Chapter 10
Accountability Regimes in Flagship Universities: How Strategic Planning Encourages Academic Capitalism

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Today's universities are complex overlapping bureaucratic hierarchies[1] led by accomplished administrators with very difficult jobs. The retired president of a Midwestern public university explained just one of its many complications: to paraphrase, "The stuff that winds up on my desk is the stuff that no one else could figure out what to do with." Given the demands of their work, including the need to get along with radically different kinds of people, top administrators tend to be bright and charming, well-published and graced with a good sense of humor. Their academic degrees are often from departments that have a very good reputation in their specialty and are part of first-rate universities. Presidents and provosts of flagship universities also tend to be more liberal than the general population. After all, they have emerged from the professoriate, which is more likely to attract people who are politically liberal than are other professions (Gross 2013).

Many presidents and provosts seem to woo "their" faculty. If their publications have been well-respected, especially if they have been eminent in their field, they like to tell their faculty, "I've been a professor, I understand how you feel about…" If they haven't published much, they may say, "When I was doing the research for my dissertation…" as if, according to one of my informants, they want to remind their faculty that they have done research, too. Why, then, has this century become what *Inside Higher Education* identifies as "an era when many professors are oblivious of or hostile toward [college and university] presidents" (Rivard, July 10, 2014)?

I appreciate the constructive suggestions of Tressie McMillan Cottom, Barrett J. Taylor and Sheila Slaughter.

[1] Technically, they are overlapping bureaucratic hierarchies and matrix systems. See Morrill 1995.

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To answer this question, I explore how so many top administrators have come to participate in the corporatization of higher education. I present a case study of Wannabe University, a flagship university in the northern United States (see Tuchman 2009). Since the end of World War II, American colleges and universities have become central social institutions and since the 1980s, they have come to resemble corporations, a quintessential form of contemporary social organization. Factors intended to minimize financial risk (see Power 2007) have promoted this tendency. To name some current academic practices: top administrators have instituted an ever stricter accountability regime, they have expanded the managerial staff, and they have balanced budgets by hiring more non-tenured personnel to teach courses. They have also encouraged other corporate methods, such as the use of strategic plans, to increase income. Supported (sometimes urged) by administrators and attracted by the financial possibilities inherent in neoliberalism, the current variation of capitalism, many members of the professoriate in general and science faculty in particular have adapted a market logic (Slaughter 2001; Popp Berman 2012).

Neither the administrators nor the professors intended to "corporatize" higher education. Rather, as C. Wright Mills put it, "Caught in the everyday milieux of their ordinary lives, ordinary men [and women] often cannot reason about the great social structures—rational and irrational—of which their milieux are subordinate parts. Accordingly, they often carry out series of apparently rational actions without any idea of the ends they serve…" (Mills quoted in Morrill 1995: 217). This generalization applies to the top administrators of Wannabe U, who have simply been trying to minimize financial and organizational risks in order to assure that the university will survive and preferably flourish. As they talk about the university, it almost seems as though they are tending an organic and threatened entity that is their responsibility.

Other factors have also fed the impetus to corporatization. However, rather than addressing the variations in the macro-links among states, corporations and higher education, I concentrate on the interactions among trustees (including politicians), top administrators, and faculty. I begin by defining my terms.

Corporatization

The changes that are transforming contemporary colleges and universities are sometimes "referred to as the commercialization of higher education…; entrepreneurial universities…; as a triple helix that weaves together higher education, state and market…; and as corporatization of higher education" (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004: 305). Other scholars (e.g. Furedi (2010)), use the term "marketization." Mostly, these terms connote that the corporatized university is increasingly becoming "an institution that is characterized by processes, decisional criteria, expectations, organizational culture, and operating practices that are taken from, and have their origins in, the modern business corporation" (Steck 2003; cf. Aronowitz 2001).

To provide more precision by recognizing that not-for-profit universities are *not* corporations, Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) introduce the concept "academic capitalism." They imply that hybridization is inherent is the current reorganization of not-for-profit higher education, for this sector is supposedly quite different from profit-seeking enterprises. Like other scholars, they are referring to a basketful of increasingly common practices. These include such procedures as: marketing one's college or university to students as a brand even as that institution transforms students into a commodity, boosting managerial capacity, decreasing faculty authority (c.f. Ginsburg 2012), and enhancing new kinds of learning/knowledge that typically emphasize the practical, job-oriented and frequently scientific studies intended to complement anticipated corporate and state needs. The term "academic capitalism" thus implies that not-for-profit universities are coming to share some characteristics of for-profit higher education, including branding, treating students as marketable commodities, centralizing academic planning and instituting academic plans as business plans intended to make *both* managers and professors accountable for specific levels of performing their jobs (see McMillan Cottom and Tuchman 2015; c.f. McMillan Cottom 2014a). Doing so, they are transforming higher education into a private good (as summarized in Tuchman Forthcoming.)

Accountability Regime

An accountability regime is meant to control risks in an environment marked by uncertainty (Power 2007). Business plans exemplify an accountability regime– *a politics of surveillance, control, and market management disguising itself as the value-neutral and scientific administration of individuals and organizations*. The essence of an accountability regime is a systematic audit that expresses the values of the administration, conveys the business logic associated with contemporary boards of trustees, and carries (frequently predefined) consequences.

An accountability regime differs from an audit. An audit is a procedure used for assessment; it does not necessarily have consequences. For instance, a surprise quiz is an audit usually intended to learn whether students have read assigned material. The quiz only becomes part of an accountability regime, when for instance students are held accountable for their grades on the surprise quiz.

Examples involving (academic) business plans are more complex. Usually they involve benchmarking or checking performance against external criteria. For instance, top administrators may audit how many courses and students a professor teaches, how many publications of specified types the professor has published, how many grants the professor has received. When it has consequences for the professor and her department, that audit becomes part of an accountability regime. For example, an audit of an assistant professor's accomplishments becomes part of an accountability regime when it results in that person's becoming tenured or fired. A business plan summarizes the cumulative expectations of all professors, managers, and often students.

At Wannabe U, the delineation and measurement of the goals in its 2008 business plan represented a speed-up of the academic assembly-line. Consider the operationalization of the goal which sought "to enhance the benefits to the state, nation and world from faculty, staff, and student research, scholarship, and creative activity by increasing productivity, building on our existing strengths and focused areas of excellence, developing a stronger extramural funding portfolio, and expanding the infrastructure that supports research and strengthens our ability to translate new discoveries into practical applications, including our capacity in the area of technology transfer." It measured current performance in these areas and established expected accomplishments, each 2014 metric being significantly higher than that of 2008. When the demands of such speedups are consequential for either individuals or departments, as a Wannabe U, these measurements contribute to an accountability regime. Generally "corporate administrators" introduce these business plans to the academic enterprise, as was the case at Wannabe U.

Wannabe University

Wannabe University is a very good public university, having clambered its way up more than 15 rungs in the rankings of the *US News & World Report* over the past 20 years (Administrators pretend not to know that variation of one or two places is mere statistical noise, but rather celebrate every hop from step to step). Although it is not a member of the Association of American Universities, an elite group of 62 research universities in the United States and Canada, its research profile has improved as have the educational backgrounds of its entering students. As its news releases have boasted at the start of each academic year, the first-year students' scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test are higher than those of the students who arrived the previous year. Through a variety of programs, the student body is also more diverse, though the proportion from specific racial and ethnic groups does not match the proportions in the state. For instance, as is typical, black Americans are under-represented and Asian-Americans are over-represented. As described in *Wannabe U: Inside the Corporate University* (Tuchman 2009), I conducted participant observation at this university for several years. I continue to maintain contact with friends at the school—phone calls, emails, face-to-face chats, and the occasional lunch or dinner.

According to Catherine Paradeise and Jean-Claude Thoenig (2013; cf. Tuchman 2009), wannabes are a specific type of university. They are one of four ideal types inhabiting cells in a matrix created by two assessments of quality—excellence and reputation, each of which varies from high to low. Judgments of excellence are customarily based on performance in such categories as: the monetary value of grants received from federal research funding, and the numbers of doctorates granted, post-docs employed, and professors who are members of the National Academy of Sciences. Once a university's degree of excellence and its reputation were conflated. As the following string of redundancies implies, a school had a great reputation because it was excellent as exemplified by its excellent students who, in turn, reinforced the institution's excellent reputation. Or, from a professor's point of view, a university may have been called excellent if the professors in its many disciplines were excellent and therefore their academic departments were also excellent.

However, the current competitive practice of rating institutions and ranking them in relationship to one another has rendered excellence and reputation more independent from one another. For instance, a college may have excellent programs but a weak reputation if no one knows how good those programs are. Conversely, the reputation of a college may exceed its degree of excellence. Thus, when national rankings of departments are published, professors in a discipline may dismiss a top result received by an Ivy League department in their discipline by arguing that the reputation of the university has produced a "halo effect" that enhances the reputation of the department.

Institutional rankings and the expansion of higher education have created some room for institutions like Wannabe U to claim excellence; they can improve their performance in the categories on which assessments of excellence are based, such as monetary value of grants received and the numbers of doctorates granted, post-docs employed, and publications. Paradeise and Thoenig (2013) suggest that a wannabe university will pay high attention to measures of excellence and less attention to indicators of reputation in order to enter the ranks of universities at "the top of the pile." In essence, the wannabe's administrators want to increase the institution's "excellence" so much that such "keepers of reputation" will upgrade their assessment of it and it might even be invited to join the heady company of the Association of American Universities.

Though many universities present themselves as striving wannabes, it is nonetheless very difficult to challenge reputations by improving measured performance, as indicated by contradictions between ranking systems. For instance, most international rankings identify the University of California, Berkeley as one of the top ten universities in the world. However, according to *US News and World Report,* the top 19 American institutions, are all private not-for-profit universities. Discrepancies exist because the different ranking systems use different measures. For instance, in the case of the *US News*, the best U.S. public universities cannot catch up to the best private ones, because the magazine's indicators include acceptance rates, which are almost invariably higher at the public universities. International rankings are more likely to ignore acceptance rates. In other words, the accumulation of excellence is enshrined in the truly elite institutions and their near unassailable (and tautological) reputation. With limited success, metrics and rankings are trying to disentangle quality and reputation.

At the turn of this century, the university that I observed was a wannabe. Then and now, the top administrators at this university hated being classified that way; the term "wannabe," they announced, is pejorative. Perhaps they were once a wannabe, a few of them currently concede, but not now. In the mid-1990s, the university website may have bragged that Wan U was the top public research university in the region, but today it identifies the institution as an international university (Early in her term, the current president remarked, "I finally got 'top regional university' off our website"). Top administrators are particularly proud of the institution's membership in a rather elite international group that exchanges students and faculty and of the increasing numbers of international students on campus as well as undergraduate students who attend universities abroad. They also point with pride to increased revenue from federal grants and the recruitment of outstanding researchers from (other) leading universities. Nonetheless, Wannabe U remains a university on the make replete with an accountability regime and a corporate administrator, because other universities are also increasing their accomplishments. It is difficult to improve one's place on a ladder, when the whole ladder is being lifted higher and higher.

Corporate Administrators

Tautologically, corporate administrators are managers who apply contemporary business practices to operate, govern, or supervise a college or university or the departments in that organization (Tuchman 2009: 69ff). Currently, most of these men and women

- believe in both branding and corporate planning, including vision statements, mission statements, and academic plans (also known as strategic or business plans) and logos that follow the artistic preferences of the decade;
- think in terms of peer groups and aspirational groups;
- advance vertically from position to position and concurrently from university to university, often in 5 years stints;
- tend to plan for the short term, much as many corporations favor short-term over long-term profits; and
- identify as having national or cosmopolitan status (in that sense the administrators are outside of the complex ties of loyalties and dislikes, of colleagues, families, and personal histories that constitute a university town).

For such an administrator, doing a good job for the university means advancing one's own career.

The current president of Wannabe U, Frances Sommers, is typical of the corporate administrators who manage leading and aspiring educational institutions. She received her degrees from elite schools with very strong departments in her areas of specialization. She then spent 14 years at a leading private university, while rising from assistant professor to dean. Moving rapidly from one institution to the next, she progressed to dean of liberal arts, provost, and then acting president, culminating in a job as chief academic officer of an important and complex public university system. When President Sommers came to Wannabe U, she was academically accomplished, in her late forties, in her first job as president, but decidedly confident of her abilities. She was also very bright and witty; she took herself (and her power) seriously.

On first meeting, Fran Sommers impressed me so much that I thought she would someday be Chancellor of the University of California, one of the largest public higher-education systems in the United States and home to two of the top 12 public universities in the world (depending, of course, on which rating system one invokes). I saw also President Sommers as the spiritual kin of a vice-provost who had once told me, "I hear this is a good university to move from. People have left here for really good places." When someone assesses past academic positions and guestimates future jobs, this person seems to understand that even the presidency of a university is just a potentially temporary job.

Like some heads of major corporations, President Sommers seems to know both that she has a powerful job and that it is just a job. She refers to her position as a job. She understands that, as do all jobholders, she reports to people whose support is essential to her ability to "grow" both the university and her career—to use the language of business-speak that has elbowed its way into contemporary English. President Sommers can be fired. Indeed, both she and key personnel of the local American Association of University Professors seem to agree about this aspect of the president's work. A member of that group's executive committee told me, "The only people Sommers seems to care about is the head of the board of trustees and the governor." A year before, when President Sommers had spoken to me about the long-term president of a private engineering school, she had also emphasized hierarchical accountability. I paraphrase her succinct comment: "The president of [a well-regarded engineering school] is hated by his faculty. They would love to get rid of him. But the trustees love him…and that's what counts [at a private university]. Here, politicians count, too."

With the backing of that governor who saw higher education as an economic engine to increase the prosperity of the state, President Sommers has been expanding Wannabe U's relationship with key industries and increasing its student body even as she hires enough faculty to decrease the student: faculty ratio. As her website declares, "We are experiencing tremendous growth thanks to our faculty, industry support, the State … and most importantly, our students. It is an exciting time to be at [Wannabe U]!"

Analyzing the Corporatization of Higher Education

It is always tempting to blame the leadership for the flaws of an institution and so to write that the interdependence of universities, their presidents and their other administrators on powerful politicians and moneyed men and women accounts for the recent corporatization of higher education. After all, people adapt to those with whom they spend time and especially to those associated with the demands of their jobs. The board of trustees of important universities are dominated by women and men "who are among the premier entrepreneurs, strategists, and educators in their respective fields," as the website of Wannabe U puts it. Permeated by the neo-liberal ideas and ideals of the contemporary United States, these men and women are sometimes prodding and sometimes shoving American higher education into a corporate mold. But, as William Vesterman (2013) notes, the gradual rationalization and corporatization of higher education predates the current formation of capitalism, neoliberalism. It existed before Thorstein Veblen decried the close association of the captains of industry and the captains of erudition (2005 edition; 1907 revised and published 1918).

As structural phenomena, academic rationalization and industrial capitalism are probably homologous in the United States and Britain. When anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (1997) suggested a possible date for the beginning of rationalization in higher education, she seemed to introduce an association between rationalization and industrial capitalism. In 1792, a member of Cambridge University proposed introducing a written (and graded) examination for the classical tripos to determine whether undergraduates were worthy of receiving a degree. Doing so, the university may have exported notions of accountability to other British institutions. Strathern suggests: "With measurement came a new morality of attainment. If human performance could be measured, then targets could be set and aimed for. What is became explicitly joined with what ought to be. This new morality was epitomized in the concept of improvement. 'Improvement' is wonderfully open-ended for it at once described effort and results. And it invites one to make both ever more effective—a process from which the tests themselves are not immune: measuring the improvement leads to improving the measures" (quoted in Evans 2005: 21). Strathern argued that Cambridge University sent audit and accountability out into the world only to have them return and haunt late twentieth-century higher education. That loop is explicit in the practices administrators now use to judge the professors whom their institutions employ.

Ultimately, the neoliberal corporatization of both administrators and the institutions they govern results from the increasing rationalization of higher education (McMillan Cottom and Tuchman 2015). It is possible to analyze that reorganization in several ways. One may study how, internationally, neo-liberalisms are transforming the socio-economic relationship of higher education to capitalism, as done elsewhere in this volume. One may examine characteristics of the top echelon of universities: the trustees, president's cabinet (the provosts, vice-presidents and such key personnel as the athletic director) and the deans. Permeated by the ideas and ideals of corporate America, these men and women are sometimes prodding and sometimes shoving American higher education and its administrators into a corporate mold (In the next chapter Slaughter and Barringer examine the network ties among trustees of elite North American universities). Also, one may also scrutinize the "fall of the faculty" (Ginsburg 2012) by examining the accountability regime that the new corporate administrators apply to faculties, as they entangle them in an ever tighter mesh of regulations and demands for productivity that are reminiscent of, but clearly different from the religious bonds that initially controlled both colleges and universities in the United States.

Just as increased productivity is the theme of the business plan goal for the faculty's research, scholarship, and creative activity, so too almost all of the measures contained in the (academic) business plan represent a speedup, for the metrics of the plan's many goals demand more of faculty; and they imply consequences if goals are not met. They also demand more of the administration, for the board of trustees assigns the president goals that must be met if she is to keep her job and the president assigns such goals to members of her cabinet and to deans.

Here are some examples. A previous head of the Wannabe Board of Trustees announced that the then-president would receive a large raise, because he had met all of the goals that the pertinent committee of trustees had assigned to him. That president tailored goals to the appropriate tasks associated with the jobs of members of his cabinet. When the vice-president of enrollment recommended a promotion for the director of admissions, he explained that the director had met assigned goals by increasing out-of-state and out-of-country applications. Some deans receive targets for attracting philanthropic donations that would increase the endowment of their college and so of the university. Sounding like a recapitulation of the once-popular television show, *The West Wing*, one vice-president told me, "We all serve at the pleasure of the president." In sum, goals are tailored to administrators' jobs. Goals do not seem to be tailored to academic departments or individual professors, though both academic departments and professors must submit annual reports and discuss them with their supervisor (According to this reasoning, department-chairs are supervisors rather than colleagues who seek to enact the collective will of department-members).

This goal-oriented system requires that both the faculty and administrators accept these formal methods of evaluating everyone's performance, including theirs. Just as they grade students, others will grade them. To keep their jobs, they must internalize corporate notions of accountability. To be sure, an administrator can choose to ignore trustee-given goals and neglect to assign goals to his subordinates; doing so, he is exercising the option to leave higher-education administration or even academe.

The Outsiders and the Business Plan

The Utility of Outsiders

The task of transforming a university by dismissing people and eliminating departments or schools is odious. It is easier for administrators who are also outsiders. Outsiders bring a great virtue to both corporations and businesses. Despite the complexity of their jobs and the multiplicity of roles they must play, they are initially free to shake things up. The trustees may even give them a mandate to do so.

When the Wannabe Board of Trustees hires presidents and provosts, it charges the search committee to find a new president who can get on with donors, politicians, alumni, trustees, faculty, staff, and students. He or she has to be able to guide the athletics department and other potential money-making auxiliary enterprises. In addition to raising money a new president is supposed to guide the economic well-being of the university, even as the state has been reducing its proportional contribution to the general budget. In 1995, the state supplied 43 % of Wannabe University's general revenues; in 2014, 21.7 %. Although the university had some profitable revenue streams, it had come late to raising an endowment. Its scientists received grants and contracts, but it could not pretend to receive as much outside research funding as the institutions in the Association of American Universities. The university had to find a way both to increase incoming funds by raising more (philanthropy) and earning more (tuition, research grants and contracts, and auxiliary activities, including sports) and to cut away the dead wood. It had to eliminate departments and prune jobs. Today, trustees and administrators interpret these basic necessities to mean that the university must devise a business plan.

Since the 1980s, scholars (e.g. Keller 1983) have been recommending that universities write such plans. For instance, then and still today, the demographics of the country were shifting; there were fewer traditional students (white, male high school graduates) to be wooed to residential colleges. The sorts of skills that employers were requiring had also changed. Accordingly, this line of reasoning went, if traditional non-profit colleges do not change, they might face financial exigencies. Planning—anticipating future needs and resources—supposedly prevents dire outcomes when such surprises as the Great Recession of 2007–2009 occur, when financial disaster increased the rate at which state and federal governments reduced their funding to public universities and the declining stock market decreased the endowments of leading private universities. In other words, the organizational logic associated with planning views colleges and universities as complex organic corporate systems which may flourish by participating in a continuous feedback loop: assess resources and needs, set realistic goals, change to meet them, assess outcomes, set higher realistic goals, plan … ad infinitum.

For the past 20 years or so, universities have been instituting a cycle of strategic plans. This cycle is akin to Zeno's paradoxes of motion. In one version of Zeno's paradox, one shoots an arrow. In a nano-instant, it covers one half the distance to the target, and in the next nano-instant, it covers one-half of that half. Logically, the arrow can never reach its target, because it will always have to fly through one half of an infinitely smaller distance. Similarly, a university's series of strategic plans can never achieve perfection. No matter the number of iterations of goals it sets and meets, it can never reach its ultimate target. In part, that failure occurs because it is always changing its target. In part, it happens, because there are only so many places at the top of the academic heap. One hundred universities cannot occupy the top 20 rungs of a ladder. Business plans embody *the paradox of incremental perfection.*

Business plans designed to promote a university's well-being also share some unfortunate characteristics with both corporate plans and military plans (In these analogies, all three organizations seem to constitute an organic body). The military estimates acceptable rates of death and injury as it plans a battle; to the planners, those who will die are nameless and faceless ciphers. Similarly, calculating who is worth saving, an insurance company must decide whether it wishes to pay for expensive treatments to restore the health of, say, a white, 60 year-old, male bus driver with a rare disease. In the same way, a university that wants to serve working-class students may raise its tuition to make ends meet, but by doing so, it may drive those very students to attend community college.[2] In each of these cases, the institutional strategy for thinking and behaving—the organizational logic—is paradoxical: to survive in the long term a university plans for the short term. It expands some programs or eliminates others by trying to calculate its needs and resources and those of its state or nation, all the while knowing that many relevant factors cannot be measured. By default, it adopts the motto, *when one cannot measure what one needs to know, one learns to need what one can measure*.

The process of strategic planning transforms the institution. Rather than embracing people who develop, transmit, and learn (receive or master) knowledge, the university becomes an organizational structure in which people just happen to participate. Decisions to expand or contract units appear to involve designing an organization chart rather than determining a verdict which affects people's jobs and so well-being.

Some of the jobs that are associated with designing and carrying out a strategic plan are difficult to do. It is hard to place people in harm's way, when one knows them and especially when one cares about them. It can be painful to face the people one is declaring "redundant"—to invoke a commonly used term that takes the breath out of a life. Planners may find comfort in that transformation of workers into ciphers on an organization chart, if it means they do not need to encounter the people they are firing. A retired associate provost still recalls the unpleasantness of these personal conversations.

> One year [circa 1990] when the university experienced a particularly deep rescission of state funds, the president decided that we would fire support personnel rather than professors. We were going to fire the people who worked in the dining room so that we could keep the academic enterprise as intact as possible. And the president said that we were not going to just insert a pink slip in their pay envelope. We were going to tell them. And then, the ex-administrator recalled, he pointed at me and said "You do it." Every time I headed out of the office toward the dormitories and dining halls, people called me "Dr. Death."

It is especially hard to sack someone who is a friend of a friend or the parent of one's children's friend.

When top administrators find it difficult to fire people, they may comfort themselves by blaming decisions on consultants, for colleges and universities customarily hire higher-education consulting firms to search for financial redundancies or find other methods to adjust the budget. With the help of these firms, carefully screened university and college committees launch national searches to select candidates for the top administrative posts, such as presidents, provosts, vice-presidents, associate vice-provosts, deans, and many directors, especially athletic directors. These people are outsiders. They are not faced with the dilemma of firing an old friend.

[2]At issue is the distinction between the "sticker price" and the "net price" (cost after receipt of a scholarship). When universities raise the sticker price, they try to control the net price for scholarship students. However, many students are not aware of this distinction and so avoid applying to what they believe are costly institutions.

Finally, the outsider corporate-administrators have one more relevant characteristic: *their numbers are increasing*. The assessment of a strategic plan's processes and outcomes, such as locating problems and finding solutions, requires both workers and record-keeping. Administrators explain that both state and national governments are exercising more supervision, requiring more forms to be filled out and submitted by real deadlines; they are adding more requirements about how administrators must do their jobs. Often, they are also seeking to make faculty and administrators accountable both for what a student has not learned and how professors carry out research. Administrators tell trustees, politicians, faculty and each other, "We are a data-driven institution."

Faculty complain that sometimes the additional regulations feel like make-work. Instead of merely setting a limit on how much a person may be reimbursed for a hotel room, an office at Wannabe U has set a limit on how expensive a hotel room can be when a host university is paying (There should be no appearance of graft). Instead of submitting the accomplishments of its faculty once a year, Wannabe department chairs in one college are now required to submit that information monthly so that the dean can maneuver for perks for his college. Both top- and mid-level administrators feel that every new problem spawns a new regulation, which in turn hatches a new office, which includes an administrator, a secretary, and an administrative assistant. They view these workers as (albeit expensive) necessities: too bad that in 2014 there are ten vice-provosts when in 1995 there were four. The work must get done.

Many professors view the added administrators and their staffs as luxuries, whose mere presence decreases the monies available for the academic budget. They hate how the distribution of the budget has shifted. Once faculty salaries constituted the bulk of spending on personnel. By academic year 2011–2012, most personnel money was spent on administrators and staff. In February 2014, the New England Center for Investigative Reporting (Marcus 2014) announced, "The number of non-academic administrative and professional employees at U.S. colleges and universities has more than doubled in the last 25 years, vastly outpacing the growth in the number of students or faculty, according to an analysis of federal figures." Their salaries, especially those at the top of the administrative heap, also rose faster than faculty salaries (*Chronicle of Higher Education* 2014a, b). This generalization also applies to Wan U.

Compensating for the Influx of Administrators

The past 25 years have seen a significant swing in the proportion of higher-education budgets devoted to academics. Colleges and universities have been hiring fewer and fewer full-time tenure track faculty and an increasing number of adjunct and full-time non-tenure track instructors. They are not only cheaper to hire, they are also easier to fire. The method used to calculate the percentage of instructors who constitute casualized labor varies (Some count each individual section of a lecture course as a separate entity, others do not). However, most estimates suggest that in the United States, adjuncts and teaching assistants teach as much as 70 % of all university courses. The adjuncts' increased presence in undergraduate education helps presidents, provosts, and deans to administer strategic plans that require agile organizations. Even when they are represented by unions, as is the case at Wannabe U, adjuncts garner little sympathy. Tenure-track and tenured professors often view them as "only adjuncts." At Wan U, as at many other universities, they do not have a vote at department meetings or a representative in the faculty senate. Most often, they cannot fight back.

Rather, adjuncts become the apotheosis of the accountability regime; they personify human capital management. They enable the development of surplus labor pools that can be hired and fired at will to manage short-term labor costs and maximize revenue. This characteristic of adjuncts renders them comparable to part-time instructors in for-profit universities and, potentially, to surplus labor pools in other industries.

However, higher education's surplus labor pool differs from that of other industries attempting to manage human-capital in a way that makes them lean and agile. Adjunct-instructors must have specialized skills that are expensive to produce. A manager may call an agency to hire a temporary receptionist, but it is more difficult to find credentialed labor to teach (usually) introductory courses.[3] As a result, higher education creates an internal split labor-market that heavily relies on commodifying the career aspirations of part-time labor. Hiring and firing adjuncts and delegating graduate students to teach low-level courses then becomes a means of controlling labor (McMillan Cottom 2014b).

The university, its administrators and its tenured and tenure-track professors benefit from this split labor market. The full-time professors garner prestige and short-term job security. The administrators receive flexibility. However, neither the members of the surplus labor pool nor their employers are happy with this arrangement. Some worry about the ability of their graduate students to find full-time tenurable jobs, but mostly the tenured and tenure-track professors care about the short-term: the number of classes they teach, the number of students they advise, the number of committees on which they serve, the amount of time they have available for research. In the past decade or so at Wannabe U and other flagship universities, these concerns pertain to how these full-timers will fare when they will have completed the yearly professional responsibilities document, which contains the metrics by which the department, the college and the university assesses their worth. Over the long haul, adjunct labor pools degrade the position of all faculty, but as the prevalence of 5-year business plans indicates, accountability regimes stress short-term results. I observed this emphasis on the short-term and the resulting escalation of administrative control as the administrators at Wannabe U prepared to shelve the last plan and to prepare the next.

[3] However, in Michigan, community colleges have been hiring outsourced adjuncts to decrease the cost of fringe benefits.

The Business (or Strategic) Plan

Business plans exemplify an accountability regime. Supposedly they are value-neutral and represent the last word in scientific administration. The essence of an accountability regime is a system-wide audit that expresses the values of the administration. It can be difficult to create such strategic plans and the audits that emerge from them, for they are supposed to cover every aspect of university activity. They seem omnipresent. Even the Wan U mailroom has a plan.

Top administrators take pride in planning; they seem to believe that their decision to plan makes them worthy of support. Thus, in 2 weeks in 2009 I heard two different presidents of good universities say much the same thing to an audience. Again I paraphrase: “Other universities have told every department to cut spending by a specific percent, but I have instituted a plan, appointed a committee, to identify potential selective cuts so as not to harm research and teaching.” Each of these men was trying to combine gradual cuts to departments with a reallocation of resources based on the assessments of a faculty committee. Neither wished to be seen as taking drastic action.

I am going to call the methods they used “assess and chop” and “incremental perfection.” Both are intended to realign resources and to simultaneously produce both savings and earnings. Assess and chop divorces the review of faculty activity from the judgments of experts in the field and relocates it to administrators or committees chosen by administrators. So do the most recent versions of incremental perfection. Committee decisions are based on what can be measured rather than what experts in a field know. For instance, one might measure a professor’s reputation by the number of journals for which she reviews articles and the quality of her research by citations in articles found in journals that have an ISBN number. At best, such measures are reifications.

Assess and Chop

One of the first how-to books about formulating an academic strategic plan recommended the assessment of programs rather than departments in order to determine how much money a specific degree cost. Its title summarizes its intent*: How to prioritize academic programs and services: Reallocating resources to achieve strategic balances* (Dickeson 1999). The book encourages committees to ask such questions as, how much does it cost to produce a master’s degree in cell biology as compared to an honors bachelor’s degree in French literature?

This organizational logic is directed at maximizing revenues, decreasing losses, or both (The interpretation depends on the interests on the person or people one asks). The “program prioritization process” involves appointing supposedly representative committees, designing complex scales to measure an assortment of characteristics of programs, and then drafting implementation plans and carrying them out. One problem with this method is the relevant unions may object that the assessment of programs rather than departments illegally ignores tenure; for assessment by program might declare professors associated with a specific wing of a department to be redundant, while permitting the department to remain—albeit in a different form.

Even before Dickeson published his ideas as a book, the Dickeson method had stirred controversies and union-objections at the University of Northern Colorado (where Dickeson was president from 1981 to1991). Eventually, there were also fierce debates at the University of Alaska at Anchorage, San Jose State University, St. Louis University, and the University of Saskatchewan, to name but a few of the institutions where faculty organized to prevent implementation. Some objections center on firing professors without declaring financial exigency, as generally demanded by union contracts. Others maintained that the "program prioritization process" is oriented toward business, not academe.

Jay Cowsill's (2013) view captures the vituperative spirit of the objections: "Prioritizing is what you get when you hire administrators who can't distinguish a university from a Walmart. Each department is to be evaluated as a profit centre. The knowledge factory that the university is currently running under the rubric of basic research will remain untouched (and probably augmented,) for there is no aspect of its present operations that can be so easily and so profitably commercialized."[4]

Gradual Cuts

Generally, administrators prefer to make cuts gradually rather than all at once (see Tuchman 2009: 105ff) since that approach facilitates *the gradual institutionalization of legitimacy* (If Step 2 presupposes Step 1 and one has accepted Step 1, it is difficult to reject Step 2 on the grounds that it presupposes Step 1). Especially since the Great Recession, most top administrators have had enough experience to know that a blunt announcement of financial cuts can throw an institution into an uproar. Since drastic cuts may maim a university, especially a professorial culture of cooperation (where one exists) and create what can sometimes become long-lasting conflict within departments, both the administrators and the faculty prefer to cut as little as possible. Some provosts and presidents prefer to instruct deans to tell academic departments to cut their own programs by, say, 5 % of their current budget. The dean must then approve a department's plan. However, that method is becoming rarer.

At Wannabe U plans to evaluate academic departments and to either increase or shave budgets have involved the paradox of incremental perfection rather than assess and chop. From the late 1980s to 2014, methods of evaluation have permitted

[4] Cowsill works at the University of Saskatchewan, where a committee of both administrators and officers of the Faculty Senate chose committee members. According to well-placed informants at that university, professors who want to become administrators dominate the senate so that the senate invariably supports administrative initiatives.

less and less faculty participation and so seem to involve the gradual legitimation of assessment. When a method of assessment uses faculty experts or experts in a discipline, I am going to call them "internal reviews." When a method does not use such experts, but instead outsources assessment, I am going to call them external reviews.

Here's the progression:

(1) *Internal Review 1*: In the late 1980s, the provost requested academic departments to write self-evaluations, to be interviewed by mutually selected visitors (outsiders), and to discuss the outsiders' advice. The provost visited every department to discuss the outsiders' report and see whether a department could agree to changes.

(2) *Internal Review 2*: Beginning in the late 1990s and culminating in 2003, a vice provost and the deans required academic departments to write a self-evaluation, to be assessed by mutually selected visitors (outsiders), and to comment on the visitors' report. With the provost's office, the chair of the department was then to negotiate a memorandum of understanding about changes to be made.

Several years later, that vice provost declared that the assessments were without value, because every academic department claimed it could become one of the top 20 departments in its discipline.

(3) *External Review 1*: In 2008, with the assistance of the deans, the provost appointed an internal committee to evaluate every academic department using a series of measures that the provost has previously identified.

Some deans objected and some found ways to refute committee recommendations.

(4) *External Review 2*: In 2013, with the assistance of the deans, the provost appointed a planning committee to suggest the goals of a new strategic plan, but the provost hired an outside firm to evaluate academic departments and hired an additional associate dean to implement the outside firm's recommendations.

Step 4 is still in process. Some deans have been trying to gather information to challenge the outside firm's measures and conclusions. The process is sufficiently complex that when the state initiated a somewhat unexpected budgetary rescission, negotiations were still in process. As a way-station, the provost ordered deans to use the perennial stand-by method; i.e. to instruct each academic department to find a way to cut its spending by 5 %. Departments were also free to devise methods to raise money.[5]

Sociologically, this four-step progression suggests:

- Top administrators do not want to eliminate faculty participation. They do so after faculty participation has not yielded the desired result (The president and

[5] In *Academic Capitalism*, Slaughter and Leslie (1997) mention an Australian physical education department that began to give horseback riding lessons to earn funds.

provost may have experienced past failure at either the current or the last university).

- Each step strengthens the accountability regime to which the professoriate is exposed.
- Ultimately, departmental reviews and the reviews of individuals become symbolic; they are based on what can be measured rather than what one wants to know. Or, as Strathern put it, "What is became explicitly joined with what ought to be. This new morality was epitomized in the concept of improvement."
- The emphasis on measurement and accountability cannot anticipate future knowledge; that is, the sorts of basic knowledge that professors may want or need to pursue. It can only predict the possible future need for some sorts of applied knowledge. In this specific sense, it undermines the pursuit or knowledge for the sake of knowledge.

Conclusion

An accountability regime requires participants to internalize its demands. It instructs both top administrators and the professoriate to use specific measures to assess their accomplishments and failures. As both Evans (2005) and Strathern (1997) point out, people's internalization of these measures may become so strong that they do not realize how context gives meaning to measurement. Rather, like weighing oneself and brushing one's teeth every morning, measurement may become unquestioned routine.

Top administrators work toward short-term goals and encourage others to do so too, because they believe that *they have no choice*. Like the professoriate, they too are subject to an accountability regime. When president and provosts reallocate resources, when they hire and fire, they are merely doing their jobs. As Mills explained, "they often carry out series of apparently rational actions without any idea of the ends they serve" (cited in Morrill 1995). They do not necessarily intend to implement neoliberal ideologies.

I have asked the meaning of higher education's increased dependence on, and enactment of, accountability. I have stressed that its responses have been occurring in a neoliberal context, as both the politicians and trustees to whom administrators report expect business methods to guide the academic side of higher education. However, I do not want to assign blame to presidents, provosts, or their bosses. At Wannabe University, as elsewhere, they are just doing their jobs. To be sure, these administrators would not have sought those jobs unless they at least partly agreed with contemporary academic planning practices. But ultimately, individual presidents, provosts, deans, trustees and governors are not to blame. All are adhering to a distinct shift in the socio-economic environment that has been occurring since at least the 1980s. They are taking what they believe to be rational actions that they hope will avoid risks. They have not intended to convert higher education from a public to a private good.

Rather the organizational logic used at twenty-first century colleges and universities—the strategy of making short-term adjustments and of confusing one's own long term interests with the short term interests of one's employing institution—has transformed higher education. As Tressie McMillan Cottom has observed (2014a), contemporary practices at non-profit colleges and universities "experiment" with what are normal, taken-for-granted procedures at for-profit colleges. Inadvertently, without reflecting on the implications of their actions in the larger scheme of things, the organizational logic of contemporary universities is changing the meaning of higher education.

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