Institutional Identity and Organizational Structure in Multi-campus Universities

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Abstract

This article focuses on multi-campus universities—ones that have multiple campuses but no independent central administrative system. The administrative structure of these multi-campus universities must be determined by the role and mission of the campuses both individually and collectively. Branch campuses tend to have hybrid missions in that they are asked to serve the overall university and local constituent communities at the same time. These multiple missions may conflict and thus require intentional organizational structures that permit both the overall university and the individual campuses to be successful.

Many states have initiated new campuses primarily to provide additional access to higher education. Most of these new campuses, such as those in California, are part of a larger university system. Under this scheme, the branches report to an overall system office that has the coordinating and administrative responsibilities for the system, but does not itself provide educational services or programs. The individual campuses have no direct relationship with each other, other than membership in the system. In other cases (including some in California), new campuses are linked to or spawned by another, mature institution. In these multi-campus universities, there is not a central or independent system office that provides coordination. Typically, the administration of the originating or main campus is responsible for the coordination among branch campuses. Thus, system functions are provided by people and organizational units that also offer educational services and programs on the main campus.

Branch campuses are created in different ways. Individual institutions sometimes take the initiative to establish additional campuses that expand their presence. Others are created by state agencies or legislatures. The motivation for doing so is often the desire to provide additional access for students who would otherwise have difficulty accessing programs at existing institutions. Other motivations include providing the appropriate context for particular programs. For example, a medical or law school may be more feasible in a large urban area than near a rural residential campus. New campuses can also represent a desire to leverage or enhance economic and cultural developments in certain communities.

Whatever the motivation, the creation of new campuses immediately raises the question about how to organize the relationship among multiple campuses. Other common organizing questions include: Do the individual campuses have their own budget and, if so, how is it determined? Are faculty at the newer campuses represented within the faculty senate of the parent campus? Do the academic deans and depart-

ment chairs at the originating campus control the curriculum at the newer campuses? Do the individual campuses have the freedom to conduct independent fundraising campaigns? Do the individual campuses interact directly with the legislative and regulatory bodies of the state or with the board of regents? Do the chief administrative officers of the new campuses report to the president of the campus system or to one of the vice presidents? If the latter, then how does the chief administrative officer of the campus relate to the other vice presidents of the institution? Do the individual campuses develop their individual images and take responsibility for their own marketing, or are they subsumed under the efforts of the larger institution? Particularly with the advent of distance delivery technologies, the various campuses may be competitors with the parent campus for the same students. How are such conflicts to be resolved?

Given the many challenging issues related to the organization and structure of multi-campus universities, it is not surprising that the most frequent topic of conversation among branch campus administrators is the nature of their relationship to the lead campus. Further, the answers to these questions are almost as numerous as the models for multi-campus universities.

This variability is apparent in the state of Washington, which a decade ago created a system of new campuses attached to the two research universities of the state, the University of Washington and Washington State University. When these campuses were created, a set of specific purposes and outcomes were written into the legislation. The state legislature and the Higher Education Coordinating Board located five new campuses in populous areas of the state that that were under-served at the upper division and graduate levels in higher education. The immediate reason for the creation of these campuses was to provide student access to degree programs. Long term, the new campuses were intended to contribute to the economic and cultural development of the communities in which they were situated.

The means by which the stipulated ends were to be achieved were conceptualized very differently by Washington State University and the University of Washington. The University of Washington began with an expectation that the new branches would become independent regional campuses with a mission different than that of the home research university. Washington State University responded with the mantra of "one university geographically dispersed." While each institution articulated an approach to early governance, procedural and organizational structures, they did so without a clearly apparent set of principles and/or a clear understanding of institutional organization or developmental theory. The difference between the University of Washington's and Washington State University's approaches suggest the absence of extant principles for such institutional expansion.

Organizational theory does not fully explain or inform the design and development of these kinds of organizations, or the structures that have developed. Current concepts such as that of matrix organizations have been applied with unsatisfactory results. The concepts of group psychology and political power structure explain some patterns and aspects of multi-campus structures, but they do little to define the most effective organizational approaches for different campus contexts.

A small and growing body of literature on the identity of organizations may, however, prove especially useful. The concepts of multiple identity, or hybrid organizations,

were first articulated by Albert and Whetten in 1985. These concepts appear to have many implications for the governance of academic institutions generally, and multi-campus universities specifically. Of particular importance is that this approach focuses on structural or governance issues. Perhaps even more importantly, the concept of organizational identity is guided by institutional values and mission rather than power relationships or political compromises.

Albert and Whetten's theorizing has been at the broad conceptual level of institutions (church, education, business, military, government, etc.). They specifically suggest that the organizational concepts they have defined are intended only to function at that level and not at the level being considered here. Their concepts, however, provide an approach that this author finds potentially valuable in guiding the organizational and structural development of branch campuses. Any shortcomings in the application of this model to branch campuses should thus be attributed to this author and the liberties taken with the model, not to Albert and Whetten.

Institutional Identity

Albert and Whetten's approach begins with the belief that organizations need to first understand what is distinctive about the institution, and also to determine its core identity. This concept is common in the literature on organizational structure and process; however, Albert and Whetten suggest that the question of identity can (should) be answered at five different levels beginning with the broadest, most general view of the organizational type and progressing through more detailed levels that define the main business function of the organization, its values/purposes, and strategies and tactics. Questions of core identity and distinctiveness can be answered by looking across items in the category. Table 1 illustrates these questions and some potential answers to them for branches of multi-campus universities.

Recognizing that an institution is an educational one brings with it the recognition that certain traditions, assumptions, and ways of operating are implied. Some of these are different than they would be for a different kind of institution, such as a retail business, church, or hospital. Similarly, recognizing that an educational institution is in the business of higher education implies organizational characteristics and operating procedures different from the designation of a public primary or secondary school. The same is true of an institution's identity as a university rather than a community college or an identity as a research university compared to that of a comprehensive one. Increasingly detailed analysis of values, purposes, strategies, and tactics further reveal distinctive elements of identity.

Hybrid Institutions

Hybrid institutions have more than a single identity. Even at the highest level (level one), some have dual organizational identities (e.g., educational and military organizations, as seen in the U.S. Air Force Academy; or religious and educational institutions such as Brigham Young University). A common assumption is that different or multiple missions imply the need for separation. Selznick (1984) reports that in the culture of the mid-1900s differences in organizational values were assumed to require separation of administration. More recent experience in the private sector, however, indicates that institutions with different identities, different missions, and/or different values can co-exist within the same institution, and that such diversity may, in fact, be essential to success.

Table 1

Identity Question (Who are we?)	Common Answer	Unique Answer
1. *Which Type of Organization?* (Social Institution)	Education	Higher Education
2. *What business?*	University	Research University Land-Grant University Comprehensive University Health Sciences University
3. *Why are we in business?* (Values, Purpose)	Knowledge Mgmt	Liberal Arts Professional and technical Global mission Community enhancement
4. *How do we do business?* (Strategy)		Lecture/Laboratory Distance-delivered Web based Full vs. part-time faculty
5. *Where/When/With Whom?* (Tactics)		Residential students Commuter Full- vs. part-time students Geographic location

These hybrid identity organizations raise questions precisely because there is a tendency to expect that multiple identities imply a potential for incompatibility. There is clearly some incompatibility when an organization is both a church and a hospital, but is there more incompatibility when the organization is both a church and a university? At the second level of Albert & Whetten's identity hierarchy, the nature of the organization's business, multiple identities also can be identified that may result in incompatibilities. An example is the University of Alaska Fairbanks, which identifies itself primarily as a research university, but has recently incorporated community colleges within its organization.

A basic question in hybrid organizations is the degree to which the multiple identities can be seen as coherent and essential. The viability of the hybrid organization may depend upon the degree to which there is overlap in and agreement concerning what is indispensable or inviolate in each of the identities that makes it worthwhile to cope with multiple purposes. With or without such consensus, the success of an organization with multiple identities also depends on the extent to which the organization can adopt operating procedures that permit or demand negotiation among the structures supporting the various identities concerning the perceived incompatibilities.

Whetten (1999) describes some hybrid organizations as ones in which one identity clearly takes precedence over other identities that occur at the same level. He notes, for example, that officials at Brigham Young University, a church-university, clearly

understand that the church identity and religious mission take precedence over the university identity and mission. Such subordination of identities is clearly one method of dealing with the conflict that can occur when an institution claims multiple identities.

Institutions where different identities are seen as equal are more challenging. Whetten suggests that one of the consequences of multiple and equally important identities is that there is neither a clear system for resolving conflicts across different agendas, nor a mechanism to prioritize among goals when no single identity predominates. This may not be completely true if multiple identities primarily appear at level three and below (Table 1). A singular identity at levels one or two may help resolve dilemmas that arise when multiple identities exist at level three. That is, incompatibility at levels three through five may be less hazardous to an organization than incompatibility at broader, more fundamental levels. Incompatibility that exists in the organization only at the level of tactics (level five) may produce little dissonance. For example, delivering products to customers with different preferences and in different locations may result in some logistical conflicts (e.g., commuter college students' preference for evening classes vs. residential students' preference for mid-day classes), but the basic content may be the same.

The viability of hybrid organizations may also depend on the organizational structure that is devised to manage the organization and its functions. In the ideographic form, different people or parts of an organization are given the tasks of carrying out different missions, and thus supporting different identities of the organization. In hospitals the classic separation of the health care providers from business and finance personnel provides an example. In the holographic organization, all identities appear in the same people. The managed care trend in health care, for example, is forcing physicians to address both the fiscal and the medical aspects of their endeavors.

In the ideographic version, conflicts are interpersonal or between groups. In the holographic organization, the conflicting demands of multiple identities occur within the individual. Dissonance is much more easily resolved within an individual than is conflict between individuals, and such dissonance is often the source of creative solutions to problems. However, dissonance within individuals also leads to stress. Note the number of physicians leaving the profession because of the effects of the managed care working environment. This raises the interesting question of whether or not the holographic model should apply to all within a higher education organization. Responsibilities to external stakeholders suggest that the dissonance should be owned by the administrators of the system. What about the faculty or staff?

The Role of Identity in Branch Campus Administration

This conception of institutional identity has several implications for the development and structure of multi-campus universities. Albert and Whetten suggest that institutions founded with multiple identities are often successful. Institutions that are formed and then subsequently acquire an additional identity have, in their assessment, been unable to maintain the dual identity. This observation serves as an important warning sign for all hybrid organizations (See Gray and Chamberlain in this issue). Given the proliferation of multi-campus universities, it is interesting to ask whether large, dominant institutions can sustain the separate and added identity that comes with the

creation of new campuses. Specifically, can people who identify with the parent institution also support the role and mission of the new campuses? The level at which one enters Table 1 in the conceptualization of the newer campuses may be important in answering this question. If the new campuses differ from the donor institution only at level five, tactics (e.g., functioning like the main campus as a research university, but in a different location), then the implications for organizational development may be minimal. While there may be some differences in the way business is being done, these are differences in tactics. Students may be older, nonresidential, part time, etc., but what is provided to the students may be similar or identical.

If a campus is seen to differ from the rest of the institution only in tactics, then the multi-campus university may want to organize itself in such a way as to provide close oversight of the new campus. Such oversight will ensure that the same product is delivered regardless of location or instructor. This is precisely the way in which the University of Phoenix functions. The University of Phoenix prides itself on students receiving the same course quality and content whether they are in New Orleans or in San Francisco. In order to do this Phoenix ensures that the text books, the course outline, and even the individual lesson plans are the same regardless of the location and instructor.

If, on the other hand, the new campuses are assumed to be different from the main university at a much higher level (e.g., level two, the kind of business that we are in), the governance and organizational structure may need to be different than it would be for a campus that differed only in tactics. If the donor campus defines itself as a regional teaching institution and the new branch campus is viewed as a research university, then the new campus shares relatively little identity with the donor. The donor campus is, then, less capable of governing the newer unit in the same way that it would a new college or department. The teaching assignments and the criteria for evaluating performance alone would be different. In such a case the ultimate resolution would seem very clear—relatively autonomous and independent administrative structures may be necessary for both the newer campus and the donor organization. Such a structure may be particularly applicable, for example, for the University of Washington and its branch campuses, which are conceived of as being regional institutions without the research mission of the originating campus.

The dilemma for Washington State University is more difficult to resolve. Washington State University assumes that the missions of the research and land-grant university are shared by all of its campuses. However, the parent campus is a rural, isolated, and residential one, while the new branches are located in more metropolitan areas and serve non-residential, upper division and graduate students. The new campuses are expected to replicate the curricular content of the main campus (again, one university in many places), and to coordinate closely with their local community on programmatic, economic, and cultural development. Thus, the newer campuses are meant to be like the original campus at level two in Albert and Whetten's hierarchy, but contextual pressures mean that they also differ at least at level four, strategies. These kinds of differences between the branch and originating campuses of a multi-campus university in strategies are often apparent and call for greater autonomy for parts of the branch campuses so they may juggle their multiple identities at the strategy level. For example, if branch campuses are precluded from offering courses at the freshman and sophomore level, program requirements set by the college or department at the main

campus that does offer freshman and sophomore classes may not be feasible at the branches if the requirement involves changes to lower division courses. For example, if the business program decides to delete Management Information Systems 350 from the catalog and to require a new course at the 200 level, then the new course cannot be delivered at the branches. The local community colleges, which offer the 100 and 200 level courses for the branch campuses, may or may not be willing or able to alter their curriculum and staffing to deliver the new course. Such a decision on the part of the main campus department creates strategic problems for the branches and additional obstacles for students. In our example, students may transfer community college credits up to a maximum level. Students who have reached that transfer limit and are then required to complete an additional pre-requisite course from the community college may be precluded from having those additional credits count toward graduation. A student at the main campus, however, would be able to count additional credits even at the lower division level, if the course were taken at that institution. Thus, the goal of maintaining identical missions may require some flexibility in the details at the strategy level, and greater autonomy in strategy selection.

Another difference at the strategy level comes from the expectation that the branch campuses be responsive to local educational needs, which are highly likely to be different from the program mix drawn from the main campus. As a result, branch campuses may be pressured to offer degree programs that are not offered by the originating campus and which do not fit the current academic structure.

There are other differences in strategies as well. The traditional residential campuses provide a powerful opportunity for a traditional educational experience. Almost everything that happens to students on such campuses is somehow related to their education. Nearly everyone they encounter is engaged in a similar enterprise. The commuter campus in a more urban environment does not provide that opportunity. The urban campus does, however, provide opportunities for collaborative learning that bring the entire community into the educational enterprise. Even student life on a commuter campus cannot be separated from the student's other roles in the community. On such campuses it is sometimes difficult to determine where the educational institution ends and the community begins. This integration of study and the real world can be a powerful educational model, but operating procedures and organizational structures designed to support the traditional, rural residential campus may not effectively serve the students of the more complex environment of the urban institution.

To serve their communities responsively, branch campuses often form many inter-institutional partnerships. Communities sometimes find themselves in need of degree programs and other academic services that cannot be provided by the local institution. Metropolitan areas offer the opportunity to respond to this need through collaboration with other educational organizations in the city. For example, in the early 1990s, the Portland, Oregon, metropolitan area lacked a general research library. The combined resources of various public and private institutions in northwest Oregon and southwest Washington approached that of a research library if they could be coordinated. With Portland State University as the lead institution and Washington State University Vancouver as one of the partners, a consortium was created that developed a virtual research library known as PORTALS, Portland Area Library System. All existing resources available to all the partners, and other resources, were reached via common

subscription to on-line library materials. Similarly, jointly offered degree programs can combine the instructional resources of several institutions to meet needs that no single institution could afford. This kind of response to community needs, however, may require a more autonomous structure for the branch campus. Rather than functioning solely as an agent and replication of the parent institution, the campus may also function as an agent of the community in solving its educational needs.

The demands of organizing collaborative learning and inter-institutional partnerships may raise conflicting identities to the third level, values, in Albert and Whetten's scheme. Whether one considers collaborative learning and inter-institutional partnerships to be strategies or values, it is apparent that the branch campuses, even if meant to be identical, often have mission elements that can be distinguished from those of the originating or home campus. Differences at level three of Albert and Whetten's hierarchy may be particularly problematic, in that the most effective structure for the branch-main campus relationship is not obvious. Differences that occur at levels four and five, strategies and tactics, represent variety of a common overall mission and suggest a clear organizational strategy where branch campuses should be closely held subsidiaries with limited autonomy and most decisions made at the "corporate" level. The more fundamental differences that may occur at level two signal strong distinctions between mission purposes. This suggests an organizational structure that gives individual campuses as much autonomy as possible.

Conclusion

Application of the concepts of institution identity to multi-campus universities leads this author to make the following hypotheses about the long-term success of branch institutions.

1. A multi-campus university may have values, roles, and missions beyond those of the individual campuses, including those of the originating or lead institution. A multi-campus university will be successful only if these are articulated, understood, agreed to, and supported across the multiple campuses of the university.

2. A multi-campus university will be successful only if the various campuses are aware of and supportive of the role and mission of each campus. That is, the university administration should be organized in a fashion that permits open and clear articulation and discussion of the individual campus' roles and missions.

3. A multi-campus university will be successful only if the organizational or administrative structure of these universities is determined by the individual and combined mission of the campuses, including, but not limited to, those of the originating or lead campus. If the individual campuses have very different missions and purposes, then the organization should be one that grants considerable autonomy to the individual campuses in order to maximize realization of those missions. If, on the other hand, the role and mission of the individual campuses is indistinguishable, other than in operational details, autonomy could be counterproductive.

4. A multi-campus university will be successful only if the organizational structure ensures that all campuses contribute to the common mission. To the extent that the individual campuses share roles and missions, the multi-campus university should be

organized to provide central or, at least, very similar control and administration of the related functions. Each campus has an obligation to contribute to the common elements of the missions, and the organizational and administrative structure should be constructed to ensure that. For example, if a multi-campus university shares a research mission across all its campuses, then the granting of tenure to faculty may of necessity be conducted centrally. If all campuses do not share the research mission, then the granting of tenure should be administered locally, with different criteria for the individual campuses.

5. A multi-campus university will be successful only if the organizational structure permits full pursuit of the individual missions of each campus. While the individual campuses have an obligation to contribute to the role and mission of the overall multi-campus university and to support the role and mission of each other campus, the multi-campus university has an obligation to be aware of and to support the unique missions of the individual campuses. If individual campuses have a mission that dictates provision of unique curricula to meet the needs of the individual communities, then responsibility for curriculum should be distributed to the individual campuses. If the individual campuses serve wholly different kinds of students, then responsibility for student services should be distributed.

The difficulty for most multi-campus universities is that the role and mission of the individual campuses do not fall at the extremes of complete overlap or complete separation. Instead, the various campuses share some common roles and missions, but each has some distinctive purposes as well. Multi-campus universities are thus often hybrid institutions with missions and values that may sometimes conflict. Often these conflicts cannot by resolved by simple prioritization. That is, one set of values or roles does not have clear trumping rights over the others. For example, legislatures and other regulating bodies may demand responsiveness to the needs of the local communities, which may differ from community to community. That is, the needs for specific responses may differ from campus to campus.

6. Some administrative or organization functions may be ones that can only be successfully executed if they are shared. If, for example, all campuses share a research mission, but each has a unique curriculum, then faculty appointment should be administered jointly. Then the question becomes one of how the responsibility for the research mission can be shared.

7. In all cases it appears extremely important that avenues for communication be extensive. The individual campuses cannot support the common mission if they are excluded from the discussion and articulation of that mission. Similarly, the administration of the overall multi-campus university cannot proceed effectively if it does not have a mechanism that makes awareness of the individual missions and details of their implementation commonplace. In addition, conflicts and differences of opinion must have a vehicle for resolution. Finally, ideas and plans must have a place at which they can be scrutinized.

8. The notion that the existence of multiple missions causes stress is also important to consider. It appears counterproductive for such stress to be borne by everyone in the organization. There is little reason for all staff to share in the conflict of multiple missions. Indeed, it may be counterproductive for many individuals in the organization

to report to multiple supervisors. Rather, it may be best to assume that the responsibility for balancing the multiple missions should be concentrated at the upper levels of the campus administration while others are protected from it. That is, a holographic organizational structure may be appropriate for campus administration, but an ideographic one may be more appropriate for the remainder of the campus' employees.

Finally, it should be recognized that we have relatively little experience with multi-campus universities. As these new universities continue to evolve, the current questions will be answered progressively through experience and new issues will emerge. It is apparent, however, that multi-campus universities represent an exciting and effective way of responding to the educational demands of our extremely varied communities.

Suggested Reading

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