

10 Emergent Strategies and Tensions between Decoupled University Structures and Management Initiatives

A Case Study of a Strategy Process

James Karlsen and Rómulo Pinheiro

Abstract

This chapter investigates the ways in which a Norwegian university located in a region facing a series of socio-economic challenges devised and implemented a new strategy. More specifically, we examine the dilemmas and tensions faced by university actors in articulating a shared strategic platform bridging internal (university) aspirations with external (regional actors and ministry) demands and expectations. The chapter adopts a historical institutionalist perspective using institutional logics as the conceptual lens against which the case data are interpreted. The findings provide fresh evidence of the complexity associated with strategic processes within highly institutionalized organizations like universities. Strategic orientations were found to adopt emergent rather than deliberative patterns. Challenges associated with the institutionalization of the co-creation of knowledge vision at the University of Agder resulted from the clashes between the different logics and behavioural postures associated with the main actors involved in the strategy process.

Introduction

Traditional conceptions of strategic processes within organizations involve the deliberative and linear nature of the process, with leaders at the top setting a vision and mission and others throughout the organization enacting on a plan to achieve it (Mintzberg, 1978, 1993). Instrumentalist accounts of modern organizations do not take into consideration that actors are bounded by the knowledge they fail to possess, as regards both their internal operations and the external environment (Christensen et al., 2007). In reality, most managers are unaware of, or fail to acknowledge, what they do not know, what Herbert Simon (1991) famously termed as pertaining to “bounded rationality”.

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Following this line of thought, Weick (1995) contends that strategy refers to “an after-the-event rationalization by top management of what they (often wrongly) believe their organisation has recently been doing” (cited by Bovaird & Löffler, 2009, p. 62).

The notion of *strategy as pattern* (Mintzberg, 1978) is particularly salient in the context of complex organizations that are deeply embedded in highly institutionalized environments, as is the case of universities (see Pinheiro et al., 2016). Firstly, viewing strategy as an (emergent) pattern sheds light on its *ex post* rather than *ex ante* nature, that is, focusing on the actual behaviours of actors rather than their predetermined intentions. Secondly, it pays attention to processes of sense-making and enactment (Weick, 1995), the idea that strategy is something organizational actors talk about in attempts to overcome the ambiguity and uncertainty associated with the complex environments in which they operate. Thirdly, a process view on strategy adopts an organic, evolutionary perspective focusing on past behaviour and consequences, rather than on becoming an instrument for shaping future actions.

According to Pinheiro and Young (2017), an emergent view on strategy is part and parcel of the university as a complex, adaptive system that co-evolves with its surrounding environment. Co-evolution implies, among other aspects, that causal mechanisms are multifaceted and non-linear. For university managers, this means embracing rather than reducing complexity, thus continuously adapting to changing internal and external environments. In such circumstances, adopting a systemic or holistic view is warranted rather than attempting to isolate the parts to manage them more efficiently. For example, while most strategies within universities refer to their core missions of teaching, research, and societal engagement or outreach, few articulate the ways in which the inner and outer dynamics surrounding each of these functions affect the others and, in turn, the complex interplay between the university and its external environment.

This chapter investigates the ways in which a Norwegian university located in a region facing a series of socio-economic challenges devised and implemented a new strategy. More specifically, we examine the dilemmas and tensions faced by university actors in articulating a shared strategic platform bridging internal (university) aspirations with external (regional actors and ministry) demands and expectations. Hence, in this chapter, we address the following research question:

- What types of internal (university) tensions emerge during the strategy process, and how can these be interpreted in the light of (institutional) theory?

Method and case

This chapter adopts a historical institutionalist perspective. As a methodological and theoretical tradition within the social sciences, historical institutionalism sheds light on the importance of past events in determining the course of future

trajectories (Suddaby et al., 2014). Past events create a kind of “anchoring effect”, making it difficult for agents to explore alternative patterns of behaviour or choices (Pierson & Skocpol, 2002).

In accounting for the importance of path dependencies in the behaviour of actors, individually and/or collectively, historical institutionalists refer to the importance of critical events or “junctures” in time (Pierson & Skocpol, 2002). One way to identify and investigate the role played by critical junctures over time is to resort to *process tracing*. The latter is a valuable methodological tool for drawing descriptive and causal inferences emerging from diagnostic pieces of evidence. These pieces are organized and re-constructed to provide researchers with a temporal sequence of events underlying a specific social phenomenon (Collier, 2011). The process is initiated with a narrative or “story” substantiated in an accurate timeline listing the sequence of key events or junctures. This is followed by the exploration of causal or salient ideas embedded in the narratives, considering the types of evidence that may confirm or disconfirm such ideas (Collier, 2011, pp. 828–829). Process tracing can be used in both positivist and interpretivist research designs. In the current study, we adopt an interpretivist approach anchored in a case study focusing on strategic (top-down) attempts at enacting structural and cultural change at a mid-size university in Norway.

The context for the study is a mid-size comprehensive university (the University of Agder or UiA) located in southern Norway, a region of approximately 300,000 inhabitants. As part of a far-reaching structural reform in Norway, resulting in several voluntary yet government-supported mergers (Kyvik & Stensaker, 2013), UiA’s board decided in 2013 *not* to pursue such an endeavour with a university college from the nearby region of Telemark. This, in turn, created a legitimacy dilemma in the eyes of UiA’s central administration, which had shifted into a new leadership team shortly following the decision not to merge. The case for this study focuses on the strategy process with the new rectorate facing this situation. Given the importance attributed to path dependencies or historical trajectories, our case builds on the role that major, prior events or antecedents play in future trajectories. Notably, the new rector who was the former Dean of the Technology Faculty was one of the few supportive of the merger, along with UiA’s previous rector. This created momentum (pressure) for a more engaging and ambitious strategy process.

Three semi-structured interviews (lasting about 1 hour each) were conducted in the spring of 2020 with key university actors involved with the strategy process at different hierarchical levels: central administration and project management. A variety of internal official documents and minutes were gathered. In addition, we drew upon our intrinsic knowledge of the strategy process due to our direct involvement as participants (period 2017–2019) in the context of the development of internal structures for co-creation. Finally, we used a research diary (Groenewald, 2004) to document all meetings we participated in, and draw upon important datasets from an earlier study (MA thesis, advised by one of the authors) on strategic processes at UiA which encompassed several interviews with key actors across multiple faculties and the central administration (Hassan, 2018).

Conceptual backdrop: institutional logics

In contrast to earlier institutional accounts stressing the importance of compliance resulting in uniformity or isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), the institutional logics' perspective caters to the importance of micro-level dynamics (agency and power) resulting in differentiation and pluralism. A logic is defined as "the socially constructed historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, assumptions, values and beliefs by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organise time and space and provide meaning to their daily activity" (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 804). Logics can be both symbolic representations and material practices that become embedded (taken for granted) over time. Logics act as formal and informal rules shaping agentic behaviour at the meso (organization) and micro (individual) levels.

Despite their salience, logics are both dynamic and historically contingent, evolving and changing in accordance with macro-level (societal) shifts (termed as "institutional orders") in which they are embedded or nested. For example, a participative democratic logic is part and parcel of a political, economic, or social system that puts a premium on individual rights, decentralization of power, accountability, and the rule of law (Fukuyama, 2014). As these institutional orders lose public support and legitimacy, the prevalent logics associated with them gradually decline and are replaced by other logics, linked to the rise of new, alternative institutional arrangements, or orders. The contemporaneous cases of quasi-democratic systems or illiberal democracies, such as those of Russia, Hungary, the Philippines, Venezuela, and so on, are compelling examples. In other words, institutional logics correspond to "the organizing principles of institutions" (Ocasio et al., 2017, p. 511) in the form of both formal and informal rules or norms.

Multiple studies have empirically shown that, as a result of the complex institutional and technical environments in which modern organizations are embedded, agents are faced with the difficult task of having to accommodate a multiplicity of institutional orders and their associated logics (cf. Pache & Santos, 2013). Often, these orders provide conflicting normative and pragmatic orientations, resulting in internal clashes or tensions. Some organizations resolve such tensions in a form of decoupling either by allowing different sub-units to follow a specific logic or by symbolically complying with the logics while retaining their structures and tasks unchanged (Greenwood et al., 2008). There is increasing evidence of the simultaneous accommodation of different logics, resulting in the rise of hybrid forms (Battilana & Lee, 2014). In such situations, formal leaders play an increasingly important role in mediating the tensions between two or more logics, often resulting in the adaption of hybrid leadership roles or strategies (Berg & Pinheiro, 2016). Recent studies have shown that actors are able to dynamically (and strategically) balance coexisting logics, maintaining the distinction between the logics while exploiting the benefits associated with their interdependence (Smets et al., 2015), suggesting that institutional complexity can itself become institutionalized and routinely

Table 10.1 Competing logics within universities

<i>Logics Key dimension</i>	<i>Managerial</i>	<i>Political</i>	<i>Administrative</i>	<i>Collegial</i>
<i>Institutional order</i>	Market	State	Bureaucracy	Networks
<i>Basis of legitimacy</i>	Performance	Accountability	Rule following	Knowledge
<i>Locus of attention</i>	Efficiency	External legitimacy	Rules and regulations	Internal legitimacy
<i>Means of enforcement</i>	Goal achievement	Authority/power	Rule compliance	Peer coercion

Source: Authors' own elaboration

enacted within everyday practice (Greenwood et al., 2011). Table 10.1 presents the key components associated with *four* logics of relevance to universities as organizations and institutions embedded in a highly institutionalized organizational field (Pinheiro et al., 2016).

Tracing the strategy process

Following the process tracing methodology sketched out earlier, Figure 10.1 shows the key events underpinning four key phases of the strategy process: (a) the emergence of UiA's new vision, (b) reactions of the faculties towards the vision, (c) the organization of the implementation process, and (d) the implementation of the co-creation laboratory and a course. It is important to note that these identified phases overlap one another and do not necessarily follow a linear fashion. Instead, they represent critical moments or junctures of the strategy process.

Phase I: Emergence of the new vision

In connection with the preparation of the new strategic plan, the rector established a strategy council for the period of January to July 2016. The council reported to the university board, which was the formal strategy group; it was composed of 16 members representing the following group of actors: staff, students and administration from UiA, and regional actors from the Agder region. In addition, a total of four open workshops targeting UiA staff were held, where specific topics in the realms of teaching, research, internationalization, and engagement were discussed. These workshops provided critical input for the discussion at the council level. The interviewees described the process as *good with open discussions* about vision and strategic areas. By mid-March 2016, three different proposals of the new vision were advanced by the strategy council; however, none were accepted by the strategy group. The leader of the strategy council, who was also head of department, underlined that the participants were concerned that the strategy had to reflect the university's main functions

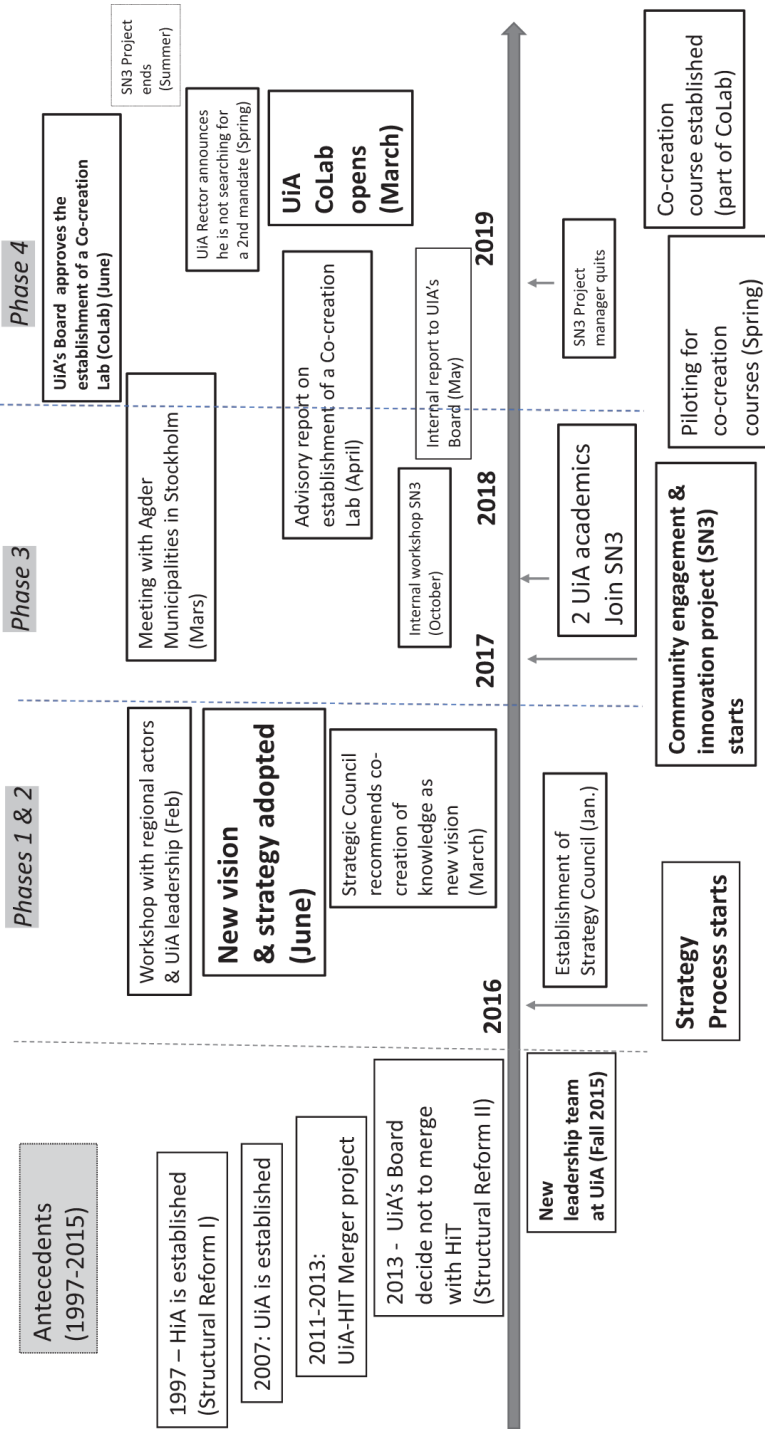


Figure 10.1 Timeline of UiA's strategy process

of research, education, and outreach. The latter function was especially important for the external members of the council, who argued that *the university should improve their communication with the region*. The argument was that there were too many access points to the university, and it was therefore difficult to identify and contact the appropriate person. *There should be one access point*, the external members argued. As a result, following further discussions, the council proposed the new vision “Co-creation of knowledge” (*Samskaping av kunnskap*) which emerged as a result of the discussions on integrating research, education, and the connection to the external environment with both the surrounding region and the broader world.

I remember I presented the vision in a meeting at the university where the rector was also present. . . . I thought before I presented it, that samskaping [co-creation] is not a good word in Norwegian. Then I said: “Co-creation in the absence of a better word”. For the Rector, it was like turning on a light. He got completely excited. Since then, there has only been co-creation. It was the one thing he [Rector] wanted to bring away from that meeting.

(strategic council member)

According to the same senior member of the council, the vision was created with a focus on the external environment of the university because there was a sense that it should be more open-minded and use the knowledge that already exists in and about the region. The reception of the new vision by UiA academics was mixed, as shown in the next section. As for the regional actors, they reacted rather favourably, as this was perceived as an attempt to engage with the region in a more systematic fashion. After some years of neglect, they argued, and following the transition to a full-fledged university in 2007, UiA was finally re-engaging with the region.

Phase II: Reactions towards the new vision at the faculty level

The proposal for a new strategic plan was submitted for consultation on 23 May 2016 with two alternatives of the vision: “Co-creation of knowledge” and “Together we create knowledge”. In the consultation responses from the faculties, one can see from the internal documents that the vision was met with mixed responses.

The arguments against the vision did not, however, convince the university board. The new vision and strategy were adopted in July 2016. An interview conducted in early 2018 with a faculty director, reported in a previous study, provides the following insight:

He [Director] also points out that the concept of collaboration is used ironically. These may be symptoms of resistance within the faculty, but at the same time, this contributes to the concept being incorporated into the faculty’s culture and language

apparatus. In the long run, it can be assumed that this will help the faculty gain greater ownership of the term.

(Hassan, 2018, pp. 41–42)

Phase III: Organization of the implementation process

According to UiA's rector at the time, his role was to act as a moderator by keeping everyone focused on the vision and the effective implementation of the strategy. The implementation process of the new strategy was organized differently for the three strategic areas.¹ The process for the strategic area *Community engagement and innovation* (internally known as SN3) was anchored in the university director's office, that is, in the main administration of the university. The leader of this process, a former minister of education and politician, was a newly hired senior advisor. He was hired largely because of his political skills and good connections to the political environment in Oslo with the aim of supporting lobbying efforts towards the government and its various agencies, most notably the Ministry of Education and Research. Yet, since lobbying is not necessarily a full-time job, he was given the responsibility of implementing this strategic area, which consisted of two key initiatives: *the Co-creation Laboratory* and *Students' Traineeships*, each of which was managed by a project leader. The two project leaders were externally recruited, but they had some previous knowledge about the university. The recruitment of external project leaders to work on implementation of the strategy led to criticism and resistance across the academic heartland, as reported in a previous study.

In the informants' view, the work with the SN-3 focus area has been where the most complications and challenges emerged at departmental, faculty and central level. The informants pointed out that the lack of competence and knowledge of UiA as an organization has been the primary reason why the project has not had the desired progression. It is a widespread problem that external people who are brought in to lead projects in complex organizations where the structures are hybrids of several ideal ways of organizing, often stumble because the organizational culture (different norms and values) are not taken into account well enough.

(Hassan, 2018, p. 85)

Phase IV: Establishment of the Co-Creation Laboratory

The most complex of the two projects was the establishment of the Co-Creation Laboratory, which encompassed a dedicated unit for coordinating engagement efforts across the board, including interdisciplinary joint teaching activities focusing on addressing the key challenges facing regional actors across the public sector.² In addition to the project leader who was working full-time, two senior academics from the social sciences were brought on board on a part-time basis as key advisors.³ The advisors possessed both scientific and practical knowledge on different aspects associated with universities' engagement: regionally, nationally, and internationally. In the interview with the project leader, we asked him about

the implementation process. He started by arguing that his role was one of being a dialogue facilitator and that *he personally did not like the notion of implementation*.

He continued by saying that the Co-creation Laboratory was an idea that had been established prior to his assuming of the role, and he wanted to have a process (ongoing dialogue) with the different faculties where the idea could be discussed, concretized, and anchored in the academic heartland. He did not want it in the form of one, two, and three steps (a linear process) but as a co-created laboratory for the whole university. The inspiration for the Co-Creation Laboratory originated from the Openlab in Stockholm, which a delegation from UiA visited in March 2017.⁴ The Openlab is located at the KTH Royal Institute of Technology's campus and is owned and financed not only by KTH but all the higher education institutions (HEIs), municipalities, and other public actors in the Stockholm region. Moreover, inspired by Stanford's University Design School, the Openlab adopts design thinking as its main co-creation method. According to the project manager: "We started too early in the process talking about building a co-creation laboratory and on the location of the new building." If he had had a second chance, the project manager noted, he would have spent more time on the process, especially by engaging academics. In retrospect, *it was an administration-driven process*. Yet it must be stated that in his earlier visits to some of UiA's faculties, the project manager was not received with open arms, with some academics being rather critical of the entire process. In addition, the former politician tasked with leading the SN3 efforts as project director, to whom the two project managers reported, was not keen on decentralized and informal team-based approaches, preferring instead a more classic command and control orientation based on formal committees and written documents for critical input. During an internal workshop in October 2017, in which the authors of this chapter were also invited to participate, together with the Rector, the SN3 project director, the two project managers, and other key internal actors, the project director started his speech at the beginning of the session by stating:

We [participants] should not use the concept Samskapingsverkstedet,⁵ but UiA Co-creating. It should be the aim of the seminar. . . . What do we believe can give success? Should we spend more time on workshops? The answer is no! There are three things we are going to work with. The first is an academic project, an interfaculty course, the second an Openlab [referring to the co-creation lab], and the third a website with information about the project.

(Authors' notes from the workshop 31 October 2017)

After the speech by the project director, the rector delivered a speech where, among other things, he argued: "The University of Agder should be easy to collaborate with and be a new and exciting partner in co-creation processes." In the discussion following his speech, the rector underlined that co-creation is a *cultural mindset* and that *everyone at the university is a co-creator*.

At the end of the workshop, the time for discussion and deliberation, including what was meant by co-creation and how to co-create knowledge, was over. The time had come for action, that is, the implementation of the decisions

taken. This strategic stand was supported by the rector who stressed the need to move forward with effective implementation, following half a year or so of project planning dedicated to establishing the vision and selecting the key initiatives. This strategic posture contrasted with that of the project team, which continued to argue for the need to engage with the academic heartland and take a more organic and systemic approach focusing on dialogue and an emerging consensus rather than a top-down implementation centred on timelines and deliverables.

UiA's board approved the creation of the new lab, later to be renamed CoLab. Following the rector's announcement, in the spring of 2019, of his decision not to stand for re-election, both the SN3 director and the remaining project manager left UiA,⁶ marking the completion of the process as such.

Discussion: clashing logics in an emergent strategy process

Starting with the strategy process, the process tracing analysis shows a pattern gradually moving from idea generation to discussion and the selection of alternatives to implementation, with a multiplicity of decisions taken within each of the key phases. This supports the notion of strategy as a stream of deliberative actions or decisions by the various actors involved, as proposed by Mintzberg (1978, p. 935). The data also show evidence supporting the notion of an emergent strategic process (Mintzberg, 1978), with actors adopting their behaviours in light of emerging circumstances, including earlier decisions and reactions to those decisions by key stakeholders. The deliberative nature of strategic processes within universities results from the historical legacy of the university as a democratic institution (de Boer & Stensaker, 2007). That said, the amalgamation of multiple disciplinary tribes and professionals (Trowler et al., 2012), and their respective norms and traditions that are embedded in distinct institutional logics, makes the pursuit of "unity of action" (Olsen, 2007) a daunting task. The empirical evidence suggests that, at key moments in the process, key UiA actors, such as the rector or project director, used their privileged or legitimate social standing to enforce or coerce participations to adopt a particular course of action, such as the decision to cease deliberation in the spring of 2018.

The establishment of a temporary (project-based) organization (encompassing a strategic council, project groups, and so on) attests to the deliberative or planned nature of the strategy process at UiA. As Mintzberg and Waters (1985) point out, deliberate and emergent dimensions should be seen as part of a continuum rather than dichotomies per se. The reality is that, in most cases, neither purely deliberate nor purely emergent strategies are realized in practice, despite actors' initial intentions:

It is difficult to imagine action in the total absence of intention – in some pocket of the organisation if not from the leadership itself – such that we would expect the purely emergent strategy to be as rare as the purely deliberate one.

(Mintzberg & Waters, 1985, p. 258)

The structural and cultural complexity inherent to universities as both organizations and institutions (cf. Pinheiro & Young, 2017) makes it nearly imperative that any planned action by management is conditional on debate and deliberation at multiple levels, as was the case regarding the faculties' reactions to the new vision.

Even though the vision was generated by the strategy council in consultation with multiple stakeholders, it became embodied in the personal figure of the rector, who, as both a representative and symbolic figure, continuously urged internal stakeholders to take bold actions in order to remain competitive in a highly dynamic environment. Stensaker and Benner (2013) contend that universities, particularly newer ones located in less central geographies, as is the case with UiA, have little choice but to engage in innovative efforts to move up competitively in their domestic and international fields. In this respect, we can also detect elements of the entrepreneurial (strategic) orientation as presented by Mintzberg and Waters (1985, p. 260; see also Young & Pinheiro, 2022). In fact, the idea of a somewhat charismatic and sympathetic foreign-born engineer (the rector) with prior experience in the private sector seemed to have appealed to both internal and external stakeholders.⁷ Such an entrepreneurial orientation (cf. Pinheiro & Stensaker, 2014a) was found to be adequate given the external pressures for change that ensued following the decision in 2013 not to merge. Hence, it was not surprising that UiA's new vision statement would be outward-oriented, also given the broader changes facing the Norwegian and European HE sectors, with societal engagement and impact ranking high on the government's agenda (Sørensen et al., 2019).

As for the way in which, as a strategic idea, co-creation was both adopted and adapted at UiA, the analysis shows a lack of internal deliberation associated with what it meant (*definition*), how it was to be applied (*practice*), and for whom it was intended (*audience*). Such debates were held at the level of the project team, including students and academic advisors involved with co-creation activities, but they never expanded the idea to encompass other levels of the organization. Rather than approaching co-creation as a long-term cultural shift or mindset, as proposed by the project team, actors close to the central administration adopted a narrower, managerialist approach in the form of co-creation as a means to an end (i.e., repositioning UiA in the national and global marketplace), instead of an end in and of itself. Dialogue, tolerance, and engagement are time-consuming and require a level of tolerance (also in regard to failure) that today's university leaders and administrators are, for the most part, not willing to embrace, partly given the multiple external pressures they face and the need for a speedy and coordinated strategic response (see Pinheiro & Stensaker, 2014b). UiA's rector played an active and dominant role in initiating and driving strategic change, which is aligned with recent findings from Norway on the role of university management (Frølich et al., 2019).

Table 10.2 Empirical manifestation of competing logics at UiA

Logics Key dimensions	Managerial	Political	Administrative	Collegial
Primary carrier	Rectorate	Project director	Central administration	SN3 project manager and team
Strategic priority	Implementation (project management)	External actors (regional and national)	Institutionalization (structures, processes, resources)	Academic engagement
Normative posture	Efficiency	Management (top-down)	Accountability	Culture or ethos (bottom-up)
Temporal perspective	Short term	Short term	Short /medium term	Long term

The data point to tensions associated with conflicting logics held by the different actors involved (see Table 10.2). Both the rector and the project director were concerned with a successful or efficient outcome, but their behavioural postures differed based on their social standings, normative beliefs, and past experiences. The rector was keen to adopt efficiency, goal achievement, and (linear) project management, aspects strongly associated with a *managerialism logic* (see Table 10.1).

In contrast, the project director's experience as a politician, alongside his official mandate, centred on external actors (lobbying), resulted in a behavioural posture where power relations (control) and external accountability (*political logic*) ranked high on the agenda. Working alongside (embedded in) UiA's administrative bureaucracy which focused on procedural aspects such as budgeting and compliance with internal and external rules and regulations, the project director adopted a traditional top-down orientation. This directly clashed with the more informal, collegial posture adopted by the project team, which was led by a hands-off project manager, and where networking based on trust, knowledge, and respect for different disciplinary cultures and local traditions was centre stage. This long-term orientation associated with an evolving (non-steered) cultural shift within UiA clashed with the short-term focus associated with achieving the milestones and goals of the strategic plan (for a recent discussion on the interplay between culture and resilience in Nordic HE, consult Geschwind et al., 2022). This, in turn, led to the rise of two competing narratives or paradigms on co-creation. The first, linked to the *cultural perspective* (Christensen et al., 2007) adopted by the project team, approached co-creation as an end in itself (i.e., part and parcel of internal norms, values, and academic identities), whereas the second, subscribed to by UiA's central administration and its formal leaders, the rector included, conceived of co-creation as a tool or instrument (see also Olsen, 2007) for realizing the short-term goals composing UiA's strategy. This clash of distinct logics is illustrated in Table 10.2.

Conclusion

This case study, focusing on a mid-size university located in a somewhat peripheral mid-size region in Northern Europe, provides fresh evidence of the complexity associated with strategic processes within highly institutionalized organizations like universities (Pinheiro et al., 2016). As found in earlier studies (Fumasoli et al., 2015; Pinheiro & Young, 2017), strategic orientations at universities tend to adopt emergent rather than deliberative patterns, reflecting ongoing dynamics set in motion by a multiplicity of forces, many of whom co-evolve with each other, thus questioning the idea of strategy as a linear, rational, and predictable process.

Some of the challenges associated with the institutionalization of the co-creation of knowledge vision at UiA, as the case demonstrates, have resulted from the clashes between the different logics and behavioural postures associated with the main actors involved in the strategy process. Of particular salience in this respect are the observed tensions between short-term, instrumentalistic perspectives focusing on efficiency, top-down management, and external accountability on the one hand, and that of a long-term cultural orientation centred on the norms of collegiality, inclusivity, and internal legitimacy on the other. These clashes illustrate the ongoing tensions between planners and other internal actors responsible for rationalizing and managing university structures and procedures (Ramirez & Christensen, 2013) and those agents (the implementers, in this case academics) responsible for the task of inhabiting and infusing these same structural arrangements with both (cultural) value and meaning. In so doing, the case points to the growing divide within modern universities, in the Nordics and elsewhere, between leadership/administrative structures and the academic heartland resulting from efforts to modernize or rationalize universities in light of market-based models stressing efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness (Enders et al., 2015).

To conclude, this case study demonstrates, among other aspects, the limitations associated with deliberative action in a university context. It also points to the importance associated with the everyday and informal aspects underpinning university life (academic norms, values, traditions, identities, and so on), which managers need to consider while devising strategic plans aimed at change and adaptation within the context of complex internal and external environments. Future studies, resorting to a larger sample and embracing mixed methods, could bring further clarity on the dynamic interplay between deliberative and emergent processes and behaviours within complex organizations such as universities while taking into consideration internal and external dynamics on the one hand and the coexistence/clash among competing logics and stakeholder demands on the other. More specifically, and when it comes to universities and regional engagement in particular, there is a need to unpack the roles that external actors – within and beyond the surrounding region – play in change processes and how they affect both strategic trajectories and short- and mid-term outcomes.

Notes

- 1 These were SN1: Learning and education for the future; SN2: Global mindset (internationalization); and SN3: Community engagement and innovation.
- 2 Due to space constraints, the focus here is exclusively on the establishment of the co-creation unit, rather than on describing the process that led to the development and establishment of an interdisciplinary master-level course on co-creation titled “Co-creation: Theory and praxis” (details here: www.uia.no/en/studieplaner/topic/SV-420-1).
- 3 In the interest of transparency, we report here that the two advisors are the authors of this chapter.
- 4 For information about KTH, see the link: <https://openlabsthlm.se/>
- 5 The Norwegian term for “co-creation laboratory” as a social and physical space.
- 6 It is worth noting that, following divergences and tensions regarding management styles, between the SN3 director and the project leader for engagement and innovation, the latter voluntarily quit UiA in the winter of 2018. The remaining project leader (focusing on traineeships) took over the project, working alongside the two existing academic advisors.
- 7 Yet, as a caveat, it should be stated that the election in 2015 of the new rector was highly competitive and internally contested, ultimately decided by less than a handful of votes by staff.

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