

## HOW SUCCESSFUL ARE THE STATE UNIVERSITIES IN DEVELOPING INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES

Öktem Vardar, June 1998

The usual administrative approach in most Turkish universities can be summarized as “saving the day... solving urgent daily problems, case by case...” In most instances, this is the attitude because there is no time to get organized. The system contains unstable elements and “there is no time to chase because we are constantly running away” as the Turkish saying goes. But it also includes the inherent resistance of our culture to systematic, permanent, institutional solutions since they limit “flexibility”. Being systematic is associated with bureaucratic authoritarianism. In the least, there is a confusion of concept.

In an information-society this attitude is a handicap. Time, efficiency, transparency arguments force us to develop institutional structures to manage a university.

I, therefore, would like to look into institutionalization in state universities and point out its relevance to information society. The traditional bodies of governance in universities such as the Senate, executive committees, academic councils are currently functional. The effectiveness of these, however, can be questioned. But more importantly, modern universities need to be structured like enterprises or corporations. Although universities are complex and horizontal organizations with multiple (sometimes even conflicting) objectives and standards in teaching, research and community services, one can roughly group activities into three main phases

1. the planning phase (policy making)
2. the implementation phase (operations)
3. the evaluation phase (verification).

The planning phase is usually non-existing in Turkish state universities. The No.1 requirement for a university to exist as an institution is continuity which is only possible by uniting around common, widely accepted, well defined institutional goals and strategies. University profiles are so diversified today that it is absolutely necessary to arrive at “institutional self definitions” and to create a coherent “corporate identity” if a university intends to keep its “brand name” for years to come instead of being one the “no name”, low expectation institutes sharing the huge teaching load of Turkey. We mostly rely on charismatic leadership. It is true that charismatic leadership may give an impetus but it is not sufficient for continuity. Continuity requires participation!

At Boğaziçi University we do put great emphasis on systematic policy development mechanisms. A strategic plan committee was formed in 1992 to discuss and develop a strategic vision. It is of advisory capacity and the members were directly appointed by the rector. It was made up of faculty members who were not burdened with administrative and representational duties with the exception of the rector and vice rectors. It was hoped that the Committee will act as a devil’s advocate as well as a think tank in developing a vision for the university. The proposals formulated by this

committee are subject to Senate approval. The standing nature of the committee reveals the approach of Boğaziçi University that strategic planning should be a continuous and not a terminal effort.

Could it be better? Yes, definitely yes. As a self criticism, I can admit that our strategic plan committee could (and should) have been more active, generating a detailed plan. In an institution, which has never gone through a soul-searching process and in a society which is not accustomed to make long term plans, it should be regarded as the initiation of a valuable tradition. Secondly, not only at the central (rectorate) level, it should have been organized at faculty and department levels, as well. One of our departments has formed a standing advisory council composed of successful alumni business-people to discuss the direction the department is heading, to get external feedback free from daily worries or frustrations of academic life. Departmental objectives need to be set in consultation with the constituencies.

Who are the constituencies? Faculty members; students: their families; the state; public and private sectors; alumni; Mechanisms should be established to get constituency reflections: alumni/industry representatives in departmental advisory boards, student representatives in department meetings, business representatives as members in executive boards (which is more than reflection, it is direct participation, which I am suggesting for this last category)

Just to give an example, illustrating the benefits of such reflection mechanisms, I would like to cite two ideas developed in the alumni advisory council of that department I mentioned. One of the major questions was what type of graduates do we intend to produce? The answer formulated was:

At undergraduate level:

Engineers with upper level management qualifications who are capable, by education and experience, to add value to different enterprises,

- having a sound command of the fundamental concepts of his/her discipline
- able to learn alternative applications by him/ herself.
- open to team work
- able to express him/herself well, enjoying novel technologies

at graduate level:

Engineers who can perform original research, produce knowledge at international standards and share this knowledge,

- aware of the scientific world
- able to follow scientific publications
- able to perform multi-directional research
- able to discuss his/her findings, share and transfer the information generated.

This is a controversial issue: How extensively do we introduce professional knowledge, how much emphasis do we put on general improvement of personal capacities. It has to be settled before curricula are developed.

Another contribution of the advisory council has been towards the solution of the computer facilities. We want all Boğaziçi University students to be at ease with novel technologies. To this end, lap-top computers may be required from all Boğaziçi University students, as textbooks are. University may supply the network servers and plug in stations and software. Since huge numbers of lap-tops will be purchased each year, suitable reduction in price and extra's for scholarship/financial aid purposes can be arranged. This system is already applied in some US universities and it seems to be a feasible alternative to the race of establishing new PC laboratories and possibility for using computers in class lectures and examinations.

Going back to (the importance of) the planning phase or policy development. One has to recognize the two extreme models of research organization in a university, as a CRE survey in 1995 indicates [1]:

In the bottom up approach, research is the responsibility of individual researchers. The intrinsic value of the investigation process is emphasized.

In the top-down approach, research activities are a service rendered to the community and, as such, fall into families of projects directed towards the priorities of external interests.

The “bottom-up” school would be best expressed by the laissez-faire model of the university whereas the “top-down” would better correspond to the interventionist view of academia. For the laissez-faire group, researchers are first accountable to their peer, fellow-scientists; for the others, society is the final judge of research value-be it government, industry or another social partner. For the laissez-faire institution, research is measured in function of its own progress; for the interventionist university, the value of research is determined by the social use of its results.

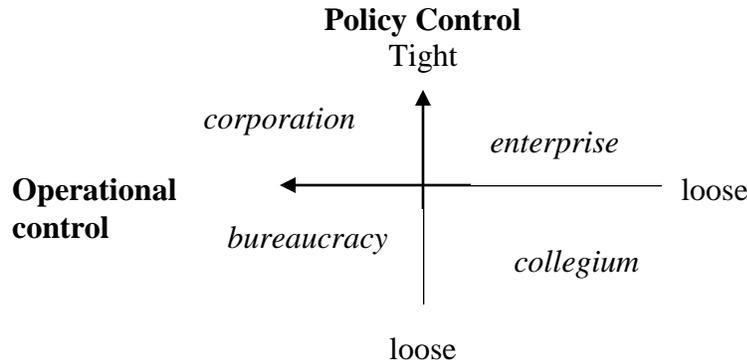
In terms of strategy, the laissez-faire proponents would insist on the resource input characterizing the institution as far as people and work conditions are concerned: for them, the key to success lies in hiring the best and brightest while ensuring that they are free to innovate. The laissez-faire institution will simply tend to react to and accommodate outside changes.

The other group would, on the contrary, insist on the output, i.e., the expected results of innovation procedures. As an institution, the interventionist type of university would dwell on processes and develop a pro-active attitude by trying to shape external work conditions to its own benefit”.

It is not easy for a university to position itself between these extremes. It may be argued that this position will evolve in time. I find it slow and inefficient to wait for such a natural process to take place-particularly, if there is no research tradition in the country. I personally favor towards the top-down model, but this has to be discussed at length at the university to digest the model suitable to that university. A model between the top down approach and the laissez- faire one can be formulated as a hybrid model where faculty members themselves limit the areas they will concentrate on. For hard sciences it is crucial to focus in certain areas because of high equipment costs. Even for soft sciences it is important to prioritize interest areas to accumulate experience and establish “addresses” in specific areas. The fact is that universities, faculties, departments can no

longer escape the need to make choices, which imply priorities and hence sacrifices. If policies are not developed clearly, implementation is doomed to be random at most.

The functioning of universities is analyzed by McNay [2] along two dimensions, shown below. Policy development is plotted along the ordinate from loose to tight control; Operational control is along the abscissa, from loose to tight, again. Four regions are identified depending on the combination of controls:



The trend is from collegium to corporation. If the university is small, typically 2-3000 students, collegium model may be desirable. As the population increases and organization becomes more complex, loose control may lead to inefficient, chaotic structures. I will emphasize the “enterprise” model: As far as the implementation phase is concerned I believe in the delegation of authority and responsibility and harmonious coordination of the activities delegated. Broad participation by the faculty members is absolutely essential to enlarge ownership and to develop a sense of belonging. Corporate model is more efficient but in an environment where academic life is less than attractive, I find it crucial to motivate faculty members to invest in the development of the university. Keeping the policy control tight and the implementation control loose may also serve to improve creativity and competition. I have to be very specific, however, that tight policy control and effective evaluation schemes have to be fully developed before operations are delegated. Otherwise it may easily lead to license to irresponsibility.

I can cite some examples from Boğaziçi University enhancing participation. As far as teaching is concerned, we have developed Academic Rules and Regulations Committee, Senate Ways and Means Committee, Undergraduate and Graduate Curriculum committees as standing committees organizing various aspects of education at Boğaziçi University.

Let me dwell on research a little. Research funding sources available to Boğaziçi University faculty members can be divided into three categories. The Research Fund allocates a government appropriated budget to researchers on project basis. Basically seed-money is provided to new starters. It is an even and broad distribution of small support. Fostering research activities, after a few Research Fund supports, will require more substantive support from TÜBİTAK/ NSF or similar agencies outside of Boğaziçi University. These can be tailored and matured according to individual preferences.

Projects supported by several Boğaziçi University members based on an existing capacity and aimed at establishing a focus group at Boğaziçi University may seek further funding through the so called State Planning Organization's Technological Research Support. Proposals are evaluated by the University Executive Board and the State Planning Organization since these funds are part of the University budget. As to the composition of the relevant boards selecting the projects to be funded: the Research fund committee has 10 faculty members mostly ex-officio by regulation. Ex officio members, quite naturally, feel the pressure of defending proposals coming from their units. In spite of that, since extensive distribution of seed money is involved and since proposal evaluation is accompanied by peer review, the operation of the Research Fund has been quite successful. The evaluation of the proposal to the State Planning Organization is performed by the University Executive Board (made up of Deans+ three elected faculty members, chaired by the rector) based on the advice given by the Research Policies Committee. This standing committee of Research Policies is composed of eight experienced faculty members appointed by the University Executive Board, the chair being the vice-rector for R&D. This committee will be, shortly, overlooking research activities at Boğaziçi University.

Links with the society (or community services) represent the third function of a university which is becoming as important as the other two. To boost such services, Boğaziçi University has established two offices, Technology Transfer Office and Continuing Professional Development Office both of which are run by committees of faculty members feeling strong about the matter. Another avenue for cooperation is the incubation center operated by Boğaziçi University and KOSGEB (Government Bureau for SME's ) jointly, subject to established guidelines.

It is impossible to complete a presentation without talking about international relations, networking and globalization. It is not the university alone that counts nowadays; one has to consider the complex structure of the university together with its partners- other universities adding on to the joint capability and the partner industries living in symbiosis. Again institutional structures, well rooted in the university hierarchy, are needed to arrange these international relations and to develop networks. International relations are particularly relevant and well suited to Boğaziçi University since the language of instruction is English and the cultural environment is quite colorful. We have developed exchange programs/ agreements with about 25 institutions abroad.

Loose control of operations can be nicely coupled with tight control of policies using an efficient evaluation or verification scheme. The effectiveness of the operations fulfilling the policies and objectives adapted will be reflected by a quality assessment exercise. Quality assessment was performed traditionally by the scientific world or depended on the judgment of equals in the university world and pertained mostly to the individual performance in research. Today, the strict individual dimension, while still valid, now coexists with a more collective and structural dimension of quality. And I am referring particularly to this aspect of quality assessment. That is, the exercise of comparing the mission and the objectives, say the input, with the operations and implementations, say the output, and minimizing the error between input and output. The

crucial issue is to have mechanisms which follow these errors. If these mechanisms are created, minimization of error will be eventually realized. The existence and internalization of such mechanisms point out to the quality culture in the university. Quality conscious universities can produce solutions to their problems even under worst conditions. Boğaziçi University has not produced yet a central organization caring for quality assessment and enhancement. Discrete attempts, however, towards a quality culture are encouraged by the rectorate:

- Engineering school has been visited for accreditation by ABET-an external evaluative review process guaranteeing exceedance of a threshold
- University has applied to CRE for an institutional evaluation –an external supportive review checking the institute’s capacity to define a mission, set objectives, implement them in a consistent fashion and then verify the extent to which it achieves these objectives.
- Course evaluation is used throughout the university to reflect students views about the courses
- An information system (data and statistics regarding students, faculty, staff, publications, citations, projects, etc) is being generated
- Instructor’s forum-an e-mail platform open to all instructors-provides feedback and an environment for discussion.

Quality and transparency are closely linked. Information diffusion is not satisfactory, yet, at Boğaziçi University. There is room for both the administration and the faculty members to make improvements. Many state universities in Turkey have weak and internally focused cultures today. Boğaziçi University is quite an exception. I believe that we have a strong and externally oriented culture which generates institutional confidence, common approaches, and realistic responses. This is a very valuable asset in institutionalization.

## References

[1] CRE, Summary of 1995 CRE Enquiry on University Research AB/ Geneva /20 Nov. 1995

[2] McNay, I “From Collegial Academy to Corporate Enterprise: the Changing Cultures in Universities” in The Changing University, SRHE Open University Press (1995)