

# ARE UNIVERSITIES SPECIFIC ORGANISATIONS?

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Conferência: A autonomia e governo das IES segundo o RJIES

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- Two main ways of defining / looking at organizations
  - Organizations as a social processes
  - Organizations as a particular type of objects => many typologies trying to classify
  
- This also applies to universities and raises questions about:
  - Whether they are or not organizations, a question often discussed in the 1960s!
  - What kind of organizations they are and what does it means in terms of their (internal) governance
  - How does governance work within universities?

## ■ Outline

1. A global trend: from universities as particular organizations to the transformation of universities into organizations like « others »

*Yes, but nevertheless still two distinctive features in university governance that have impact on the management of universities*

2. A governance combining hierarchical, professional and deliberative coordination
3. Core activities (teaching and research) that are loosely coupled and rely on unclear technologies

## **PART 1**

**A GLOBAL TREND: FROM UNIVERSITIES  
AS PARTICULAR ORGANIZATIONS TO  
THE TRANSFORMATION OF  
UNIVERSITIES INTO ORGANIZATIONS  
LIKE « OTHERS »**

- Two main periods in the study of university governance
- From 1960 to the 1980s, organizational studies on universities stress their particularism
  - From the collegial model (Goodman, 1962; Millett, 1962) to university culture (*organizational saga*, Clark 1972)
  - From the political model (Baldrige, 1971), to the resource dependence theory (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1974)
  - From the bureaucratic model (Blau, 1973) to professional bureaucracies (Minzberg, 1979)
  - From organized anarchies and the garbage can model of decision-making (Cohen, March et Olsen, 1972) to pluralistic organizations (Denis, Langley, & Rouleau, 2007)
  - Models' mix (for instance Hardy, 1990)

- Since then, most studies rather focus on whether and how closer to other organizations universities are becoming
  - The construction of universities into organizations (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson, 2000)
  - Universities as strategic actors (actorhood) (Krücken and Meier, 2006)
  - Empowerment and professionalization of academic leaders potentially threatening collegiality
  - Importation of managerial solutions
    - Performance indicators
    - Management software linking university members together

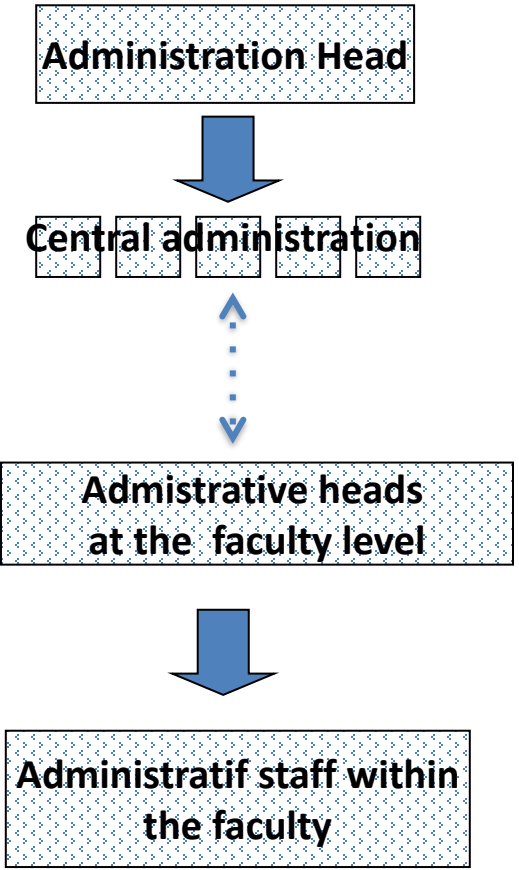
## **PART 2**

# **A GOVERNANCE COMBINING HIERARCHICAL, PROFESSIONAL AND DELIBERATIVE COORDINATION**

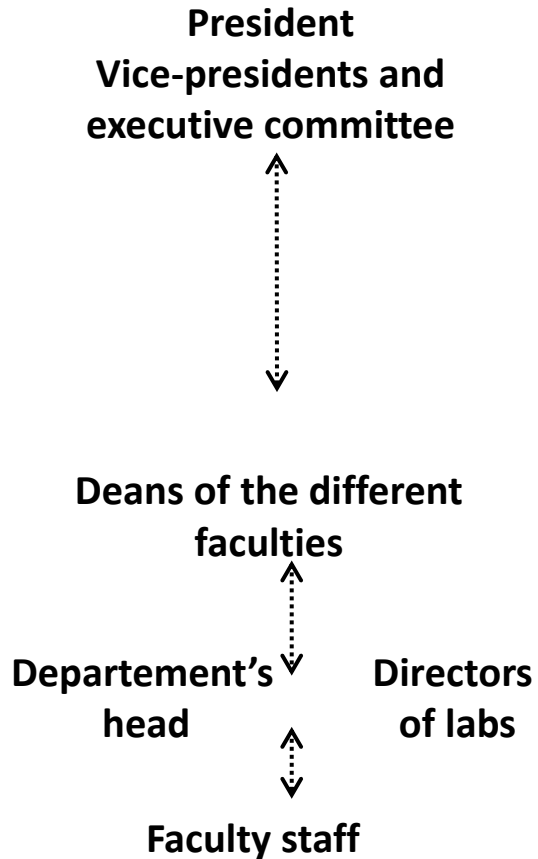
- The typical structure of most universities entails three different forms of coordination
- In France university presidents can “choose” between different governance options, each of them relying on different alliances and leading to different tensions
  - Governing with the administration
  - Governing with the deliberative bodies
  - Governing with the deans



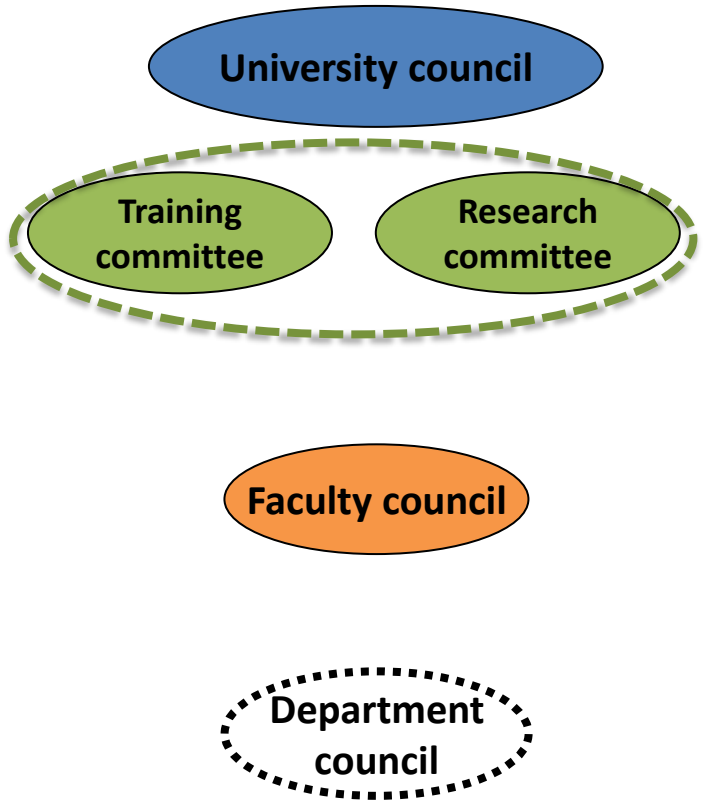
### Administrative coordination



### Professional coordination



### Deliberative coordination



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## **PART 3**

**CORE ACTIVITIES (TEACHING AND  
RESEARCH) THAT ARE LOOSELY COUPLED  
AND RELY ON UNCLEAR TECHNOLOGIES**

### PART 3. - LOOSE COUPLING AND UNCLEAR TECHNOLOGIES

- The core activities of universities, teaching and research are, each, loosely coupled activities(Weick, 1976)
  - By loosely coupled, I mean that the achievement of teaching (or research) does not require a strong coordination with others or does not rely on a strong interdependence with others
  - Variations among disciplines exist, of course, and new technologies and new forms of academic work somewhat reduce the intensity in loose coupling but it nevertheless remains high
  - This is related to the characteristics of these activities but it is maintained
    - Cooperation is kept reduced
    - The environment of universities reinforces this characteristic as it provides resources that increase one's individual autonomy and one's negotiation power
    - The administrative staff is not able/allowed to impose more coordination even if the introduction of management software has empowered the central level

- Research and teaching as “unclear technologies” (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972)
  - These activities are difficult to describe, prescribe, reproduce
  - The relationship between these activities and what they produce, or their efficiency, is complex and difficult to measure
- ⇒ A lot of controversies and tensions around what should be taught and how, what should be a research priority and how to attain “excellent” research

- Implications for university leaders
  - The unexpected role of formal structures: they rarely coordinate or constrain collective and individual behaviors (horizontally as vertically) but they first of all define defensive territories and identities
  - Leadership, a subtle exercise
    - Poor hierarchical relationships
    - Poor legitimacy
  - Different ways to circumvent: adherence to a project/vision, top-down collegiality (Lazega and Wattebled, 2010)

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**THANK YOU VERY MUCH**

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