CHAPTER 14

Autonomy and the Realities of Internationalization at Australian Universities: An Institutional Logics Perspective

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Toward Greater Institutional Autonomy in Australia

"Freedom and autonomy will be the hallmarks of the government's approach to universities. As we reduce the burden of regulation on universities, I urge universities to grasp their destinies in their own hands."

—Australian Education Minister, Christopher Pyne, May 2014 (Pyne 2014: 16)

"We are deregulating higher education—because universities, of all institutions—should be capable of running themselves."

—Australian Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, June 2014 (Abbott 2014)

Recent statements from Australia's education minister and prime minister signal—potentially—a new era in Australian university autonomy. Claims that Australian public universities will be given greater organizational autonomy suggests there will be less dependence on governments to direct strategies but also less government funding and thus greater financial autonomy. Should Australian public universities be given more freedom "to formulate strategies for their future development" (Bleiklie 2007: 397), they may also formulate new trajectories of internationalization. Governments encourage "export" of higher education to encourage alternative revenue sources from overseas student fees (Parker 2013), leading to greater financial autonomy and eventually to an enlarged and more diversified financial base.

Despite recent signals indicating greater "autonomy," the government still plays a significant role in higher education in Australia. As displayed in table 1.1, government funding comprises 59 percent of all funding, and state universities comprise 38 out of Australia's 41 universities. The federal government also plays a significant role in ensuring accountability in the sector such as through the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), which sets requirements for university governance, mandates compliance to standards, and dictates the appropriate level of operational risk (Baird 2013), including for offshore operations of Australian universities (Shah and Nair 2012). Even though TEQSA is a relatively new government agency, an even newer government (sworn in on September 18, 2013) has instructed the agency to "deregulate" (Pyne 2014) and allow universities greater autonomy in managing their own operations.

As governments relax regulatory requirements, they are likely to increasingly favor output-oriented accountability measures, including accreditation, performance-based funding, and performance indicators (Huisman and Currie 2004). Mollis and Marginson (2002) forecast this and suggest that university autonomy will be reshaped in terms of corporate culture. Indeed, Guthrie and Neumann (2007) describe universities in Australia as "increasingly market driven, operating more like large businesses—increasingly generating their own income and focusing on costs and economic status" (p. 232). However, they are still only "business," and other rationales for action may still exist.

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the extent to which corporate orientations have replaced government-defined goals and programs within the context of the international activities of Australian universities. The international activities examined include international partnerships and programs for international students in the university's home country: Australia, distance education, and branches in foreign countries (Altbach and Knight 2007). In terms of *financial autonomy*, we discuss changing levels of dependence on government funding, and for *organizational autonomy*, we discuss managerial, policy, and governance changes (Enders, de Boer, and Weyer 2013, Turcan and Gulieva 2013). This chapter draws on qualitative evidence, in the form of in-depth interviews with senior managers from a cross section of Australian universities. The structure of this chapter involves a brief discussion of the theoretical foundations, leading to a research question. After an outline of research methods and the data collection process, the results of semistructured interviews are presented. Finally, results are discussed, with conclusions, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Theoretical Foundations: The Institutional Logics Perspective

Within sociological institutionalism, the institutional logics perspective has been useful in studies of organizational change in higher education (see Bastedo 2009, Dunn and Jones 2010, Frølich et al. 2012, Gumport 2000, Lounsbury and Pollack 2001, Washington and Ventresca 2004). The institutional logics perspective is described by Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012) as a metatheoretical perspective useful for analyzing interrelationships among institutions, individuals, and organizations. Institutional logics are frames of reference that guide sense-making, and are articulated in the vocabulary that actors use to motivate action and define

their identity (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012). The institutional logics perspective is, therefore, useful for examining how institutional change and culture affect the governance and strategic behavior of organizations (Thornton, Jones, and Kury 2005, Reay and Hinings 2009, Miller, Le Breton-Miller, and Lester 2011).

The institutional logics perspective is also valuable for identifying new rationales for action that may arise with partial deregulation (Sine and David 2003). Scott (2008) explains that institutional logics in higher education or "meta-logics" may include "generalised frameworks such as 'bureaucracy,' 'corporation,' 'non-profit organisation,' 'education' or . . . the 'profession'" (p. 232). With the prospect of increasing deregulation, previous institutional logics and historical norms derived from governments and academic authorities will be challenged by competitive forces (Seers 2007). With a new focus on economic rationality, organizations may adopt new governance modes and high managerial autonomy (Meyer and Hammerschmid 2006). Van Vught (2004) suggests that autonomy and internationalization may be linked through changes in national policy as "deregulation and the increase of institutional autonomy in many countries are assumed to enable institutions to become more responsive to their environment, including international challenges" (p. 5). This leads to our research question:

How do deregulation and autonomy change the motivations and underlying logics for university internationalization?

Research Design

To understand motivations and underlying logics for university internationalization, the institutional logics perspective will be used. Institutional logics are reflected in vocabularies, identities, and rationales for action (see Dunn and Jones 2010, Friedland and Alford 1991, Thornton 2004). Semistructured interviews were conducted with senior managers at Australian universities. These managers had responsibility for the internationalization of their institutions, namely, the operations of offshore branches, the establishment of international partnerships, and international student recruitment. Respondents were selected from the top tiers of management in international offices and chancelleries from a cross section of Australian public universities. This selection process aimed at maximizing valid and reliable information and minimizing distortions, biases, errors, and misunderstandings (see Holstein and Gubrium 2004, Järvensivu and Törnroos 2010).

Using maximum variation sampling, senior managers were invited to take part in the interviews, after which more managers were invited in order to seek negative instances (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2013) in terms of practices that do not align with a particular institutional logic. Sampling ended at a likely point of theoretical saturation when themes were regularly repeated and appeared redundant, which occurred after participants from universities were interviewed. To ensure confidentially, each university was de-identified and numbered "University 1 to 13" for analysis. This was followed by an in-depth single case study selected from one of these 13 institutions. Through undertaking an in-depth case study, our aim was to better understand each international strategy and the rationale justifying it.

Interview audio was recorded and then transcribed to be analyzed with NVivo 10 (by QSR International), a qualitative data analysis software package useful for storing and coding data sources that aids systematic and consistent data analysis (Sinkovics and Ghauri 2008, Tippmann, Scott, and Mangematin 2012, Weitzman 2000). All data was coded using Reay and Hinings' (2009) approach of investigating institutional logics by focusing on the rationale managers give for particular actions.

Analysis of Results—Changing Motives for University Internationalization

Analysis of the interview data revealed that universities used their international activities to fill revenue gaps created by greater financial autonomy from the federal government. As government funding decreases, universities look to corporate practices and international revenues:

"in the absence of those strong Commonwealth government revenues or a decline in those revenues, then the question is where will you make up the gap in your funding base? And inevitably, I think the right answer would be—some of that would be international student revenue, some of that should be research revenue, some of that should be philanthropy." (International Director, University 4)

"with the government cutting back on funding in terms of the size of the funding back to Australian universities, Australian universities have to be very careful what they choose to undertake." (Transnational Director, University 2)

"the relative share is going to continue to decline and so if the share of government support is going to decline, it has to come from somewhere else." (Deputy Vice Chancellor, University 13)

Respondents all recognized the importance of international activities for generating revenue and "maximizing profit":

"Internationalisation has been a big thing for us because it's the way of bringing new sources of revenue and new research opportunities to a university of our size" (International Director, University 3)

"To be a profit-maximiser is I think also part of any organisation's thinking, you want to make sure that you generate enough income that can be reinvested to you, can assure returns and also be reinvested for particular initiatives." (Transnational Manager, University 7)

However, international activities may simply represent revenue replacement necessary for survival. The motives of corporations are not completely aligned to these public universities because profit is not the only rationale:

"You don't have that government telling you, "This is exactly what you do," why do people—why do universities still do the right thing? One, I think universities do the right thing because they're not in it to make money." (Deputy Vice Chancellor, University 12)

For Universities 2 and 9, offshore activities were simply not profitable enough for profit to be the only motive:

"If you're just doing it for profit you'll have to close down half of these. So you really need to ensure that they're doing more than just providing an extra income." (International Director, University 2)

"If you were just focusing on profitmaking, you would focus on undergraduate Chinese business students taught in Australia." (International Director, University 9)

Other respondents suggested that "new" motives involved a more holistic focus. These motives either involved serving the needs of foreign countries in which branches are located or served the needs of students and staff at home campuses:

"I would certainly like to see us do more [offshore partnerships] of those over time but not all being financially driven but actually being driven to support holistic relationships internationally." (International Director, University 4)

"We can become more holistically international through those other aspects, such as student mobility and curriculum and actually a good student experience." (International Director, University 10)

"Our vision to be a global educator is about doing things that are mutually beneficial." (Transnational Manager, University 2)

These motives may not always be altruistic, and were explained by one respondent in terms similar to the rhetoric of many corporations:

"Social responsibility, political responsibility, you know good political citizens, good regional citizens, that's more the kind of image that we're trying to project." (Transnational Manager, University 6)

Case Study—Autonomy Leading to Entrepreneurialism

To enhance our understanding of a shift in institutional logics, and its impact on university internationalization, we undertook an in-depth single case study at University 7. University 7 is a large university with significant offshore operations and has shifted from government-directed international strategies toward more entrepreneurial strategies. University 7 perceived opportunities for greater autonomy as opportunities to pursue "aggressive" export strategies:

"The Labor government was a bit too, I think they were messing with the policy too much and I think there'll be a positive impact on international education and I think it will be even, perhaps even more aggressive than the Labour government." (International Manager, University 7)

"We believe strongly in engaging with governments and I personally do and the university then carries that. So we're innovative but we're also about engaging very dynamically... I think we're aggressively [entrepreneurial]." (Deputy Vice Chancellor, University 7)

This represents a shift from strategies largely directed by the regulator TEQSA toward new self-directed models of internationalization:

"TEQSA itself needs to understand how innovative models in internationalization need some flex." (Deputy Vice Chancellor, University 7)

These models of internationalization may be adapted from the corporate sector:

"in identifying market opportunities or business development opportunities internationally or even how to you engage with a particular company around a particular research issue, so the skill set, I think is starting to shift from not just being administrative but more strategy." (Deputy Vice Chancellor, University 7)

In the case of University 7, institutional change has generated a shift in the dominant logic driving internationalization. With fewer constraints, entrepreneurial and corporate models are encouraged to dominate. The university can follow "new" paths of internationalization and begin to incorporate revenue-centric activities into a carefully aligned portfolio of international programs.

Discussion—Meta-Logics of Internationalization

Respondents emphasized multiple motives for internationalization consistent with earlier studies (e.g., Tayar and Jack 2013). These motives may reflect distinctive meta-logics as they comprise different sets of "standard vocabularies and legitimate accounts that actors can draw on" (Meyer and Hammerschmid 2006, 1005). In terms of their international programs, these universities appear to have "substantive autonomy" in terms of determining their own international goals and programs (see Berdahl 1990) and use multiple logics to legitimize these goals and programs. Reductions in regulations and funding have created a gap for a new meta-logic to become dominant. The logic of corporatization is visible across all the interviews, but an additional logic related to "nonprofit organizations" and community benefit is also present. The shift in these logics is depicted in figure 14.1.

This suggests that university managers' vocabularies of motives reflect a shift away from government-defined goals and programs toward corporate goals and programs. Even so, a corporate logic alone cannot explain the motives for internationalization. The offshore revenue-generating activities discussed by these informants appear to adhere, at least partially, to a business-like institutional logic. As universities become more autonomous, their institutional templates may resemble governments less and corporations more. Despite trends toward corporatization, respondents still emphasize the "service function" of universities. These community-oriented aims were not explicitly linked to any performance outcomes, and instead reflected the potential international development impact of branch campuses offshore (Wilmoth 2004) or the "normative ethos" of academic science (Merton 1968). Reay and Hinings (2009) suggest that even with new institutional logics, previous logics may continue to exist for extended periods. The findings in this study suggest that corporate logics and market principles are evident across all universities studied, but that elements of other logics still exist at the highest echelons of management. The community logic

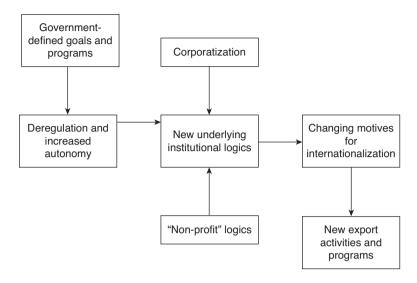


Figure 14.1 The logic of university corporatization

was expressed by each respondent, but in a way that asserted additional motives rather than a clear resistance to corporate logics, thus supporting Townley's (2002) research with public sector respondents who were prepared to accept "business-like" behavior, but strongly resisted actually becoming a "business."

Institutional logics provide underlying justification principles for managers and also provide the basis for frameworks to articulate claims (Leca and Naccache 2006, Scott 2014). For some universities, the underlying justifications sometimes reflect those of corporations and, at other times, reflect previous logics related to community benefit. There was a tendency for corporate principles to take precedence over the other meta-logics identified by Scott (2008) as "bureaucracy," "non-profit organization," "education," and "profession" frameworks. Though the previous logics and frameworks for action are threatened by corporate principles, they appear to still exist and are drawn on by managers to justify their university's international activities.

Our findings reveal that the institutional logic of corporatization has not replaced the traditional academic and bureaucratic logics, at least not entirely. Using the terminology proposed by Gumport (2000), traditional educational and democratic logics have been "subsumed" in the sense that they are incorporated into the new rationalities of action, and the new logics appear to have caused detriment to legacy logics, but there is not yet a "wholesale adoption" of corporatization. These findings may reflect only superficial reflections of older logics and motives related to profit, and revenue generation may be deliberately or unintentionally downplayed by the managers interviewed. Given, though, that some international activities still misalign with corporate principles of efficiency and revenue optimization, it emerges that the legacy logics substantively influence actions rather than only manager vocabularies and rhetoric.

Conclusions

As universities in Australia begin to determine their future, there may be new identities and divergent paths of internationalization available. The financial management imperative and export focus have influenced all universities concerned, but corporate motives fail to constitute the sole driver of university internationalization. Consistent with the findings of Reay and Hinings (2009), these logics require a different set of behaviors from actors within the same field. Durand et al. (2013) further argue that, even though the institutional logics perspective is maturing, "little is known about how firms take positions in the institutional space by embracing more than one logic, and the consequences of this on their performance" (p. 167). Our study contributes initial empirical evidence that the motives of university managers reflect multiple institutional logics. For higher education research, the "entrepreneurial university," "academic capitalism," managerialism, and corporatization appeared to be on the ascendency (see Clark 2001, Deem 1998, Etzkowitz 2003, Slaughter and Leslie 1997) and may fill the void left as governments reduce organizational and financial controls over their systems of higher education

Understanding universities that do not have a "one-dimensional profit-seeking organizational culture" (see Marginson and Considine 2000) may require a determination of how other logics shape strategic activities. The terms "business-like" and "quasi-market" still seem appropriate given that even the more profit-oriented functions of a university such as its export activities still have not reached a fully corporatized and marketized phase of their development. Greater autonomy may lead to entrepreneurial international expansion, but the goals and programs of universities may not match those of corporations.

Limitations and Future Research

There are limitations to this research design. Burns and Scapens (2000) suggest that institutional rules, routines, and institutions in an organizational field may not be completely identifiable given that some institutional pressures may be abstract, difficult, or even impossible to observe empirically. Similarly, Boxenbaum and Battilana (2005) argue that institutional logics may be difficult to observe because "before they manifest in action, institutional logics are cognitive templates of a highly abstract nature" (p. 358). Furthermore, there is a risk of upper-echelon bias as interviews were conducted only with senior managers (see Hambrick and Mason 1984, Park and Harris 2014). A further limitation is that these findings may be specific to public higher education in Australia.

Similar competing logics in higher education in other national settings may lead to unique justifications for export and different international strategies. For scholars of university governance, there may also be future opportunities to use the institutional logics perspective to enhance an understanding of issues such as how multiple competing logics may be reconciled. This could assist in addressing Shattock's (2002) call to rebalance corporate-dominated and academic-dominated university governance to move toward "shared governance." This appeal has not been answered in Australia, and we have not achieved what Caruana et al. (1998) describe as a balance between accountability and autonomy.

Practical and policy implications

As universities become autonomous from governments, they may look internationally for direction, or may embrace models from the corporate or nonprofit sectors. In this process, policymakers may seek to use new incentives, or nonregulatory levers, to encourage institutional diversity and ensure the financial stability of the sector. Further university internationalization triggered by higher levels of autonomy may lead to new forms of autonomy. Universities could align with offshore partner universities or may undergo restructuring to meet the requirements of foreign funding bodies.

Going forward, an appropriate role for government may be to guide universities to adopt models from the corporate sector, or models used in foreign countries. If universities gain financial and institutional autonomy, and then become singularly focused on profit at the expense of teaching quality, governments will again need to at least partially revoke institutional autonomy or use funding structures again to reward for quality.

The proposed changes emerging in Australia in the funding of institutions, and the likely level of increasing autonomy granted to higher education institutions, may potentially influence thinking and policy in other countries. Hence, this chapter is significant for a broad audience of relevant policymakers. Although "internationalization" is one part of a much wider set of university activities, a more "corporate" approach is beginning to permeate the way universities are governed and managed. This chapter should give insight into the response of institutions to the decline in state funding and the extent to which internationalization is perceived to be driven by financial imperatives that are changing the ethos of the university. This chapter also indicates that there are potential conflicts between traditional values and new corporate imperatives. Further case studies might be helpful in providing an understanding of how imperatives are enacted. The views of academics and students, and the extent to which they influence strategy and policy in the universities that have been sampled would also enhance understanding.

An insight into the "logics" of international partners and their impact on their Australian university partner is a dimension of the autonomy equation that needs to be understood. In a future study, an examination of performance indicators or measures of the success of policies might support the thesis that Australian universities are not yet driven solely by "profit" or the reverse. In any event, it is likely to underline the complexity and interplay of competing forces in the realization of autonomy.

This conclusion may serve as a reminder that gradually increasing autonomy brings new types of responsibility. It may also remind governments that if they wish for wider social, economic and political outputs from universities, they need to ensure that there are effective but not restrictive means of delivering their objectives. Future studies might look at the interplay of institutional and government logics.

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