The Transformation of Organisational Identities

Interpretations of policies concerning the quality of teaching and learning in Norwegian higher education

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITIES

INTERPRETATIONS OF POLICIES CONCERNING THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN NORWEGIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van
de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Twente,
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volgens besluit van het College van Promoties
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door

Bjørn Stensaker

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te Vågsøy

Dit proefschrift is goedgekeurd door de promotoren:
Prof. dr. G. Neave
Dr. P.A.M. Maassen

Preface

When writing about identity, you will at one point also question your own identity. Even if answers sometimes can be hard to find, the questions still provide you with ambitions of clarity and direction. At this point, these ambitions have resulted in a theses summing up years of study and work. As with identity, the thesis is also a product of personal history, traditions, and social interaction. Relating to my personal history – my interest in identity is probably caused by earlier studies in psychology and political science. The fact that the department of political science at the University of Oslo traditionally has had many professors interested in institutional theory is probably an important reason why this perspective got such a prominent place in the current study.

However, social interactions, networks and friends are probably the most important factors behind the shaping and completion of the current study. Hence, many people deserve to be mentioned as sources of inspiration in this foreword. Current and former colleagues at NIFU have here played a vital role for a number of years and my thanks goes in particular to Åse Gornitzka, Ingvild Marheim Larsen, Ole Jacob Skodvin, Jens Christian Smeby, Agnete Vabø, and to my old ´bosses´ Per Olaf Aamodt and Svein Kyvik.

During the process I also enjoyed the hospitality at CHEPS for two shorter periods in 1999 and 2000 where I got to learn CHEPS both professionally and personally. I really appreciated both sides of the CHEPSonians, and still miss the indoor soccer training once a week. Special thanks go to Harry de Boer, Jeroen Huisman and Hans Vossensteyn for always keeping humour, sarcasm and irony alive.

My two promoters, Guy Neave and Peter Maassen, had a formidable task in guiding me through all the big and small decisions to be taken in the process. I am always indebted to their experience, insights and analytical skills which they so generously used in my favour. For Peter, living in Oslo, and closest to the suspect, the job also represented some extra time spent on the thesis, and for that I am very grateful. If there are any brilliant parts in the thesis I have Guy and Peter to thank. The not so brilliant parts are my responsibility alone.

In the finishing stages of the thesis there were also a number of people that put in a lot of effort. At CHEPS, I would like to thank Gillian Luisman and Monique Snippers for excellent technical and administrative assistance. At NIFU, Tove Hansen helped me numerous times when computer software did not deliver what

it promised, and Henrik Kjærum provided me with valuable assistance when chapter five to eleven were translated.

In my family, my mother Elfrid, my brothers and sisters and their families, Per and Tusse, have always – and sometimes perhaps a bit to eagerly – shown an interest in the (progress of the) thesis. Seen in retrospect, that support was indeed very valuable and kept me going when other issues tended to dominate my agenda.

The final word goes to my wife and children. Eiril, Sjur and Siv are my closest partners and best friends. With practical jokes, temperament, noise, care and love, they have managed to make the last couple of years the most interesting and exciting in my life. For that I am very grateful.

Bjørn Stensaker
Oslo, May 2004

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1 Introduction

1.1 On quality and organisational identity

In the 1980s and 1990s the quality of higher education was put high on political agendas throughout Europe. One can identify a number of factors explaining this increased political interest in quality. Research, for example, by Frazer (1997) and Brennan and Shah (2000), has shown that public policies for securing and improving quality had objectives linked to:

- making institutional use of public funds more accountable
- improving the quality of higher education provision
- informing students and employers
- stimulating competition within and between institutions
- checking new (and often private) higher education institutions
- assigning institutional status as a response to increased diversity within higher education
- supporting the transfer of authority from the state and to the institutions
- assisting the mobility of students (within and across national borders)
- making international comparisons

Several of these objectives can be regarded as political responses to quite dramatic changes in European higher education in the 1980s and early 1990s. Huge influx of students in higher education, increased size of the higher education institutions as a result, and budgets for higher education not expanding at the same rate as the growth in students, are familiar stories in many countries.

However, the policy initiatives taken to secure and improve the quality of higher education in Europe during the 1990s can also be seen in a wider perspective, as a continuation and an integrated part of the more ideologically based public sector reforms that have been implemented in European countries since the 1980s (Neave 1988; van Vught 1989; Brunsson & Olsen 1993; Lane 1997; Christensen & Lægreid 2001). Labelled, for example, as the rise of the evaluative state (Neave 1988), or new public management (Pollitt 1990), the main elements of these policy initiatives have been to increase the efficiency (ability to perform), effectiveness (ability to fulfil political objectives), and accountability (ability to legitimate the results) of the public sector. ´Quality´ is a key-word that often has been used to integrate these various meanings, not only in the public sector in general (Mickletwait & Wooldridge 1996; Pollitt 1995; Lægreid & Pedersen 1999; Pollitt &

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Bouckaert 2000), as well as in higher education (Harvey & Green 1993; Cameron & Whetten 1996). During the 1990s, this political interest in quality seems to have contributed to the changes taking place in higher education institutions in several ways.

First, the emphasis on efficiency, effectiveness and accountability has forced higher education institutions to adopt structures, systems and routines intended to enhance such objectives. Decision-making has become more centralised (Askling 1997), and tendencies towards building more formal administrative systems supporting the processes of research and teaching can be observed (Gornitzka et al 1998). More emphasis on teaching and learning issues and structures has been noted (Brennan et al 1997). The transparency of the activities conducted by higher education institutions has increased (Stensaker 2003). There is evidence from some countries indicating that among the many external measures affecting higher education institutions during the 1990s, ´quality assurance has proven to be the most potent of change agents´ (Kogan & Hanney 2000:240). Second, the emphasis on efficiency, effectiveness and accountability has also contributed to create cultural changes in higher education institutions. Studies have, for example, shown that quality assessment can ´undermine existing academic cultures by weakening the group boundaries within higher education institutions´ (Brennan & Shah 2000:119). Also the very idea of what a higher education institution is has been challenged, where some have argued that the whole ´Humboldtian university [is] under pressure´ as a result of the governmental policies associated with quality (van Vught 1996:185). Consequently, during the 1990s, new labels and ideals have been proposed for higher education institutions. The service-university (Cummings 1996), the corporate enterprise (Bleiklie 1998), and the entrepreneurial university (Clark 1998), are only some of the new labels and ideals which suggest the need for more dynamic and adaptive institutions.

Traditionally, other labels have been used to characterise higher education institutions. It has been more common to describe them, for example, as ´organised anarchies´ (March & Olsen 1976) or as ´loosely coupled´ organisations (Weick, 1976) with little emphasis on issues such as management, control and results. One could argue that by introducing policies that focused on the quality and performance of the institutions, governmental policies and reforms introduced in the 1990s were not only aimed at improving the output of the higher education sector, but also at *changing the identity of the higher education institutions and their ´mode´ of production*. This transformation can be interpreted not only as a change in the system, but also as a change of the system (Neave 1988, 1998, see also Slaughter & Leslie 1997). It is this link between the policy use of quality and

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performance, and the changing organisational identities of the higher education institutions that is investigated in this study.

1.2 Norway – an interesting case

There are many common elements in the national policies in Europe that were the result of the growing political interest in the quality of teaching and learning in the late 1980s and early 1990s (van Vught & Westerheijden 1994; van Vught 1996). First and foremost we can point to the establishment by many European countries of national systems for evaluating higher education institutions and their teaching programs during the 1990s (Frazer 1997). However, a closer look discloses that the policies related to the quality of teaching and learning differ from country to country (Brennan & Shah 2000). A look at empirical studies on the effects of the new policies concerning quality at the level of the higher education institutions also shows that much attention has been given to the Netherlands and the UK during this period (Weusthof 1995; Westerheijden, Brennan & Maassen 1994; Brennan, Frederiks & Shah 1997; Kogan & Hanney 2000; Henkel 2000). This is not surprising. Both the Netherlands and the UK were, together with France, countries which implemented public policies for securing and improving quality already in the 1980s, and both countries were regarded as frames of reference for other countries that developed their own policies at a later stage (Maassen 1998).

One of these countries was Norway, and it can be argued that this country is a very interesting case for studying how policies concerning the quality of teaching and learning have affected higher education. When it comes to the political rhetoric concerning quality, several similarities with other OECD-countries have been disclosed related to purposes and objectives of the policies (Frazer 1997). However, in other respects the country is unique. For example, while governmental policies concerning quality in the UK in the 1990s had a distinct judicial and economic basis with an emphasis on full-scale and quite detailed evaluations schemes with links to funding and externally defined quality standards (see e.g. Brennan, deVries & Williams 1997), the related Norwegian policies had a softer, more experimental design with several objectives linked to policy-learning (Stensaker 1997, 1998). These policies were based more on pedagogical and communicative measures than on judicial and economic ones.

Furthermore, the Norwegian policy initiatives from the 1990s concerning quality can also be characterised as rather modest: no quality standards or explicit definitions of quality were provided by the Ministry of Education to guide institutional actions. Only a minority of all disciplines and institutions were

covered by external evaluations, and the development of the methods and procedures for stimulating interest in teaching and learning had high priority (Stensaker 1997). In the governmental white paper that provided the political framework for the political initiatives in the quality area, the responsibility for securing and improving the quality of teaching and learning was given to the higher education institutions themselves (St.meld.nr. 40 1990-91). Not only the processes of defining and developing the concept of quality, but also the responsibility to secure and improve it, have been very open, leaving much room for institutional discretion and autonomous implementation.

The point here is not whether the Norwegian policy-making in the 1990s concerning quality should be characterised as very thoughtful and well-designed. Such a description could be questioned anyhow since the country in general is known as a ´reluctant reformer´ of higher education (Maassen 1996:10). The interesting issue is to what extent these policies have affected the interpretation of the concept of quality in Norwegian higher education institutions, and their actions concerning the quality of teaching and learning during the 1990s. Thus, in an international perspective, the Norwegian case could provide an interesting contrast to those countries where policy-making concerning quality has been more firm and comprehensive. As such it can be expected to add to the growing body of knowledge on how higher education institutions are changing in response to contextually different external demands.

1.3 Research questions and research strategy

If one assumes that the Norwegian policy interest in the quality of teaching and learning was an attempt to change the way higher education institutions function, while at the same time the institutions were autonomous in the implementation of the policies on quality, the crucial issue subsequently becomes *how* these policies were interpreted at the institutional level. A focus on interpretation is essential for identifying whether any changes in behaviour also contribute to changes in the self-understandings, values and norms inside the higher education institutions. Lasting organisational change, interpreted as irreversible change in the way an organisation acts and behaves, is often accompanied by a process of collective cognitive interpretation through which organisational members internalise change (Selznick 1957).

In an attempt to find a concept that incorporates such cognitive changes in higher education, Välimaa (1995; 1998) and Henkel (2000) have suggested that ´identity´ may be a promising concept, not least in that it can be used to build a bridge

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between structure and actor, between the policy context, the institution, the profession, the discipline and the individual academic (Henkel 2000:22). This integrating capability of the concept of identity is of special interest for this study which has the identity of the higher education institution as its study object (the organisational identity). As a starting point, organisational identity is defined as collectively held perceptions and beliefs about the distinctiveness of a given organisation (Albert & Whetten 1985).

By specifying organisational identity as the dependent variable, the overall research problem can be formulated as follows:

> *How has the organisational identity of Norwegian universities and colleges been affected by national policies concerning the quality of teaching and learning during the 1990s?*

This overall research problem will be addressed by applying a neo-institutional perspective, more specifically by combining insights from ´new´ and ´old´ institutional theory, emphasising the cognitive and normative dimensions of two versions of sociological institutionalism (Scott 1995:35, 52; Trommel & van der Veen 1997:48). The focus is on understanding and interpreting how organisations change and attach meaning to the change processes within a given political subsystem, or what the new institutionalism often calls an organisational field. One of the basic assumptions underlying this study is that the higher education sector in Norway can be characterised as such an organisational field where change in organisational identity is a result of the interplay between the individual organisation and other actors (other universities and colleges, national authorities, other stakeholders) in the field. This assumption is important in that the field thus provides the opportunities but also sets the limits for individual organisational change.

Another assumption is that governmental policies are a very influential factor in determining the opportunities and constraints that exist within a field. Even if there may be several factors explaining organisational identity change in higher education, it is the link between organisational identity change and governmental policies that is emphasised and examined in this study. Governmental policies are in this study broadly defined and include more general and normative ideas, concrete reforms with specific objectives, but also the governance arrangements in the field i.e., the mix of policy instruments the state uses when governing higher education: funding, information, organisational and legal measures, etc.

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How organisations ´manoeuvre´ in the available ´policy space´ made up of constrains and opportunities is an empirical issue, which will be investigated on the basis of the following subquestions:

1. What is organisational identity?
2. How may changes in organisational identity be explained?
3. What distinguished the relationship between State and higher education in Norway during the 1990s?
4. What were the Norwegian policies concerning the quality of teaching and learning in higher education in the 1990s?
5. What were the ´organisational ideals´ of Norwegian higher education in that decade?
6. How were these policies and ´organisational ideals´ interpreted by Norwegian higher education institutions?
7. In the 1990s, what changed in the organisational identity of Norway's higher education institutions?
8. Was change in the organisational identity of Norwegian higher education institution an adjustment to national policies concerning the quality of teaching and learning?

The overall research problem and the sub-questions derived from it, have several consequences for research design and methods used. As indicated above, the study is more focused at organisational responses to a changing environment than a traditional ´top-down´ policy implementation study would be. Even if policy initiatives and regulations are assumed to be of importance for the higher education institutions examined in this study, the analysis will be more concerned with examining what happens when the state uses specific policy instruments for putting its policy into practise, implying that it transfers the responsibility for the implementation of the policy to the individual institution.

The emphasis on organisational identity and the process of collective cognitive change at the institutional level in this study is in line with recent claims that researchers using institutional theory should focus their attention on the micro-level of institutional life and the *processes* of institutionalisation, deinstitutionalisation and reinstitutionalisation (Trommel & van der Veen 1997:61, 62). Due to the fact that such processes are highly sensitive to their context (Greenwood and Hinings 1996), a qualitative research design is developed. To be able to capture the institutional variation in the field, the study will collect information and data from several types of higher education institutions. Two

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public universities, two state colleges, and two private higher education institutions have been selected as cases.

Another methodological consequence is that a study of processes of identity construction, deconstruction and reconstruction has to take into account that these processes are likely to take place over a longer time period. As a consequence, the study will cover a ten-year period, from 1990 to 2000. This time-period is carefully selected for two reasons. First, a ten year period should be long enough for institutional identity change processes to develop. Compared to other studies using an institutional framework, this period may seem short, but it has the advantage that incidents and actions are more easily remembered by those participating in them. Second, the period from 1990 to 2000 also covers an important reform period in Norwegian higher education. It was in the late 1980s, but especially in the early 1990s that the massive student influx in Norwegian higher education started, and the white paper that set the course for the majority of the policy initiatives in the 1990s, especially concerning the quality of teaching and learning, was published in 1990-91. The period ends in 2000 when the white paper sketching the policies for the new century were launched (St.meld 27 2000-2001).

1.4 Linking the study to research on quality

To study how policies to secure and improve quality have affected higher education is not a novel thing to do. Over the years, a growing body of knowledge has been established in this area. However, it could be argued that not much research has focused on the higher education *institution*.

For example, one direction of research has been to investigate whether the external quality assessments that have been implemented in various countries have had any direct consequences and effects at the study program/departmental (and individual) level. This is perhaps the most pursued strategy when it comes to empirical studies of quality in higher education in the 1990s (see for example Weusthof 1995; Frederiks, Westerheijden & Weusthof 1994; Jordell, Karlsen & Stensaker 1994; Saarinen 1995; Brennan, Frederiks & Shah 1997; PLS-Consult 1998; Stensaker 1999a; Henkel 2000). Because of frequently raised fears that claims for accountability would overshadow the possibilities of improvement (Kells 1992; Vroeijenstijn 1995, Kells 1999), one of the questions creating the most interest has been to study whether and how assessments with the double purpose of accountability and improvement handle this delicate balance. The studies conducted have provided evidence that accountability and improvement can

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coexist, and also act as a catalyst for organisational change (see e.g. Thune 1996; Stensaker 1997). Nevertheless, the experienced changes seem to be very incremental in character.

Another empirical research strategy, that has a broader scope than studying effects at the study program/department level, has been to analyse whether the policies concerning quality also have contributed to changing power structures, power dependencies and decision-making activities in higher education (see, for example, Bauer & Kogan 1995; Stensaker 1997; Kells 1999; Massy 1999; Smeby & Stensaker 1999; Brennan & Shah 2000; Kogan & Hanney 2000). One question of particular interest has been whether an increasing number of evaluations have contributed to changing the autonomy of higher education institutions, and the academic autonomy within higher education institutions. Studies conducted indicate that when it comes to the institutional autonomy, policies concerning quality are closely related and intertwined with other developments and reform initiatives in higher education, and that this could lead to both decreased (Bauer & Kogan 1995) and increased autonomy (Brennan & Shah 2000). Inside the institutions, there are clear indications that managerial authority at the institutional level has been strengthened, not only as a result of activities in the quality area, but also due to other reform initiatives and policy changes in higher education (Askling 1997; Stensaker 1999b; 2000).

However, in almost every study on quality conducted, there are indications that work related to quality also contributes to attitudinal and cognitive changes within higher educational institutions. Reports about e.g., academic reorientation towards teaching and learning, changes in preferences of what is regarded as important areas of improvement and a new understanding of the relationship between higher education and society, can be mentioned as examples of this (see e.g., Brennan & Shah 2000). While there currently is a lack of evidence suggesting that, for example, student learning is significantly improving as a result of governmental policies focusing on the quality of higher education (Stensaker 2003), there are indications that these policies may be of importance in changing more intangible dimensions of higher education institutions.

It could be claimed that such dimensions have been overlooked in many of the studies conducted. Instead of in-depth analyses of how higher education *institutions* have changed, the analyses have often emphasised the broad consequences for the higher education *sector* or the *study program/department* level. In this way, many important trends and effects have been identified concerning both the macro and micro level, downplaying, however, the possibilities for

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variation at the institutional level. Such variation could be of great interest to study in an era in which reform policies are intending to provide higher education with increased autonomy (van Vught 1989; Maassen 1996), where more competition between the higher education institutions is emphasised, and where there is much interest related to how the institutions may respond to this situation (Clark 1998).

1.5 The plan of the book

The book has twelve chapters including this introductory chapter. In chapter two, the theoretical framework used to analyse institutional responses to policies for improving teaching and learning in Norway is developed. The chapter starts with an examination of institutional theory, its strengths and weaknesses, and suggests that organisational identity is a concept that could provide a link between ´new´ and ´old´ institutionalism. The chapter ends with some research propositions concerning the conditions for organisational identity change.

In the chapter three, an overview of Norwegian higher education is given with the intention to provide the reader with a more thorough understanding of vital characteristics and policy developments that directly and indirectly concerned the quality of teaching and learning in Norwegian higher education in the 1990s. A short description of the higher education system is given, but the main part of the chapter is related to an examination of major reforms and policy initiatives in the sector.

In chapter four, the dominant ideas related to the policies and reforms implemented during the 1990s are identified. After a discussion of the governing approaches in Norway in this decade, the relationship between the state and higher education is subsequently conceptualised in terms of some organisational ideals. These ideals incorporate important ideas recognisable in Norwegian higher education policy-making in this period, and but is first and foremost intended as a tool for studying in which direction changes in organisational identities were headed.

The research design and how data have been analysed are discussed in chapter five. Data (the cases) are gathered in six Norwegian higher education institutions: Two universities, two private higher education institutions and two state colleges. A qualitative research design has been used with document analysis, interviews and independent evaluation reports and historical accounts as the primary information sources. In line with the interpretative theoretical framework chosen,

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the methodology is related to the implications of this perspective when it comes to issues of validity, reliability and objectivity.

In chapter six to eleven, the case studies are presented. Each chapter presents one case study structured in the same way, starting out with the history and vital characteristics of each institution before going through the institutional initiatives for improving teaching and learning during the 1990s. The initiatives are then analysed, and the effects of the initiatives are described together with a discussion of the external and internal factors affecting the initiatives taken and the effects accomplished. Each chapter ends with a short discussion on the links between governmental policy initiatives concerning the quality of teaching and learning, and the institutional actions in this field in the 1990s.

In the conclusion, in chapter twelve, a comparison of the six case institutions is made concerning how the institutions interpreted and took actions related to the quality of teaching and learning, and the effects of their efforts. In this chapter the research proposals are also revisited and their applicability is assessed, before the link between governmental policies concerning teaching and learning and organisational identity change is discussed on the basis of the findings from the case studies, with some policy implications suggested.

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2 Organisational identity change and institutional theory

2.1 Organisational identity – a short introduction

The intangible aspects of higher education have for several decades been an important study object in higher education (see Maassen 1996, for an overview). The present study is linked to this broad research interest. The topic in focus of this study, organisational identity, can be regarded as one of several possible cultural artefacts in an organisation (Alvesson & Berg 1992; Hatch & Schultz 1997), and has in recent years attracted renewed interest both within organisational studies in general (Czraniawska-Joerges 1994; Weick 1995; du Guy 1996; Whetten & Godfrey 1998; Gioia et al 2000) and in higher education studies more particularly (Välimaa 1995; 1998 Henkel 2000).

Indicating that organisational identity is one of several possible cultural artefacts in an organisation suggests that it is a narrower concept than e.g., organisational culture. While conventional definitions of the latter often highlight that organisational culture can be managed and manipulated resulting in changes in the collective behaviour of the members of the organisation (Alvesson & Berg 1992), a provisional definition of organisational identity would emphasise the symbolic, mythological and cognitive sides of the organisation. Important here is the construction of organisational reality through the use of symbols and myths that blur the distinction between truth and lies (Strati 1998: 1380). In other words, organisational identity should be understood as a socially constructed concept of what the organisation *is* rather than how it *acts*. This does not mean that behaviour is unimportant. Symbols and myths may interact in numerous ways with organisational behaviour (Pondy et al 1983). The point is that a focus on organisational identity is more interested in how organisations are constructed as meaningful entities. The focus is not so much on how people act as to how they try to make sense out of their acts (through the use of cognition, symbols, language and emotions).

Henkel (2000: 22) has pinpointed the danger with this position by claiming that the analysis as a consequence may ignore the reality of academic working lives and instead overemphasises the influence of abstract epistemologies, symbols and language. However, a focus on organisational identity could be defended by claiming that symbols, myths and language exert great social power in that they

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stimulate fresh ideas, change attitudes and provide new cognitive frames for action (Scott 1995: 129).

Another reason why a focus on organisational identity is emphasised relates to the fact that change processes in organisations are often difficult to pinpoint. Organisations are never ´frosen´ entities, they move and change constantly. In complex organisations, such as higher education institutions, changes can also occur in contradictory and diffuse ways, where the direction and meaning of the change process can be difficult to identify. By having a focus on organisational identity, the present study attempts to make sense of the experienced reality by using the identity concept as a ´lens´ through which changes are interpreted, and where the ´essential´ elements in these change processes are distilled. Organisational identity is a construction, but can be a construction that people inside the institutions recognise as meaningful and real (Bauman 1996). Symbols, myths and language are entities that refer to common perceptions and meaning construction (Alvesson & Berg 1992), and it is this inter-subjectivity that is emphasised in the present study.

If organisational identity describes what the organisation is, then the consequence is that identity would be understood as something ´real´ and ´deep´ and as an expression of the true ´Self´ of a given organisation. This tradition can be said to belong to a Durkheimian perspective where individual behaviour aggregates into a holistic and institutionalised organisational entity. As such it links the organisational identity concept to more conventional understandings of organisational culture emphasising values, norms and behaviour. In higher education, Burton Clark can be regarded as a consistant representative of this perspective (Clark 1956; 1960; 1970; 1972; 1998).

It was also a higher education setting that triggered Stuart Albert and David Whetten to develop their interpretations of the organisational identity concept in the 1980s (Albert & Whetten 1985). As business administration professors involved in a cutback operation at the University of Illinois, they experienced the financial strain in their own university as marginal compared to cutbacks in the industry sector. The university was not planning to shut down departments, reduce the number of faculty, or downsize core academic programs. Still, the proposed cut-backs triggered university discussions on whether the university could maintain its profile as a research university if a few programs were reduced, and heated debates were initiated on whether university legitimacy had been lost. In other words, what seemed to be a marginal budget cut by state legislators, escalated into a full-blown identity crisis for the university.

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That event formed the basis for the article ´Organisational identity´ in which Albert & Whetten (1985) proposed that the type of commitment shown by the faculty was rather fundamental. The questions asked at the institutional level were such as ´who are we´ and ´what sort of organisation is this´. Questions closely related to religious beliefs. At least the observations could not be reduced to factors such as distress, anger or incredulity (Albert 1998: 2). The factors that seemed to influence the university debate were rather those of affection, emotions and search for meaning – summed up in what they termed organisational identity – a uniqueness related to the university. In trying to generalise from their case study, Albert & Whetten (1985) suggested that this uniqueness consisted of three aspects: a) central character, b) temporal continuity and c) distinctiveness. The first notion, central character, distinguishes the organisation on the basis of something important and essential. Temporal continuity means that the identification includes features that exhibit some degree of sameness or continuity over time, and distinctiveness implies a classification that identifies the organisation as recognisably different from others.

This characterisation of organisational identity rings some familiar bells for students in organisational theory. One of the founders of the institutional school in sociology, Philip Selznick (1949, 1957) used the identity concept in the same way - as a label to describe how organisations over time become transformed into institutions with distinctive characteristics (an identity). In this ´old´ institutional perspective, organisational identity was perceived to be a (´real´) stabilising element in organisational life, and a holistic expression of the organisation.

This holistic view on organisations can also be found in later versions of institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell 1983; DiMaggio & Powell 1991). A ´new´ element in the new institutionalism is, however, the way in which organisational identity is interpreted and defined. Organisational identity is a social institution the organisation adapts to. The organisation then becomes a metaphor - a ´super-person´ who ´exposes´ an identity (Czarniawska & Sevón 1996). Thus, in order to obtain legitimacy from the environment, organisations compose themselves into a whole (Czarniawska 2000: 273). Thus, in the new institutionalism, organisational identity is subordinated to popular ideas in the environment on how the organisation should look like. Instead of a conception of identity emerging from deep inside the organisation, identity is located in the formal structure and becomes a ´chameleon-like imitation of images prevailing in the post-modern marketplace´ (Gioia et al 2000: 72). The assumption is that organisational identity

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is transformed from a stable, distinct and enduring characteristic to a fluent entity and an easily changeable organisational fashion.

Even if these interpretations provide some clarity regarding the properties of the organisational identity concept, there still appears to be a gap between an understanding of organisational identity as ´real´, ´deep´ and distinctive, and one that emphasises organisational identity as a metaphor, a symbolic and more standardised entity. However, in line with our ambitions of developing a cognitive perspective that blurs the distinction between the symbolic and the real, a theoretical framework that tries to combine these two views will be presented in this chapter.

Due to the fact that the concept of organisational identity and its applications have not been built on a consistent and well-founded theoretical framework, resulting in what some have termed ´the tower of babel´ when it comes to how the identity concept has been defined and used (Hatch & Schultz 2000: 11), the strategy of the present study is to link the study of organisational identity closer to institutional theory. Thus, institutional theory, and especially the cognitive dimensions of this theory, will be used as the foundation for the framework, not only because organisational identity plays an important role in this theory, but also because institutional theory deals specifically with the relationship between organisations and what usually is called ´institutionalised environments´ where generally accepted ideas about how certain organisations should look like or behave are generated. ´Quality´ may be said to be one such accepted and normative idea that several different organisational identities can be derived from. Various studies point to the fact that it is difficult for organisations not to respond to such ´superstandards´ in one way or another (Røvik 1998).

Another advantage of using institutional theory can be related to what is often called ´patterned interactions´ between individuals, groups and organisations that structure the relationship between these actors and make action more predictable (Scott 1995). Higher education systems often have distinct characteristics when it comes to structure, leadership and interaction among the organisations and groups making up this sector, characteristics that make up a temporal order – a logic of appropriateness – creating a cultural specific practise which should be taken into account when analysing and interpreting how organisational identities are created and changed in this sector (Clark 1983, Maassen 1996). (see also chapter three for a more detailed description and analysis of the higher education sector, and policy initiatives within the sector during the 1990s).

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Finally, and perhaps most importantly, institutional theory also suggests how organisations may deal with situations characterised by high uncertainty, for example, when new policies emerge. One of the suggestions is that in these situations organisations will seek to reduce this uncertainty by employing an imitation strategy (DiMaggio & Powell 1983), with the end result being some form of (symbolic) structural homogeneity (isomorphism) among a group of organisations. At the end of this chapter, a number of propositions intended to empirically ´test´ some of the basic hypotheses in the new institutionalism is put forward.

2.2 The point of departure: Sociological institutionalism

It is commonly accepted that institutional theory has many facets, created, inter al, by contributions from different disciplines such as economics, sociology and political science (Scott 1987; DiMaggio & Powell 1991; Peters 1999). The institutional theory presented here, is often labelled as the sociological version of neo-institutionalism (DiMaggio & Powell 1991). However, the problem of identifying clear boundaries, or a core set of beliefs even exists within a narrower ´sociological version´ (Trommel & van der Veen 1997:48). Thus, in this section, some core concepts related to this version of institutionalism are identified as the theoretical point of departure for the thesis. With these concepts as a basis, a review of recent research in higher education using sociological institutionalism as a frame of reference is conducted, leading up to a discussion about the theoretical shortcomings and knowledge gaps research has identified. The section ends with arguments about the potential advantages of integrating insights from the early ´institutionalists´ in an attempt to overcome some of the current weaknesses of sociological institutionalism.

2.2.1 Identifying the basic concepts

The work of Philip Selznick created the basis for the sociological version of institutionalism suggesting that organisations over time, and in a socialisation process, are turned into institutions. They develop their own distinct character when they are infused with values and norms. This ´old´ institutionalism focused on the importance of influence, coalitions and competing values in the institutionalisation process (Clark 1960), with power structures and informal structures as central factors (Selznick 1957).

The work of Berger & Luckman (1967) was, however, an important source for the development of research on institutions with their suggestion that taken-for-

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granted norms and values also can exist outside the organisational framework, constructing a shared social reality in the larger society. In the ´new´ institutionalism that was developed on this basis, focus was therefore on *institutional environments* and how they ´imprison´ organisations in ´iron cages´ (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). These institutionalised environments represent severe constraints on change processes so that stability, inertia and reproduction of the externally produced ´norms´ will be the outcome (Tolbert & Zucker 1983), forcing organisations, for reasons of legitimacy, and thus, survival, to de-couple organisational practice from organisational structure (Meyer & Rowan 1977). The new institutionalism shifted the research attention to organisational appropriateness – how organisations acted to obtain legitimacy from their environments (March & Olsen 1989). However, acknowledging that something had been lost on the way, DiMaggio & Powell (1991: 27) stated that an important future challenge to new institutionalism was to address the issues of change, power and efficiency. Issues that the old institutionalism to a much greater extent had focused upon.

One of the fundamental assumptions in new institutional theory is still that organisations, to survive, must prove their social worthiness towards their environment on which they depend upon (Oliver 1991: 147). Organisational responsiveness to external demands and expectations is therefore vital, and organisations will fail if they deviate from the prescriptions of institutionalising myths (Meyer & Rowan 1977). Furthermore, the relationship between the organisation and the institutionalised environments can be defined and characterised by four factors.

First, organisations reflect patterns or templates established in a wider system. They do this by *imitating* the visible part of these patterns or templates. Thus, organisational structures are often copied (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). Dependent on the power of the external pressure, this imitation can either be mimetic due to poorly understood means ends relationships (uncertainty), normative due to influences of education and professions, or coercive due to pressure from politics or public agencies.

Second, this imitation leads the organisation to develop a rather loosely integrated or *de-coupled* organisational form. Structure is disconnected from technical work or activity, and activity is disconnected from its effects (Meyer & Rowan 1992). Since internal technical or functional activity is less visible and only to a limited degree put on display, organisational structure is what is being shown externally (Meyer & Rowan 1977; Brunsson 1989).

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Third, the environmental patterns drive the organisation of work through linkages and effects that goes beyond simple direct control, such as regulation, law and resources (Scott & Meyer 1994). Instead, these environmental patterns are influential *meaning systems* (Berger & Luckman 1967), made up of social and cultural behaviour patterns, constitutive and normative rules, and regulatory processes (Friedland & Alford 1991; Scott 1994), which we only to a limited degree are conscious (Douglas 1966).

Fourth, the content of these meaning systems, the message they are transmitting, can be described as *rationalised and rationalising* (Meyer 1992, Meyer, Boli & Thomas 1994, Meyer 1994). This message is a result of the global influence of the Western institutional order: ´The structuring of everyday life within standardised impersonal rules that constitute social organisation as a means to collective purpose´ (Meyer, Boli & Thomas 1994: 20). In this process, nation states, organisations, sciences and professions, are important drivers that forces us all to operate under norms of rationality.

An important feature in new institutional theory, and a consequence of the existence of these (rationalised) drivers, is that there exists both narrower and wider levels of institutionalised environments (Scott 1994: 84), consisting of ´organisations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognised area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organisations that produce similar services or products´ (DiMaggio & Powell 1983: 143). In different versions of institutional theory, these intermediate structures are labelled industry systems (Hirsch 1985), societal sectors (Scott & Meyer 1983) or *organisational fields* (DiMaggio & Powell 1983).

Even if most students of institutional theory would agree that these intermediate structures do matter in shaping important pattern and templates, much disagreement still remains when it comes to how they matter, i.e., to define the important properties and the actual influence of these structures (Meyer & Scott, 1992: 2). Furthermore, empirical research using a new-institutionalist framework has also produced results that could question the validity of the propositions presented above, e.g., when it comes to the question whether organisations actually imitate each other, and whether organisations always de-couple their organisational structure from their core activities. Examples of such research results can also be given from studies in higher education (see below).

2.2.2 Empirical research in higher education relating to the new institutionalism

When reviewing empirical studies within a new institutionalist framework, it is quite easy to identify support for the basic assumption that organisational change over time will be that of convergence rather than divergence (see for example the volumes by Meyer & Scott 1992 and Scott & Meyer 1994)

However, some studies have also come up with other results. In the US, Covalski & Dirsmith (1988: 585) studied university budgeting processes, and concluded that self-interest and power relations infused the whole process, where powerful groups used their power to enforce institutional compliance when their interests were at stake.

A similar result can also be found in a European context. Christensen (1991), in a qualitative study of the implementation of a new government initiated planning system in Norwegian higher education, found that intra-organisational dynamics, e.g., administrators seeking power, could explain much of the divergence in how the planning system was implemented and the effects it created in different institutions. This study also showed how the implementation of result-oriented planning lost momentum when important internal actors at the institutional level lost interest of it. Larsen & Gornitzka (1995) studied the same reform a few years later, and suggested that there was evidence that over time, one could trace instrumental (and not just symbolic) effects of the planning system within the institutions. In sum, these studies point to the importance of powerful organisational actors and interests, where the importance of the environment is somewhat downplayed.

Contrary to many of the European studies conducted in this perspective, which tend to have a qualitative, interpretative and partly constructivist approach (Meyer 1996: 243), many of the studies conducted in a US context continued to have a longitudinal, quantitative and organisational field focus, however, by trying to incorporate factors such as power and the possibility for ´illegitimate´ institutional change. As a part of this tradition is a series of studies that focus upon the establishment and development of educational programs both in public and private higher education. Brint & Karabel (1991), for example, tested out the convergence hypothesis of DiMaggio & Powell (1983) on a sample of American community colleges. However, their analysis suggested that powerful institutional actors and organisational leaders were a key factor for understanding the organisational change experienced. A result more in line with the findings of Christensen (1991).

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In their longitudinal study of curriculum development in several hundred American private colleges in the period from 1971 to 1986, Kraatz & Zajak (1996) found that the propositions from the new institutionalism attracted surprisingly little support from their empirical analysis in which diversity instead of convergence in curriculum development was a major result. In addition, they found strong indications that real instead of symbolic changes were taking place. In discussing the results of the study, the factor identified as having the largest impact on the outcome was the existence of powerful technical environments, a result quite contrary to that of new-institutionalism where it is claimed that institutional forces will overshadow technical forces as time goes by (Tolbert & Zucker 1983).

Morphew (1996: 115-116), studying program duplication in a sample of American public higher education institutions in the period 1971-1993, found a similar pattern. Even if external legitimacy did account as explanation for why some advanced degree programs were developed, the universities studied did not become more similar during the period of study (see also Huisman & Morphew 1998, Huisman & Beerkens 2000).

Thus, even if the work reviewed here only represents a small number of studies carried out under the new institutionalist umbrella, they do signal only partial support for the assumption that organisations become more similar over time. It seems that the theory has some troubles in explaining what the new institutionalism would label as ill-legitimate (or divergent) organisational change (Greenwood & Hinings 1996).

2.2.3 The struggle to explain organisational change

In an overview over developments in the area of new institutionalism in the early nineties, DiMaggio & Powell (1991: 13-14) acknowledged that much of the work so far had been concentrating on persistence rather than change, and had a focus on organisational inertia and the stability of institutional components (Zucker 1977). Thus, organisational change and factors that lead to such change had only been addressed to a limited degree (DiMaggio 1988). Many theoretical attempts to broaden new institutional theory, as seen in the last decade or so, have therefore had an explicit focus of trying to explain organisational change.

When the new institutionalism first emerged, organisational change was viewed as a change towards greater conformity (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). This would take place in a two-step process, where in the emergent phase of an organisational

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field, technical performance requirements or variables are more important than in later stages, when pressure towards institutionalisation, or convergence, were argued to become stronger (Tolbert & Zucker 1983).

Thus, as organisational fields mature, or to use a new institutionalist term, get ´structurated´, change occurs only within the parameters given by the organisational field, creating almost constant reproduction and reinforcement of existing modes of thoughts and organisations (Greenwood & Hinings 1996: 1027).

Later developments have, however, pointed to other possible explanations of change processes in a new institutional perspective (Zucker 1988; DiMaggio & Powell 1991; Fligstein 1991; Oliver 1991; Brunsson & Olsen 1993; Greenwood & Hinings 1996). One line of thought has focused on the structure of the institutional field, that is, the extent of tight coupling and the permeability of a given field. Fligstein (1991: 316) has, e.g., noted that in loosely coupled fields, non-convergent behaviour is easier to obtain because of lack of mechanisms for monitoring compliance. Furthermore, in fields with a high level of permeability, in fields that are in an early stage of development, or in fields outside state regulation, change could occur as a consequence of the lack of leading organisations (role-models) or regulatory agencies. However, also the opposite situation, the existence of tight coupling and well-regulated or mature fields, could give rise to change. Should the institutional environment change prescriptions dramatically, e.g., because of a crisis, financial problems etc., tightly coupled organisations could face the possibility for quite radical changes (DiMaggio & Powell 1991).

In focusing on the content of the external meaning systems, some institutionalists have stated that even if organisational fields may produce rationalised prescripts of accepted behaviour and structures, they could also give competing or, at least, inconsistent, signals (DiMaggio & Powell 1991). Hinings & Greenwood (1988) have pointed out that this actually may be quite normal, and a not very unusual situation within a given field. The consequences of such unclear prescripts open the possibility for ideosyncratic interpretation and either deliberate or unwitting variation in practices (Greenwood & Hinings 1996: 1029).

Brunsson & Olsen (1993) have followed another path to explain organisational change. Instead of treating the institutional environment as an independent variable, they focus on how the interaction between environments and organisations create its own dynamic pattern, a pattern that in some instances may be that of change, e.g., between organisations and political shifting character of the environments. The argument presented is that this may create a situation where

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organisational reforms and change are the norm, not the exception, and that this can be a quite stable process. Because organisations seldom have the abilities, and because it also could be dangerous for organisations to fully adapt to new norms presented for them, the result is often organisational failure to comply, which in turn creates the possibility for the environment to present new reform ideas, norms and templates (Brunsson 1989: 206).

Even if more dynamism has been brought into the new institutionalism as a result of the theoretical developments referred to above, one could still argue that also some of the latest applications in the sociological version of the new institutional theory appear to lack an emphasis on organisational self-interest and an active agency. A characteristic trait in several of the contributions mentioned has been to treat factors such as power, agency and efficiency as belonging to and defined by the organisational field, e.g. in arguing that even in the most institutionalised field, there has to be some kind of variation and diversity in organisational forms in order for change to occur (Kondra & Hinings 1998). In other words, the organisational fields that influence institutionalisation are also influencing de-institutionalisation (Oliver 1992: 577). The norms specifying what to adopt are also simultaneously specifying what is not fashionable and should be avoided, or de-institutionalised (Røvik 1996: 162).

A theoretical twist in which organisational fields continue to play a major role in explaining organisational change, has also been to incorporate another theoretical perspective on organisational change, that of population ecology, into the neo-institutional perspective (DiMaggio & Powell 1991: 32). However, the population ecology approach also tends to neglect intra-organisational dynamics, arguing that organisational change takes place through processes of selection rather than adaptation (cf Hannan & Freeman 1977).

Oliver (1991: 151) has also tried to explain organisational change as dependent on variations in the environment. In her attempt of trying to use insights from a resource-dependency perspective in combination with new institutionalism, she suggests that organisational variance in change strategies is dependent on the ´institutional pressures toward conformity that are exerted on organisations´ (see also Tolbert 1985, for a similar integration attempt).

Grenstad & Selle (1995: 5) have attempted to develop the new institutionalism in yet another direction. They suggest that new institutional theory and cultural theory (see Thompson, Ellis & Wildavsky 1990) could be integrated into a common framework, arguing that cultural theory is a version of new institutional

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theory. By using the group/grid typology of cultural theory as a starting point with its emphasis on how the behaviour of individuals is prescribed by external rules and how group control influence individual action, ´beliefs are no longer separated from structure or action, but are part of the action itself´ (Douglas 1982: 199-200, quoted from Maassen 1996: 77). In this way individual preferences and action, organisational forms and cultural systems are united into a common framework where the distinction between external/internal no longer becomes relevant. However, even if cultural theory may be a promising way forward, this perspective could still be criticised for being rather deterministic when arguing that only a limited number of structured actions, or ´ways of life´ are possible (Maassen 1996: 82-83).

One could, therefore, still claim that all the latest attempts of developing the new institutionalism, and especially relating it to organisational change, still face a problem with what may be termed the ´over-determined´ (D'Andrade, 1984) or ´over-socialised´ (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991) side of the perspective, treating intra-organisational characteristics such as vested interests, history and objectives as a ´black-box´. Rational action to fulfil self-defined objectives is ignored - all is myths, symbols and appropriateness (Perrow 1986: 266). The possibility that e.g., organisations might influence the environment, that society also could be adaptive to organisations is still not a frequently tested option in the new institutionalism (Perrow 1986: 177).

Another problem related to the new institutionalism is the treatment of myths and symbols as politically neutral phenomena. As Perrow (1986: 269) shows in his review of some of the research that has led to this view, there could be powerful interests behind the distortions that symbols hide. In line with these thoughts, work by Abrahamson (1996) shows that management ´fads and fashion´ are not simply institutionalised patterns and templates, created in a sort of ´democratic joint venture´ process, but recommendations of organisational behaviour that stem from political and economical elites in management consultancy firms, business schools and multi-national corporations. Selznick (1957) had a normative solution to this problem when he described how good institutional leaders would become statesmen. In the new institutionalism, the problem is mostly overlooked except for acknowledging of coercive forces do have an impact on organisation (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). How organisations in a more normative or ethical way should respond to such forces is, however, a problem not addressed by the new institutionalism.

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As perspectives for studying organisational adaptation, there can also be raised methodological critique on how representatives of the new institutionalism empirically have studied adaptation and change processes (Røvik 1998: 115). The first problem is that in studies of how policies, ideas and ´institutionalised action´ are spread, the variables used to define whether adaptation, change or imitation has taken place or not, is often related to formal decisions or organisational structures only (see for example Tolbert & Zucker 1983). When separating between those that adopt and those that do not, or between those that adopt early or late in a diffusion process, it is handy to use formal decisions as measurement criteria. However, these variables are incomplete measures for understanding the complexity of adaptation, change and imitation processes. Variations in the form of adaptation are, e.g. not explored (Westphal, Gulati & Shortell 1997: 366). Moreover, formal decisions, but also organisational structures are simple and rather incomplete variables to use when we know that adaptation, change and imitation often take place through a complex process, and that such a process may change both the ´innovation´ as such, but also the interests of the organisation implementing it (see e.g., Selznick 1949).

A second methodological problem concerns the time-periods applied to study adaptation processes. Especially in the new institutionalism, some of the most profiled studies in the field have been conducted many years after the adaptation is supposed to have taken place. Examples are Tolbert & Zucker's (1983) study of the spread of a local municipality reform in USA between 1885 and 1935, but also Fligsteins' (1985) study of the spread of the multi-divisional organisational form in USA between 1919 and 1979 belongs to this category. Even if these studies are methodologically sophisticated and exemplary in many ways, not least in that they acknowledge that organisational change does take time, they still have a weak point if the reader also should be interested in how the adaptation processes actually took place. To reconstruct the adaptation processes that took place 20 or even over 100 years earlier is of course difficult with this type of research design.

In the early 1990s, Friedland & Alford (1991: 243-244) argued that the new institutionalism did not ´have the theoretical tools by which to understand the institutional content whose diffusion they do analyse, or the conditions under which particular forms are institutionalised or deinstitutionalised´. Over a decade later, one could claim that the tendencies of trying to incorporate other organisational theories, such as population ecology, cultural theory or resource-dependence theory in the new institutionalism, is a sign of a theory that still lacks such theoretical tools. As will be shown in the next section, more recent discussions have, however, pointed to the possibility of revitalising the new

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institutionalism by incorporating elements from the early days of research on institutions.

2.2.4 From ´old´ and ´new´ to neo-institutionalism

Looking back on the developments within the institutional perspective the last forty years, one of the founders of ´old´ institutionalism, Philip Selznick questioned the wisdom of the ´new´ institutionalists in drawing a sharp line between these two versions. Selznick (1996: 273-274) showed, e.g., how some of the ´new´ elements in institutional theory also were important in the old version, i.e. the attention given to myths and symbols, and the weight given to cognition in coping with uncertainty. He continued by claiming that a separation between the old and the new institutionalism sometimes has a tendency of being an unnecessary ´construct´, thus unfortunate because its fails to take account of theoretical and empirical continuities within the institutional framework.

Echoing this line of thought in an empirical overview of institutional contributions in the mid-1990s, Scott (1994: 78) claimed that there were tendencies toward convergence among ´institutionalists´ as they increasingly have started to recognise the joint importance of ´meaning systems, symbolic elements, regulatory processes and governance systems´. In a later work, Scott (1995: 129) argued, e.g., that the de-coupling thesis of neo-institutional theory also could be questioned, and as such providing a link between the old and the new version of institutional theory:

> *Meyer and Rowan suggests that these (organisational) responses are often merely symbolic, the organisational equivalent of smoke and mirrors. I disagree. First, to an institutionalist, the adjective merely does not fit comfortably with the noun symbolic. Symbolism, the mechanism by which meanings are shaped, exerts great social power. Second, numerous studies suggest that although organisations may create boundary units for symbolic reasons, these structures have a life of their own.*

In other words, symbolic action may actually have instrumental effects. Following these thoughts there have been launched attempts to develop explanations for how external environment and intra-organisational factors interact in causing organisational change, and as such ´bridging together the old and the new institutionalism´ in an integrated neo-institutional perspective (Greenwood & Hinings 1996: 1023). As indicated, Greenwood and Hinings suggest it is this convergence around multiple themes, the *coming together* of the old and the new institutionalism that should be labelled *neo-institutionalism*. The theoretical framework for this study belongs to this tradition, where insights from the old and the new institutionalism are combined in trying to explain organisational identity

change. This position does not imply a rejection of other ways of developing neo-institutionalism, or an implication that this should be the path neo-institutionalism should follow in the future. The neo-institutional framework presented in the following section (2.3) should rather be interpreted as adjusted to the stated research question, and the potential offered by the old institutionalism to develop a dynamic view on how organisational identity may change.

As shown in section 2.3, the theoretical framework presented also sets out to follow recommendations from some institutionalists advocating research that unravel how diffusion of innovations is an exercise in the social construction of reality (Strang & Meyer 1994), and that we should recognise that organisations may react (strategically) to institutional pressures in a number of ways (Oliver 1991), although, dependent upon and in interplay with intra-organisational factors (Greenwood & Hinings 1996). Thus, the framework builds upon Scott (1995: 132) in that ´organisations are creatures of their institutionalised environments, (but) most modern organisations (are) constituted as active players, not passive pawns´.

Several elements in Selznick´s old institutionalism lead to such an image of an active organisation. First, ´institutionalisation´ is by him interpreted as an organic process. A process that takes place inside a living organism – the organisation – establishing a biological metaphor on organisational change (Czarniawska-Joerges 1992: 82). By doing this, Selznick opens the ´black box´ of "institutionalisation´ both as a process and a product. For example, the institutionalisation process is by him characterised by social needs, internal and external pressure, by the recruitment and selection of personnel and by what Selznick (1957: 58) terms ´organisation-building´, i.e., the process by which values, power and organisational practise are negotiated and shaped. The outcomes of these processes turn the organisation into an institution. The organisation becomes ´infused with values´, reflecting a distinct way of fulfilling personal and group needs (Selznick 1957: 17).

A second point by Selznick implying an active organisation is that formal (but also informal) leadership plays an important part in the institutionalisation process. Leaders are for Selznick important in several ways. They are needed to negotiate between the various interests inside the organisation, and between the organisation and its environment. They contribute in defining the mission and role of the organisation. They may add purpose to these formal objectives, and could also defend the integrity of the organisation (Selznick 1957: 61-63). By emphasising these leadership tasks, Selznick has been referred to as a precursor of symbolism in organisational theory (Czarniawska-Joerges 1992: 81). Leaders are providers of

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meaning to organisational members and to the society upon which the organisation depend.

Of course, for those advocating the advantages of the new institutionalism, it is easy to claim that internal processes in the organisation is given too much emphasis in the old institutionalism, highlighting only the political aspects of organisational life, the vesting of interests within the organisation as a result of political trade-offs, alliances and power struggles. Thus, even if there are several influential voices heard for integrating the old and the new institutionalism (Selznick 1996; Hirsch 1997; Hirsch & Lounsbury 1997; Stinchcombe 1997), one still needs to closer analyse and elaborate how discontinuities between the old and the new institutionalism could be related to the study of organisational identity change (see table 2.1 for an overview of the two versions).

Table 2.1 *Old and new institutionalism compared*

	Old	New
Conflict of interest	Central	Peripheral
Source of inertia	Vested interests	Environmental legitimacy
Level of analysis	Focal organisations	Field, sector
Locus of institutionalisation	Organisation	Environment
Behavioural emphasis	Commitment	Habits, rules
Organisational dynamics	Change	Persistence
Structural emphasis	Informal networks	Formal organisation
Key forms of cognition	Values, norms, attitudes	Classifications, scripts, schemas, routines
Social psychology	Socialisation	Attribution
Goals	Negotiable	Symbolic

Adapted from DiMaggio & Powell 1991: 13, Hirsch & Lounsbury 1997: 408.

A look at the table discloses several problems when trying to combine the insights from the two versions. For example, the old institutionalism focused on the significance of informal structures, and how these may deviate from the formal organisations. By contrast has the new institutionalism downplayed conflict of interest in and between organisations, focusing on how organisations seem to solve such problems in their administrative structure (DiMaggio & Powell 1991: 12). Here, irrationality is actually located in the formal structure, as a sign of political tribute to powerful cultural accounts in the society.

However, some continuity between the two versions can also be identified. According to DiMaggio & Powell (1991: 12), old and new institutionalism do share a scepticism towards rational-actor models of organisations, they agree that institutionalisation constrains organisational rationality, and each view institutionalisation as a state-dependent process that makes the organisations less instrumentally rational by limiting the options they can pursue. Furthermore, even if they have different views on how organisations are embedded in the environment, both recognise that organisations are dependent of their surroundings. In the old institutionalism, the environment was local and close to the organisations. Thus, the strategy of co-optation was natural, as personal and face-to-face interaction characterised the relationship. In the new institutionalism, the conceptions of the environment was broader, focusing more on professions, nation states and industry sectors which also could stretch beyond national borders. As a consequence, co-optation is a more difficult strategy to pursue. In the new institutionalism, the environment penetrates the organisation, creating ´iron cages´ through which organisations view their choices for action (DiMaggio & Powell 1991: 13). Still, since both organisational structure and change strategies could be institutionally shaped (Scott 1995), one do not end up very far from the statements by Selznick (1957: 19-20) that organisations ´do not so much create values as embody them´ (and that) ´organisations symbolise the community´s aspirations, its sense of identity´.

It is exactly in these references to the identity concept that one can identify an ambiguity in Selznick's writings, an ambiguity that provides a good starting point for developing the theoretical framework for the present study, not least since the statements come very close to the interpretations of organisational identity usually given in the new institutionalism. Here, organisational identity is a product of externally inspired, passive and imitative adaptation – a symbol of environmental aspirations embodied by the organisation (cf. Scott 1995: 44-45). Thus, organisational identities are produced externally as typifications, scripts or archetypes (Greenwood & Hinings 1996). The ambiguity lies in the fact that in the old institutionalism, organisational identity has traditionally been perceived as the result of different forces, actors and groups inside the organisation that compete for influence, or struggle to obtain power. To quote Selznick's own writings (1957: 16): ´Dispite their diversity, these forces have a unified effect. In their operation we see the way group values are formed, for together they define the commitments of the organisation and give it a distinct identity´ (see also Douglas 1986: 55).

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2.3 The processes of organisational identity change

The ambiguity concerning stability versus dynamism in Selznick´s understanding of organisational identity can also be found in studies of organisational identity (Gioia et al 2000). However, recent research on organisational identity suggests that this ambiguity may be a construct stemming from a failure to separate between identity labels on one side and the on-going interpretation of identity labels on the other (Gioia et al 2000). The argument rests on an assumption that the identity is found in the labels we use when we talk about, describe and analyse an organisation, and that it is the *labels* that are institutionalised, not structure or behaviour. For example, a university may carry the label ´entrepreneurial´ without attaching a specific organisational structure to that label. Organisational change occurs due to different and on-going interpretations by organisational members and stakeholders of what the labels mean or signal but without questioning the label as such (Gioia et al 2000: 54). The result is that stability is found in the labels, but where the meanings attached to the labels changes over time creating a dynamic and adapting organisation. To show what this means for a re-interpretation of old and new institutional theory emphasising organisational identity change, the variables in table one (old and new institutional theory compared) are used as a structuring device.

2.3.1 Conflict of interest

In the new institutionalism, conflict of interest is a rather peripheral theme, a fact that may be related to the level of analysis, but also to the fact that organisational identity is not conceived to be ´real´, but only an instrument for external legitimacy, and as such, nothing to argue about. The counter position is taken in the old institutionalism, where organisational identity is a matter of how the organisation should develop, and which values and objectives that are of importance.

However, by relating the identity concept to the outcome of conflicting social processes inside the organisation, Selznick does manage to escape from accusations that it is rather naive and unrealistic to believe in a uniform, shared organisational identity (see for example Czarniawska-Joerges 1992: 185). For Selznick is life inside an organisation packed with social interaction, various identities, conflicts and interest negotiations. It is the negotiated outcome of these processes that in turn create the distinct institution, and the dominating organisational identity. In other words, organisations have many identities, but where bargaining and negotiations decide the ones that are emphasised. And since bargaining power is essential in negotiations, Selznicks´ institutionalisation

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process is also an implicit struggle over power. It is the inclusion of such factors that Stinchcombe (1997: 17) has argued is the virtue of the old institutionalism in bringing institutional theory forward. In his view, the new institutionalism does not have the ´guts of institutions in it´, where the ´guts of institutions is that somebody somewhere really cares to hold an organisation to its standards and is often paid to do that´. An argument for bringing e.g., leaders back into the spotlight.

An implication of this view is that power and interests are vital in understanding how an organisational identity is shaped and changed. Even if e.g. institutional leaders may have limited influence over existing identity labels of an organisation, the institutional leadership (and others) can influence the various interpretations of these labels. Elbach and Kramer (1996: 442) found that external threats to US top-twenty elite business schools in the form of a bad score in their ranking triggered the institutional leadership to reinterpret their reference groups so that they could affirm their organisational identity. In other words, even if the label ´excellent institution´ was maintained, the institutional leadership highlighted dimensions not recognised by the rankings. This does not imply that interpretations given by the institutional leadership were just accepted by the academic staff. Rather, the interpretations served as a starting point for a round of social construction within the organisation. In a case study of strategic change in a large public university in the US, similar findings were reported (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991: 434). Thus, organisational identity change in academia seem to hinge on some sort of consensus-building, but where the institutional leadership seems to play a more important role that usually portrayed in that they not only may serve as sense-makers in a change situation, but also as sense-givers that carefully provides the symbols and frames that stimulate motivation, action and discussion (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991: 446). These studies support the idea that there is a link between symbolism, sense-making and influence as proposed by Selznick, but radicalise that position by arguing that more radical organisational identity change can occur due to creative interpretation of the given identity labels. However, the constructed identity will always reflect the internal power and influence relationship in the organisation.

2.3.2 Source of Inertia

In the old institutionalism, it is the existence of established power relations in a given organisation that secure stability and trigger inertia. The organisation is oriented towards status quo because of vested interests inside the organisation. In

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the new institutionalism, external legitimacy is seen as the dominant factor securing stability.

However, a stable organisational identity could also be explained in a different way, not to be caused by factors either inside or outside the organisation, but by the relationship between the organisation and its environment (Gioia et al 2000). The argument is that there is a close relationship between organisational identity (the internal dimension) and the organisational image (the external dimension), i.e., how organisational members perceive how others see the organisation (cf Gioia et al 2000: 67): An organisational image that provides a ´good match´ with the organisational identity leads to stability and inertia (see also March & Olsen 1989). However, it is possible to claim that due to increasingly complex environments, and more rapidly shifting external demands, such situations are becoming more exceptional in higher education. Thus, not only are there reasons to believe that many higher education institutions experience a gap between image and identity, but this gap could also represent a potential threat to the survival of the organisation. As illustrated by the earlier example of budget cuts at the University of Illinois, a given identity can be problematic when the organisational environment signals a change in the relationship between the organisation and the outside world. When a too huge gap emerges between the identity of an organisation and its environment the possibility for an identity crisis may occur. The threat relates to the possibility that a huge image – identity gap could indicate an organisation that is ´faking its identity´ or one that is unable to respond to expectations in the environment (Schultz et al 2000: 1).

Given this situation, the challenge for any higher education institution is to try to minimise the gap between organisational image and identity. For those with vested interests inside the organisation, the challenge then becomes to reinterpret the existing organisational identity (labels) without losing influence. And since organisational members with power are most likely to advocate for an organisational identity that is able to serve their interests (cf Selznick 1957), one often ends up with a situation reported by several studies of change processes in academia, i.e. that existing mental models are used as a starting point for re-interpretation. And since the perhaps most powerful mental model is the set of beliefs members hold about the current organisational identity, the result is often that elements in the ´old´ organisational identity remain dominant when a ´new´ is constructed (Elsbach & Kramer 1996: 474, Gioia et al 1994: 365). Unless the image of a given organisation is changed radically, due to e.g. turbulent changes in the environment, organisational identity is therefore changed through a step-wise but

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continuous process where important identity labels are kept but ´de-constructed´ and ´re-constructed´ as new meanings are attached to them.

2.3.3 Level of analysis

In principle, the level of analysis is quite different in the old and new versions of institutional theory. While old institutionalism has a focus on institutionalisation processes inside a given organisation, new institutionalism has, with a few exceptions (see e.g. Meyer & Rowan 1977), tended to analyse populations of organisations on a more macro level.

However, looking into the concept of identity more closely discloses an opportunity that institutional theory seems to have missed. In the Oxford Companion to Philosophy (Honderich 1995: 390), identity is given a rather ambiguous definition. Stemming from the word ´identical´ – identity actually refers to similarity or sameness, a fact that discloses two dimensions of the concept. One dimension that relates to uniqueness and one dimension that relates to similarity. Acknowledging that identity comes in degrees and ways, Wittgenstein (op cit 1995: 391) is quoted indicating that an identity perhaps could be found between the two dimensions. According to him, ´roughly speaking, to say of two things that they are identical is nonsense, and to say of one thing that it is identical with itself is to say nothing at all´.

This statement has two important implications. Pure imitation, often defined in new institutional theory as a process of trying to become the same, is impossible, even if it is attempted. The result will still be uniqueness. Second, Wittgenstein suggests that to say something meaningful about identity, one need to compare objects so that a given identity can be established. By contemporary students of organisational identity, these insights are reflected in how the identity concept is framed, and the level of analysis decided. Thus, Czarniawska & Sevón (1996) have pointed out that organisational identities are shaped between the organisation and the environment. The argument is that organisational identity labels do not just evolve out of nothing, but are influenced by dominant ideas, organisational fashions and existing templates in the surroundings of an organisation (Czarniwska & Joerges 1996: 24, Hatch & Schultz 2000: 22). The result is that the distinction between different levels of analysis is blurred, even if the prime focus is on the focal organisation.

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2.3.4 Locus of institutionalisation

As a consequence of the different levels of analysis in the old and the new version of institutional theory, the locus of institutionalisation is within the organisation in the old version, and in the environment in the new one. Contrary to this, and as mentioned earlier, it could be argued that the locus of institutionalisation can be found in the identity labels of a given organisation (Gioia et al 2000: 75).

However, organisational identity labels may be quite abstract, not least as a result of negotiations between various powerful groups (see 2.3.1). Thus, it can be expected that such labels open up for many interpretations, group and individual adjustments, but where organisational members with different backgrounds and interests still relate to a given identity label.

Thus, whether claims of distinctive collective identities are actually ´true´ is much less important than the fact that organisation members often believe that they are distinct and therefore engage frequently in efforts to foster the shared idea of a distinct, collective identity (DiMaggio 1997: 275, see also Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail 1994). The latter position fits well with one of the central processes described in the old institutionalism (see, for example, Selznick 1949, 1957, Clark 1970) where ´organisations, like individuals, strive for a unified pattern of response´ (Selznick 1949: 181). Clark's (2000: 11) point about an ´umbrella idea´ under which a broad range of cultures and disciplinary identities can coexist within a higher education institution also illustrates that even if the concepts of organisational identity and organisational culture may have some common denominators, e.g., in emphasising collective thinking and the possibility for members of an organisation to develop a common mental frame of reference, there are also some differences (Fiol et al 1998:57, Hatch & Schultz 2000: 26). Most important is that while organisational identity refers to a set of myths, beliefs and symbols, the norms, values and behaviour attached to these may not be shared to the same extent (Alvesson & Berg 1992:101). In other words, the myths, beliefs and symbols may be the same, but the meaning and the behaviour attached to them is different.

This is an important point, not least because organisations in general, and higher education institutions in particular, can be host to a range of different cultures (disciplinary, professional, academic etc., see Maassen 1996: 33-54 for an overview). These cultures can be situated in patterns of taken-for-granted assumptions, world-views, and tacit mental frameworks that are more or less shared among organisational members (Hatch & Schultz 2000: 25). Due to this variety, it is difficult to imagine that organisational culture, especially in large and

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complex organisations such as universities, can be an aggregated variable (Maassen 1996: 53). However, the symbolic (and often abstract) aspect of the identity concept could make it more likely to evolve into such an aggregate and institutionalised variable.

The twist is, of course, that even if this difference may be clear as an analytical distinction, problems arise when trying to differentiate between organisational identity and organisational culture in real life. An organisational identity may be expressed in various ways, from tacit understandings to overt demonstration and may, thus, interact with how culture is expressed (Hatch & Schultz 2000: 27). Both identity labels (Gioia et al 2000) and organisational cultures (Maassen 1996) may be difficult to change from a more managerial point of view – both features are institutionalised. Still, identity labels could be easier to de-institutionalise due to the fact that new interpretations of the labels over time may gradually change the meanings of a given identity. And since symbols like organisational identity may serve both expressive and instrumental purposes, ´real´ (behavioural) change could take place as the meaning ascribed to a given identity also changes and where people start to act accordingly (Gioia et al 1994: 363).

2.3.5 Behavioural emphasis

In the old institutionalism the behavioural emphasis is on socialisation to predominantly normative standards, while the behaviour emphasis in the new institutionalism is more related to cognitive aspects like rule following and habits. This division between the ´normative´ and ´cognitive´ side of institutional theory has almost become a standard point of reference for differentiating between old and new institutionalism (cf DiMaggio & Powell 1991, see also Scott 1995: 55). Not least has Oliver (1997) argued that the normative rationality i.e., the fidelity to self-defined values and to an established organisational identity, may constrain organisational adaptation and change.

However, Scott's divide of institutional theory in a ´regulative´, ´normative´ and a ´cognitive´ pillar have in later years also been heavily criticised (Hirsch 1997, Hirsch & Lounsbury 1997). The argument is that the different versions of institutional theory and their accompanying compliance mechanisms may be analytical separable categories, but that ´there is no critical test available to empirically resolve whether, indeed, compliance is based on following external cultural scripts or adhering to internalised norms or both at varying times´ (Hirsch 1997: 1720). Christensen & Røvik (1999: 177) argue in similar vein that in practise it is hard to separate arguments of appropriateness from that of instrumentality in

concrete decision-making processes. Due to the fact that rationality and instrumentality are strong ideologies in most western societies, behaving appropriately often means demonstrating clearly that one is acting in accordance with the former logic.

An implication of this view is that organisational identity could be shaped by a variety of factors that are empirically difficult to differentiate, and that, for example, normative and cognitive factors may interact in various ways. Such complexity and interaction can only be analysed through careful analysis of how various identity labels are interpreted in a given organisational context. Gioia & Thomas (1996: 373) have suggested that such analysis should address the paradoxical elements that often make up a given identity in an higher education institution, e.g. by asking what ´enduring´ really means for an organisation when changing environments demand that even a not-for-profit organisation should behave strategically, and what ´distinctive´ means in an age when institutional processes emphasise mimetic behaviour. Their own answer to these questions is that organisational identity must be a more fluid concept than usually recognised, but that any organisational adaptation in identity to changing environments has to be coherent with existing identity labels (op cit 382, see also Hatch & Schultz 2000: 1). A reason is that the same environment that fosters shifts in interpretations of current identity labels is also the one that operates to limit the degree of those shifts (cf. Scott 1995). Organisations that constantly shift identity labels would not be judged as trustworthy in their environments (Gioia et al 2000: 73).

2.3.6 Organisational dynamics

In the old institutionalism, organisational identity change depended to a large extent on intra-organisational dynamics. Influence, coalitions and competing values were seen as ingredients in a power struggle that could, dependent on the (active) institutional leadership, lead to quite radical organisational change. In the new institutionalism, change is conceived as a (passive) change involving constant reproduction and a reinforcement of existing modes of thought. Change is convergent change – leading to organisational persistence through imitation (Greenwood & Hinings 1996: 1022, 1027).

However, it has been argued that imitation is a very important concept for developing and changing an organisational identity (Røvik 1998). The argument launched to support this statement is that imitation should not be seen only as a ´passive´ process as proposed by the new institutionalism. Imitation should rather be perceived as an active process (Czarniwska & Joerges 1996, Sahlin-Andersson

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1996, Sevón 1996). Since organisational identity is a relational phenomenon it must always be defined according to something or someone. However, as illustrated earlier by Wittgenstein, identity is not only a matter of similarity – it is also a matter of difference. There will always be organisations or organisational identities that a given organisation does not want to be associated with. Thus, imitation may include both adaptation and differentiation processes (Røvik 1998: 139). In some instances, adaptation and differentiation may also occur in an integrated process as when organisations imitate a specific aspect of an organisation e.g., when a university ´imitate´ the computer science program of another institution, but where other central characteristics of that institution is judged as elements one want to distance oneself from (Labianca et al 2001: 314). Such decisions indicate a rather reflective and thoughtful process of adaptation, and not unconscious and passive imitation.

Thus, imitation is perhaps not the best term when trying to describe adaptation processes in more realistic terms. Czarniawska & Joerges (1996) has suggested that transformation is a better description, suggesting that imitation is not necessary the opposite of innovation (see also point 2.3.7). Imitation could be viewed as a process in which something also is created (Sevón 1996: 51). Furthermore, recent research suggest that the mechanisms through which transformation takes place involve matching of both structure, as suggested in the new institutionalism, but also organisational identities. In a study of university emulation in the US, Labianca et al 2001: 325) found that universities considered other institutions identity-attributes as crucial for their own emulation choices.

However, as pointed out by Greenwood & Hinings (1996: 1035), organisational matching, and a potential dissatisfaction with existing interpretations of current identities within the organisation does not provide any direction for future change.

To instigate change and to give change a certain direction, someone inside the organisation must provide an alternative interpretation of how to cope with the gap between existing identities and popular and dominating identity templates in the surroundings. Research within higher education has suggested that the institutional leadership, as suggested in the old institutionalism, may play a role in this process (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991: 446). In addition, it seems that interpretations that describe future ends in aspirational terms are more likely to be accepted in higher education institutions than more defense-oriented interpretations (Gioia et al 1994: 380, Gioia & Thomas 1996: 397).

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2.3.7 Structural emphasis

In the old institutionalism the structural emphasis was put on vested interests, informal networks and the infusion of value in the organisation. In the new institutionalism, organisational structure is the prime dependent variable. The formal organisation is the target for the institutionalisation process.

Given the fact that the present study assumes that it is identity labels that are institutionalised, an implication is that the structural emphasis is related more to the manifestations of and symbols attached to these identity labels. However, since organisational identity is a relational phenomenon, created in the interface between the organisation and its environment, another consequence is that one also needs to pay attention to the processes of identity creation and not only the ´outcomes´ of such processes. The latter point is of special importance since identity creation in organisations is usually conceived as an ongoing process (Weick 1995: 43).

This process-oriented view bears several similarities with the old institutional perspective. The main difference is that while it are mostly intra-organisational processes that lead to the value-infusion processes described in the old institutionalism, it is the relationship between the organisational identity and external events that – directly or indirectly - affect this identity that is emphasised. Czarniawska and Joerges (1996: 23) have used the term translation to describe such a process. Citing Bruno Latour, they claim that this term better describes what really happens when ideas ´travels´ and are adopted by organisations. Accordingly, external ideas are not diffused through technical systems, but translated by human beings:

> *The spread in time and space of anything – claims, orders, artefacts, goods – is in the hands of people; each of these people may act in many different ways, letting the token drop, or modifying it, or deflecting it, or betraying it, or adding to it, or appropriating it* (Latour 1986: 267, quoted in Czarniawska & Joerges 1996: 23)

In other words, according to Latour, adaptation is not pure copying as suggested by the new institutionalism. However, Latour is in line with new institutionalist thinking when he argues that popular ideas circulating in the environment have to be responded to and that they are difficult to reject (cf. DiMaggio & Powell 1991). Corresponding with these thoughts, ideas are rather transferred from the environment to the organisation through a ´chain of translators´ that modify and ´edit´ the original idea (Sahlin-Andersson 1996: 82).

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Such a process could take place in several ways. Not least, creative interpretations could be the result of poor understanding of the original idea by the translators, where the translation results in a form of unwitting variation as described by March & Olsen (1976), or where the ´superstandards´ offered by the environment are so broadly described that they open up for a number of possible interpretations (Røvik 1998). Another possibility combining insights from old and new institutionalism; creative ´editing´ could also be the result of power struggles or an active agency inside the organisation, where the translation is performed by e.g., leaders who use external ideas in attempts to strengthen or transform the identity of the organisation as described by Selznick (1957). Røvik (1998: 109-110) has suggested that in the latter case, the translation process must be conducted following certain rules: First, the translation must be done or be accepted by groups or actors having power considered important by other groups and actors inside or outside the organisation, it must be socially authorised. Second, the translation must be done in such a way that it will not directly support or disfavour certain (especially powerful) groups or actors, it must be harmonised. Third, the translation must be done so that groups and actors see the idea or template as something that may, potentially, empower or improve their own position, it must be individualised.

2.3.8 Key forms of cognition

In the old institutionalism, (local) values, norms and traditions are seen as dominating cognition processes, while external classifications, scripts, schemas or templates occupy a central position in the cognition processes described in the new institutionalism.

However, both versions of institutional theory could be accused of not explicitly describing how the proposed cognition processes actually take place e.g., when it comes to how the environment is ´known´. Weick (1969, see also Weick 1995: 30) has suggested that the environment does not force itself upon the organisation, as proposed in the new institutionalism, but is ´constructed´ when the organisation collects and analyses information about its environment. The argument is that there is not some kind of monolithic, singular, fixed environment external to the organisation, rather that the environment is something that is enacted upon and authorised by a given organisation. Weick (1995: 32) claims that the enactment process is not only about constructing the environment. When discovering the environment, the organisation also decides about whether there is a need to act on what they discover. Quoting Smircich and Morgan (1982: 258), Weick sums up the enactment process as ´generating a point of reference, against which a feeling of

organisation and direction can emerge´. A similar argument can be found in Czarniawska & Joerges (1996: 26) when they suggest that an idea has to be ´objectified´ by the organisation before it can serve as an identity label – is has be attended to. Such a process signals an active agency, and is very different from that described in the new institutionalism, where adaptation is a matter of passive imitation of given templates.

Still, institutions may influence the enactment process. As Czarniawska & Joerges (1996: 28) argue, we do ´approach an idea in terms of what we already know´, suggesting that past experience and traditions play an important part in the construction process as described in the old institutionalism. Furthermore, and following a basic idea in the new institutionalism, there may also be some ideas and templates in the environment that force themselves on to organisations, especially if they stem from actors or sources that the organisation is very dependent upon (cf. Scott 1995). For example, As Norwegian higher education is first and foremost a public affair, owned, regulated and financed by the state, it is likely that signals from, e.g. the Ministry of education, are attended to by higher education institutions in the country.

2.3.9 Social psychology

In the old institutionalism, social psychology was centred on the socialisation process of organisational members. In the new institutionalism, attribution is instead the keyword – drawing attention to processes that would link the organisation to the institutionalised environments.

However, it could be argued that trying to describe institutional theory through a distinct separation between socialisation and attribution, or for that sake, to separate between cognition and psychology is not possible (Selznick 1996, Hirsch 1997, Hirsch & Lounsbury 1997). As has been argued earlier, even if such categories may be theoretically useful, there exists no empirical method for relating organisational responses to such categories. Thus, if one has the ambition to study these mechanisms empirically, attention should be related to how meaning is constructed – to whatever people feel makes sense in a certain situation.

Such a position does not imply that sensemaking in an organisation is a ´free´ activity. On the contrary it seems that sensemaking is closely linked with current identity held in the organisation, to the history and to the meaningful lived experience (Weick 1995: 24). Research of identity change processes in higher

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education institutions confirm this view by showing how sensemaking must be fitted into a coherent interpretive scheme or system of meaning (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991: 434). Since the organisational identity is shaped by past interactions within the organisation, and between the organisation and its environment, any interpretation of new ideas needs to integrate that experience when advocating organisational change (Czarniawska 2000: 274). This position fits well with the old institutionalism where processes of re-constructing the self are seen as fundamental in the identity formation of the organisation, but where such reconstruction relates to history and traditions, resulting in an ´integrated product´ (Selznick 1957: 38-39).

A break with past experience and traditions may occur, but still has to be sensible. Such a change away from the past needs a convincing explanation. Meyer (1996: 251) has suggested that the new institutionalism offers several sources for how convincing ´legitimate´ explanations should be framed. According to him, any explanation that advocates more ´rationality´ within the organisation, more ´organising/organisation´ or other sorts of ´progress´ may serve as legitimating devices. Within an identity perspective, such a break may involve the re-interpretation of existing identity labels, where the meanings attached to given (institutionalised) identity labels are changed (see point 2.3.4).

2.3.10 Goals

Within the old institutionalism, goals were the outcome of power struggles and vested interests, thus a negotiated entity. In the new institutionalism, goals are perceived as a symbolic gesture to legitimate the organisation towards the environment.

It could be claimed that these two views are not mutually exclusive. Even if goals are a result of internal power struggles it has been suggested that organisational members also must view the goals of the organisation as proper and legitimate, especially since it has been claimed that academic staff in higher education institutions derive parts of their personal identity from their own organisation (Henkel 2000: 22).

In other words, goals would have both expressive and instrumental effects, a point suggested by the old institutionalism, where the emotional identification with the organisation by organisational members may create resources of energy that may increase day-to-day efforts (Selznick 1957: 18). Thus, not only may it be argued that it is important to please the environment by having goals that are perceived

as important and appropriate in the environment as suggested in the new institutionalism, but it is also of equal importance that goals provide organisational members with pride and emotions (Schultz, Hatch & Larsen 2000: 1). However, since many organisational members may have an interest in, and indeed dispute over how important organisational goals are formulated, it is perhaps not very surprising that the goals of higher education institutions often are quite vague – being the result of compromises and lengthy discussions (cf Mintzberg 1979: 197, see also point 2.3.4).

Visible organisational tools like goals, strategies, organisational structure and other ´technical´ arrangements could, thus, be seen as important expressions about what the organisation ´is´, how it performs and where it is ´going´ ((Meyer 1979; Feldman & March 1981; Dill 1997). Empirical studies of change processes in higher education institutions have disclosed that e.g., strategic plans perhaps should be viewed more as an input to sensemaking processes than as an output of sensemaking, as it is usually treated (Gioia & Thomas 1996: 398). Technical arrangements like organisational goals may therefore be both the medium and the outcome of sensemaking processes, and could be important symbols in the process of organisational identity change. It may be argued that organisations such as higher education institutions with intangible products and services rely heavily on such technical arrangements both for external and internal meaning construction (Weick 1995).

2.4 Research propositions

The key points in the discussion of how to link old and new institutionalism in an attempt to explain organisational identity change have been summarised in table 2.2.

Table 2.2 *Organisational identity change in an institutional perspective*

	Old	New	Organisational identity change
Conflict of interest	Central	Peripheral	Central
Source of inertia	Vested interests	Environmental legitimacy	Stable image – identity relationships
Level of analysis	Focal organisations	Field, sector	Focal organisations
Locus of institutionalisation	Organisation	Environment	Identity labels
Behavioural emphasis	Commitment	Habits, rules	Coherence, integrity
Organisational dynamics	Change	Persistence	Transformation
Structural emphasis	Informal networks	Formal organisation	Translation
Key forms of cognition	Values, norms, attitudes	Classifications, scripts, schemas, routines	Enactment
Social psychology	Socialisation	Attribution	Sensemaking
Goals	Negotiable	Symbolic	Expressive, emotional

It should be underlined that the framework presented in table 2, is in its foundations an interpretive scheme, and is, in the way it is presented here, difficult to use for testing out specific research propositions for each of the elements in the table. The obvious reason is that the elements are not mutually exclusive, and may, as shown in the previous section, interrelate and fuse together in complex ways. However, what a focus on organisational identity does is to blur the difference between some ontological and epistemological assumptions in the ´old´ and ´new´ institutionalism i.e., the difference between:

- voluntaristic (´old´) vs. deterministic (´new´) social action
- real (´old´) vs. symbolic (´new´) change processes
- divergent (´old´) vs. convergent (´new´) organisational effects

The strategy that will be used is, consequently, to launch three broader research propositions that question these dichotomies drawing on the insights from the previous discussion on organisational identity.

Research proposition 1 (voluntarism vs. determinism):

> *When an institution of higher education changes its organisational identity, it will select among available (elements of) organisational ideals and adopt those amongst them closest to its own identity.*

This proposition is related to the notion in the new institutionalism that adaptation is a passive process determined by dominating ideas in the environment. By proposing that a higher education institution will select identity elements closest to its own, this proposition emphasises the ´active agency´, and the interests of the organisation. As such, the research proposition embraces the insights of the old institutionalism and recent research on organisational identity by emphasising enactment (active search) processes (see 2.3.8), and the possibility that internal power structures in the organisation can make radical organisational identity shifts difficult (see 2.3.1). At the same time, it does acknowledge the importance of the external environment in providing the ´portfolio´ of available organisational identities (see 2.3.3), and that change is step-wise since the organisation will select the identity closest to its own (see 2.3.2).

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Research proposition 2 (real vs. symbolic):

> *When an institution of higher education changes its organisational identity it will undertake activities of ´re-interpretation´ in order to replace an existing identity with a new one.*

The core of this research proposition concerns the symbolic adaptation processes sketched by the new institutionalism. Instead of a pure symbolic process, this proposition suggests that adaptation processes are characterised by attempts to build organisational coherence and integration (see 2.3.5). However, the research proposition acknowledges the possibility that symbolic adaptation may be the first step in the adaptation process, but that the organisation, over time, will merge any gaps in the image – identity relationship (see 2.3.7). The research proposition also incorporates the idea that it is organisational identity labels that are institutionalised while the meaning attached to them may shift over time (see 2.3.4).

Research proposition 3 (divergence vs. convergence):

> *In seeking to adopt a new organisational identity, an institution of higher education will undergo changes in values, norms and behaviour which set it apart from other institutions of higher education engaged in similar processes.*

A central assumption in the new institutionalism is that adopting organisations under similar external pressure will become more (structural) similar through processes of convergence. This research proposition acknowledges that the adopting organisation may acquire some structural similarities with other organisations as suggested by the new institutionalism, but argues that it will develop expressive and emotional arguments emphasising its uniqueness, attempting to distinguish itself from similar organisations (see 2.3.6, 2.3.9 and 2.3.10).

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3 Norwegian higher education – characteristics, policy and reform

3.1 Introduction

Norwegian higher education is in this study interpreted as an organisational field that both legitimates and constrains change (see chapter one and two). As discussed in chapter two, organisational identities are created in the interface between an organisation and its environment through a process in which organisations try to imitate organisational ideals established in the wider system. However, whether this is in practice a pure imitation process was questioned and instead a process of organisational identity change was introduced. Nonetheless, even if the process of imitation is interpreted differently, it is still assumed that external organisational ideals play an important role in the establishment and change of the organisational identity of higher education institutions.

Organisational ideals may stem from several sources both inside and outside an organisational field. However, a link between policy-making, state governance and organisational ideals in Norwegian higher education can be established, especially since the state not only decides ´the effectiveness of government provision of higher education´ but also ´the effective functioning of markets and professional control´ (Dill 1998: 362). The way the state exercises its authority and the relationship it develops with higher education institutions is of particular importance. One might expect the state to have been a central actor in providing institutional legitimacy, to have served as the prime regulator of institutional change processes, and hence, to have provided normative ideas and images of the desired ´identity model´ for Norwegian higher education institutions in the 1990s (see also Bleiklie 1998). However, this role cannot be taken for granted as the state traditionally has played a different role in various national higher education systems (Clark 1983).

In this and the next chapter, Norwegian higher education is analysed at the system (field) level. Here, the intention is to provide the reader with a thorough understanding of those vital characteristics and policy developments that directly and indirectly concerned the quality of teaching and learning in Norwegian higher education in the 1990s. A short description of the higher education system is given, but the main part of the chapter contains an examination of major reforms and policy initiatives in that sector.

In the following chapter (chapter four), the dominant ideas and images related to the policies and reforms implemented during the 1990s are discussed. After a presentation of the governing approaches in Norway in this decade, the relationship between the state and higher education is subsequently conceptualised in terms of some organisational ideals. These ideals incorporate important ideas recognisable in Norwegian higher education policy-making in this period, but they are first and foremost developed as a tool for studying the direction of change in organisational identities during the 1990s.

3.2 Norwegian higher education – an overview

3.2.1 System description

In Norway, the higher education system is divided into a university sector and a college sector (a binary system). In the period analysed, there were four universities in the country. Established in 1811, currently with over 30.000 students, the University of Oslo is the oldest and largest of the four. The other three, in Bergen (1948), Trondheim (1969) and Tromsø (1972), were all established after 1945. Six specialised scientific colleges in e.g. physical education, music, agriculture, also belong to the university sector, but with a much smaller number of students. The college sector comprises 26 state colleges. This sector was reorganised in 1994 reducing the number of institutions from 98 to the current number. The two sectors are almost of equal size when it comes to the number of students – with the college sector on top. There are also a substantial number of private higher education institutions in the country, but with the exception of the Norwegian School of Management (BI) with more than 10.000 fulltime students (and round 7.000 part-time students), most of the private institutions are quite small (in 2000 there were approximately 21.000 students in the private higher education sector). In addition, over 20.000 students study abroad, while only around 4000 foreign students study at Norwegian higher education institutions (numbers from 2000).

Norwegian higher education expanded tremendously in student numbers during the period 1990 - 2000. In the late 1980s about 105.000 students were registered in higher education, while at the turn of the century approx. 180.000 students followed various forms of higher education (NFR 2001:95). This growth has, however, not been linear during the decade. Universities experienced a decrease in the number of students after 1996, while the college sector increased the intake of new students. Some disciplinary differences are also noticeable. At universities,

law and humanities seemed less attractive to students in the late 1990s, while numbers were fairly constant in pedagogy, social science and in the sciences. In colleges it was especially within health and social work programs that an increase in student numbers was experienced in the 1990s (NFR 2001:96).

Historically, university degree types have been inspired by the continental European university model, with a four-year first degree (cand.mag.), followed by a two-year second degree (cand.polit etc.). Professional degrees in medicine, business administration, civil engineering etc, differed from this structure, even if the time frame for the studies often were set to four or six years. In the college sector, the length of the first degree programs has traditionally varied between two and four years. Traditionally, a second degree has not been offered in the college sector. During the last decade, however, a few colleges have been granted the right to offer second-degree programs and even doctorate studies in given subjects (for example, business education and engineering)

If one looks at the programs offered in Norwegian higher education in the 1990s, science, technical studies and social science programs dominated, i.e. these fields produced almost two thirds of the first degrees awarded on average per year in Norway in this period (NFR 2001:100). A look at the number of doctoral degrees in 2000 shows that most were produced in the sciences (26 percent), in medicine (21 percent), technology (19 percent) and social science (18 percent) (NFR 2001:103). As in many other countries, higher education in Norway has also become a more important arena for women. In the year 2000, almost 60 percent of the students in higher education were women (NFR 2001:101), and the number of female doctoral students has increased during the 1990s.

The labour market opportunities for people with higher education were fairly good during the 1990s. On average, only between two and three percent of graduates with a university degree experienced unemployment during the decade. However, some disciplinary differences do occur. A look at the unemployment rate in 2000 for graduates 6 months after leaving higher education shows that for candidates from the social sciences, humanities, law and the sciences, between five and seven percent have not been able to get a job. For candidates in psychology, business studies, and health care studies the unemployment ratio has only been between one and two percent (NFR 2001:106). Candidates with a university degree have traditionally found their job in the public sector, but this gradually changed in the 1990s due to public sector cutbacks resulting in fewer openings there. Increasingly, graduates from universities, therefore, had to look in the private sector for job opportunities.

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Most of the Norwegian higher education is public with only one private higher education provider of some size. In 2000, the state-owned higher education institutions in the country had 92 percent of the total student population, and received 98 percent of the public expenditure on higher education (Hämälainen 2001:26). The latter figure includes funding that stems from the Norwegian Research Council, a major financial source for research conducted in the higher education sector. No student fees have traditionally been charged for studying in a public higher education institution. This situation indicates that the state is an important actor for the whole system, both as the funder and as the actor that regulates the system.

3.2.2 The traditional relationship between the state and higher education in Norway

It is beyond the scope and limits of this study to describe the foundations and history of Norwegian higher education in all its details (for a recent study of policy change in Norwegian higher education in the period 1965-1995 – see Bleiklie et al 2000). Still, some brief comments need to be made. The Norwegian higher education system can historically be characterised as belonging to the continental (German) university tradition (Clark 1983, van Vught 1996). In the Norwegian version, this has implied rather tight state-control over the inputs of the system (institutions, curricula, resources, students, staff), while at the same time emphasising the *Lehr- und Lehrnfreiheit* related to the Humboldt tradition (Aamodt, Kyvik & Skoie 1991).

After World War II, Norway took the same path as other West European countries in reforming and expanding the educational system. In Norway this implied both the establishment of new higher education institutions and the expansion of existing ones (Kyvik 1999). Even though special colleges related to teacher training, engineering and nursing already existed in the 1960s, they were supplemented during the late 1960s and the 1970s by a new category of colleges called District colleges, mainly with the aim of providing shorter and more vocational education, e.g., in business administration, teacher training, social work etc. After the establishment of the District colleges, the college sector in the 1970s comprised over one hundred institutions. In addition, a new university was in 1972 created in Northern Norway (University of Tromsø) although after protests from the two established universities in Oslo and Bergen claiming that there were not sufficient resources (economically and human) for such an establishment (Dahl & Stensaker 1999). This criticism was further fuelled by the fact that another university had just been created in Trondheim in 1969, after a merger between

several existing institutions (the Norwegian Technical College and the Norwegian Teacher College).

Even if the university sector in Norway was rather young, the universities had a special position there, with e.g. separate acts for each institution. The degree of governmental control varied, in other words, between universities and colleges. The tradition of *Lehr und Lehrnfreiheit* meant much academic discretion for the universities, while education given at the regional and District colleges often was given according to a national standard, e.g. in teacher training. The Ministry of Education used, at the same time, often quite detailed regulations regarding the number of students institutions could enrol in a given study program, e.g. in medicine or in nursing (see also Bleiklie et al 2000). This way of governmental steering has historically had a rather dramatic impact on both universities and colleges due to a budgeting system in which the financial allocations closely related to the number of students each institution was allowed to enrol. Through governmental decisions on the establishment of new institutions, through the use of national academic standards, and by the financial allocations linked to student enrolment, it is possible to establish a picture of a relationship between the state and higher education as rather tight and characterised by detailed control by the government.

However, the process by which this control has been executed can still be characterised as rather ´soft´. The State has, as in other Scandinavian countries, often taken the role as a ´guardian angel´ protecting higher education against pressures from the market and the other stakeholders of higher education (Erikson et al 1987; Nybom 1993; Eide 1995). Thus, higher education in Norway can traditionally be regarded as a sector with a low level of conflict and tension between the Ministry of Education and the higher education institutions (Aamodt et al 1991). The latter also goes for the relationship between higher education and other ministries and state agencies. Olsen (1983:19) described Norway in the mid-eighties as a country characterised by a peaceful co-existence between the state and various organised interests – and as a state ´which has institutionalised a stable political process´ leading to ´revolution in slow motion´, not least in the higher education sector. For example, in a study analysing political changes in Norwegian higher education in the period 1965 – 1995, Bleiklie et al (2000:30) stated that:

> *In comparative terms Norwegian higher education policy has been characterised by consensus and a gradual development, and policy shifts are better understood as outcomes of evolving, shared norms rather than as results of changing constellations of actors.*

However, even if true in a longer historical perspective, it is an empirical question whether the statement is also valid for the period 1990 – 2000. In the next section, important reforms and changes in Norwegian higher education during the 1990s are described more in detail.

3.3 Policy and reforms in the 1990s

A reform can be defined as public policy-making aimed at marginal or comprehensive changes in a given public sector accompanied by specific objectives (Lane 1990:68). However, a set of reform initiatives with respect to a public sector could be said to make up a policy space – where ´top-down´ (reform) initiatives and ´bottom-up´ (change) developments are so closely interrelated that it is very difficult to make useful descriptions about one of them without taking the other elements of the set into account (Lane 1990:68). Norwegian reform initiatives to improve quality of teaching and learning fit well with this description. Reform initiatives with broader intensions often have consequences also for teaching and learning activities and are, in addition, heavily interwoven with other developments within the sector. However, for analytical purposes, the description below is divided in two. The first part gives a broad overview of major reform initiatives launched by the state during the 1990s. In the second part, policies directly targeted at the quality of teaching and learning is depicted.

3.3.1 Major reform initiatives

Except for the policy emphasising expansion of the system, both in student numbers and in the number of higher education institutions, a picture of a ´steady state´ in higher education with few reform initiatives characterised the sector in the latter parts of the 1970s and during the 1980s (Aamodt et al 1991).

However, a government commission in the late 1980s and a subsequent white paper in the early 1990s changed this picture rather dramatically (NOU 1988; St.meld.nr. 40 1990-91). The arguments developed in these two documents were that expansion of higher education had diffused and fragmented the system, creating many small and specialised institutions with little co-operation between them. The solution proposed in the white paper was to establish larger institutions through amalgamations and increased institutional and disciplinary specialisation and co-operation with the aim to improve research and education, and to make better use of the resources allocated. Generally speaking, one may identify a shift in the political focus from *quantity* (expansion) to *quality, efficiency* and *effectiveness*

(consolidation) of the higher education system (St.meld.nr. 40 1990-91: 8; Smeby & Brandt 1999: 53; Bleiklie et al 2000:83). For example, the white paper stated that no more comprehensive universities were needed in Norway, shutting – for the time being - the door for some of the colleges with ambitions of acquiring this status.

An important backdrop for this shift in the political focus is undoubtedly an increased focus on quality, efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector in general due to problems in financing the public services (Lane 1997). During the late 1980s and early 1990s, all Ministries in Norway were mandated to implement reform measures resembling those that often come under the ´new public management´ umbrella (Pollit 1990). Internationally, various measures have been identified as belonging under this umbrella. Typically, these include (Lane 1997:9):

- decentralisation of tasks from the central level and increased institutional autonomy
- increased emphasis on results and output, introduction of systematic evaluation activities
- more power to the consumers of public goods
- a clearer divide between service funding and service production
- increased competition, often by allowing private actors to compete in the public service production
- privatisation of public service production

Due to a considerable income from the oil-sector, the problems related to the funding of public service activities in Norway in the late 1980s and early 1990s can be described as rather marginal compared to many other countries, for example, Finland (Olsen & Peters 1996). However, powerful actors in the public sector in Norway, most noticeable the Ministry of Finance (FD), but also the Ministry for Labour and Government Administration (AAD) established in 1990, worked strongly to limit public expenditure and modernise the public sector in this period (Lægreid 1995:49; Fimreite 1997:83). Various Governments declared throughout the whole decade that an increased decentralisation of authority, increased institutional autonomy and a stronger focus on the outcome of public spending was needed to prepare the country for a tougher international competitive climate (see for example St.prp.nr.1 1995-96: 9). The most visible measures coming out of such arguments was the introduction of result-oriented planning (ROP), a new accounting system for the public sector and systematic use of evaluations in all public sectors.

In higher education, result-oriented planning caused the greatest upheaval of these measures. Even if a key element of ROP was to include potential

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stakeholders and ´market/user needs´ in defining objectives (Christensen 1991), it was still heavily criticised for being an administrative tool of little applicability for higher education (Larsen & Gornitzka 1995:349).

Increased institutional autonomy was also a key element in the accounting reform that was launched a few years later (1996), and that gave higher education institutions more autonomy in financial matters. However, during the 1990s, increased decentralisation occurred in a number of areas in higher education. Analysis of decision-making structures has, for example, indicated that the country during the 1990s has been moving towards decentralising authority to institutions and less stringent regulation from the authorities, with a more managerial model evolving inside the institutions (Bleiklie et al 2000). In universities, one has witnessed that more emphasis is placed on institutional and departmental strategic planning efforts both when it comes to research (Larsen 1995) and teaching (Stensaker 1996). However, the historical differences in the institutional autonomy between universities and colleges prevailed during this period. For example, the institutional and departmental freedom in developing new study programs and in curriculum issues in the college sector was during the whole 1990s experienced as very marginal, with national standards limiting institutional autonomy (Kyvik 1999:315).

Attempts to improve quality, efficiency and effectiveness were in particular visible in the college sector in the 1990s. As mentioned before, prior expansion of the higher education system had created a number of specialised colleges in teacher training, engineering and nursing. In addition, more vocational oriented District colleges during the 1970s and 1980s created a college sector with a large number of small and somewhat fragmented institutions. In 1994, The Ministry of Education amalgamated 98 of these institutions into 26 larger and more comprehensive state colleges with the intensions to increase administrative effectiveness, economic efficiency and academic quality (Kyvik 1999). However, in the evaluation of the reform, it was claimed that after five years, most effects of the reorganisation could be attached to organisational and administrative measures, and that the asserted improvement in academic quality was more difficult to discover (Kyvik 1999:314).

The central idea behind the reorganisation of the college sector was also to increase cooperation, but also the specialisation between and within higher education institutions. The argumentation for the establishment of the *Network Norway*, a plan for coordinate the Norwegian higher education system better and outlined in the white paper from the early 1990s, was that Norwegian higher

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education institutions did not sufficiently take advantage of their academic potential (St.Meld.40 1990-91: 46-47). Many departments within institutions were regarded as being too small to maintain a continuous high level of quality of their education and research. The Ministry of Education wanted both departments and institutions to merge or to specialise within certain fields of learning, thereby leaving other areas and disciplines to other institutions. The Ministry suggested that this also could be done in some form of co-operation between the university and the college sector, where colleges should take care of lower degree education within a specific subject whereas universities should take responsibility for the higher degrees. In this process, the institutions were encouraged to make their own suggestions and recommendations for specialisation and co-operation. However, the Ministry reserved the right to have the final word concerning the proposed specialisation of the institutions (St.meld.nr.40 1990-91), and no additional resources were given to institutions acquiring a certain specialisation.

The final major reform launched in this decade was a new Act on Universities and Colleges which was implemented in 1996. The main intention with this Act was to replace the individual Acts with respect to each university, and to standardise the formal rules and regulations in the whole higher education sector. Thus, the new Act intended to support the establishment of the Network Norway through a transparent and integrated legal system. Not least, the new Act opened up for increased student mobility between the university and the college sector and contributed as such to a more standardised mutual recognition process between institutions.

3.3.2 Policy initiatives related to the quality of teaching and learning

During the 1990s, some specific measures and initiatives have been taken by the Ministry of Education with the aim of improving the quality of Norwegian higher education. A separate government commission composed only of representatives from the higher education institutions, the Quality of Studies Commission, was appointed in the late 1980s to assess the situation, and to come up with solutions and recommendations for the future (Studiekvalitetsutvalget 1990). In their report published in 1990, this commission emphasised how closely related quality improvements were to the culture of higher education institutions. The argument advocated was that changes in culture in turn would lead to changes in how higher education functioned, i.e., in the quality of teaching and learning (Studiekvalitetsutvalget 1990: 72). In their strategy to implement such a shift in culture, the commission suggested that change in the educational infrastructure of teaching and learning was a necessary condition to achieve this objective. Echoing an OECD (1988) review of Norwegian higher education claiming that too much

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energy and resources were used on examination and too little on the learning process, the commission argued that quality improvements depended on altering the teaching and learning process by enhancing pedagogical skills of the teaching staff, by pedagogical development work, a shift in the weight given to the examination process in favour of processes of learning, and by establishing formative and systematic internal and external evaluation systems. The latter suggestion might have been inspired by a study trip the commission made to European countries where national evaluation systems already had been implemented.

Furthermore, the commission encouraged the institutions to develop their own ´action plans´ for quality (Studiekvalitetsutvalget 1990:17-19). In the process of improving higher education, the commission further recommended that implementation should take place by using a combination of bottom-up and top-down processes, where the role of the state was to facilitate the work put down by the institutions (Handal & Lycke 2000).

In the 1991 governmental white paper on higher education, several of the central ideas from the ´quality´ commission were incorporated (St.meld.nr. 1990-91). Interestingly, ´quality measures´ such as evaluations were discussed in a chapter on state governance and organising, in which the Ministry of Education promised more decentralisation. The white paper also stated that maintaining and improving the quality of higher education was mainly an institutional responsibility (St.meld.nr. 1990-91: 57). The most important national responsibility in the quality area, it argued, was to ´check´ whether institutions took quality improvement seriously. In other words, national meta-evaluations were an important tool in the quality improvement process.

However, instead of arguing for the establishment of systematic national evaluations, the Ministry of Education stated that conducting evaluations was a responsibility not only for the national authorities, but also for institutions themselves, encouraging them to co-operate in establishing such procedures. The Ministry also emphasised that, echoing the ´quality´ commission, the most important purpose concerning national and/or institutional evaluations was to enhance institutional learning. The control function of evaluation was, in other words, toned down (St.meld.nr. 1990-91: 56). To inspire institutions, and to provide a mechanism for communication and learning, the Ministry launched a national pilot project for evaluation of higher education that should run from 1992-1996. The aim of the project was to enhance and stimulate institutions to develop their own evaluation systems by creating a knowledge base for these

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activities (St.meld.nr 40 1990-91: 56). The design of the evaluations launched as a part of this pilot project was heavily inspired by international developments within the field of evaluation (see van Vught & Westerheijden 1994), and included a disciplinary and subject based focus, institutional self-evaluations, the visit of an external peer review committee and the publication of an external report (for details, see Stensaker 1997).

The Ministerial emphasis on ´improvement´ rather than ´control´ supported the formative evaluation approach recommended by the earlier ´quality´ commission. The fact that the responsibility for the administration and analysis of the evaluation process was given to an independent research institute (NIFU) can be said to be an indication of the quality enhancement aspects of the process. However, because the evaluation project was presented in a section in the white paper that dealt with governmental steering and organisation of the higher education system, several institutions had doubts as to whether they could trust the Ministry´s intentions of not using the evaluation results for other purposes than quality improvement (Jordell et al 1994). Institutions suspected that topics related to the ongoing mergers within the college sector, the institutional chase for certain academic ´specialisations´ related to the Network Norway idea, and the increased emphasis on institutional efficiency could appear on the policy agenda if one experienced a ´poor´ evaluation result (Karllsen & Stensaker 1993; Stensaker 1997:278-279).

In retrospect, this fear was exaggerated. In practise, the situation became the opposite. It was rather the institutions that ´used´ the results of the evaluations towards the Ministry in attempts to achieve certain academic ´specialities´, to increase their resource base, or for other purposes (Stensaker 1997). Another observation was that the evaluation project seems to have had a limited ´learning effect´ within the higher education system. Even if the national pilot project had effects in specific departments, subject areas and programmes evaluated, the spread of information and experiences from evaluated to non-evaluated departments or subject areas was limited (Stensaker 1996).

While employing the pilot project, Norway participated in several international activities within the field of evaluation. Norwegian higher education institutions were part of a European pilot project for evaluating higher education, and the agency responsible for the evaluation project in Norway, NIFU, established several contacts with other agencies and networks within the evaluation field. By the end of the pilot period, the Ministry asked NIFU to sum up experiences from the evaluation project and to make recommendations regarding a future national

evaluation system in Norway. As a basis for the recommendations given, NIFU pointed to the tendencies towards fragmentation in transferring information and experiences from the project where little information from evaluated to non-evaluated units had occurred. NIFU referred also to research indicating that follow-up of evaluations often demand close co-operation between the evaluated unit and the rest of the institution, and that involvement from the institutional leadership was an important factor during this process. The costs of implementing and running a national subject/discipline based evaluation system were in addition brought to the fore (Karlsen & Stensaker 1996).

Thus, the main recommendation from NIFU was to establish a national audit system, i.e., a system of indirect evaluation with an institutional focus and with attention locked on the institutional systems and routines for improving education instead of aiming at scrutinising quality *per se*. Arguments favour of this model related to the need to support the policy of decentralisation from the state to the institutional level, as well as to the assumption that costs would be reduced compared to a disciplinary/subject based evaluation model. Another recommendation was to establish a separate organisation to carry out these evaluations because of the need to professionalise the organisation and running of the evaluations and to keep quality as an important issue on the political agenda (Karlsen & Stensaker 1996).

The Ministry of Education did not take immediate action, and two years elapsed before the question of a national evaluation system in higher education returned to the political agenda. In 1998, and concurring with a major reorganisation of governmental councils for vocational education in social work, teacher training and engineering, the Ministry established the Norway Network Council. The council, which was to function as an advisory body to the Ministry, was also given the task of clarifying what kind of systematic evaluation activity Norway should have in the future, and to carry out various kinds of evaluations at the Ministry´s request. In 1999, this council presented a report echoing many of the main arguments presented by NIFU some years earlier. The recommendation given was to set up a national audit system (Norgesnettrådet 1999:116). However, such a system was not implemented within the time-frame of this study.

Other state initiatives directly aimed at improving the quality of Norwegian higher education during the 1990s were limited. Still, student evaluation of teaching became a mandatory activity in 1994. The Ministry of Education instructed the higher education institutions to establish procedures for systematically collecting, analysing and feeding information back to institutions

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regarding the students´ view on and experiences with teaching. The institutions seemed to respond quickly to this request. In 1995, a study showed that 53 percent of the institutions already had such systems in place for the whole teaching portfolio, while 40 percent had evaluation systems that covered part of the teaching conducted. Only 7 percent of the institutions lacked routines for student evaluation of teaching (Smeby 1995).

Summing up state initiatives and some of the effects in the quality area during the 1990s, Handal and Lycke (2000) argued that quality as a *label* for ongoing discussions within institutions had decisively been introduced during this period: 32 out of the 35 higher education institutions polled in Norway had developed an *action plan* to improve the quality of their education. Whether these discussions and plans were just a matter of rhetoric adjustment or a sign of substantial improvements was regarded by the authors as an open question (Handal & Lycke 2000).

There were little public interest in the quality of teaching and learning during the 1990s. Newspapers reported occasionally about high student failure rates in some study programs during examination, and some newspaper established a nationwide student satisfaction survey in 1998, but these events did not cause any political upheaval. In the Norwegian Parliament (the Storting), quality of teaching and learning was not on the agenda. And even if representatives from the Norwegian Association for Business and Industry (the NHO) sometimes participated in the committees set up in the evaluation pilot project, they neither influenced the design of the evaluations, nor played a major role in the follow up of results from the evaluations (Stensaker 1997).

3.4 Policy and practice

The many reform initiatives taken in the early 1990s emphasising quality, efficiency and effectiveness in the higher education system coincided with the second wave of student demand of higher education. As in many other West European countries (with some exceptions, for example the Netherlands and Germany), the early 1990s saw a large influx of new applications to higher education in Norway (Aamodt 1995). For example, while governmental plans from the late 1980s asserted that higher education would have about 105.000 students in 1995, real numbers totalled of over 160.000 students that year. Even though some higher education institutions argued for a stricter admittance to higher education, the government maintained the traditional ´open admission´ policy.

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The influx of students in the early 1990s created severe problems for the higher education. One of the most visible was the reduction in the resources per student that Norwegian higher education underwent during the 1990s. Since public spending did not maintain the per capita student funding, the institutions, and some departments in particular, had to reduce the level of activity. Thus, even if public spending for the sector as a whole increased during the 1990s, largely as a consequence of budgeting tied to student numbers in higher education, overall resource situation measured per student became more difficult. For universities, economic problems were particularly felt in the social sciences and the humanities where the student numbers increased the most. For the new state colleges, not only student numbers, but also mergers influenced the resource situation. Due to expected efficiency gains as a result of the merger, the Ministry argued that fewer resources were needed in the sector as a whole. Thus, for this sector, the mergers also meant a cut in the total budget (Kyvik 1999:311).

Result-oriented planning, new accounting system and growth in student numbers triggered another development in universities and colleges during the 1990s, namely an increase in the number of administrative staff in the institutions (Gornitzka, Kyvik & Larsen 1998). Administrators were also needed to handle the increase in the reporting activities both to the Ministry of Education and to the National Database for Higher Education (DBH) that was launched to improve information on the outcomes of the sector. Furthermore, decentralisation created an increased need for ´policy-making´ and ´institutional planning´ at the institutional level, a process which demanded a more professional administrative staff. Inside the higher education institutions, increases in administrative staff led to fear of an increased bureaucratisation of higher education institutions. Research also showed an increase in the number of administrative officers and managers. Relatively more resources were used for administration than for research and teaching even if administration in absolute figures still was marginal compared to academic budgets (Gornitzka et al 1998).

That the Ministry of Education in the white paper from 1990 ruled out creating more comprehensive universities did not hinder several colleges from planning to become a future university. Some of the state reforms indirectly enabled them to pursuit their objective. For example, amalgamations in the college sector created new institutions of a size and with the resource base to realise university ambitions. The much sought after institutional specialisation in the Network Norway idea further fuelled university ambitions in a number of institutions. ´Institutional drift´ was particularly strong at the Stavanger College, and in Agder

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College, but university ambitions also became visible at the Bodø College later in the 1990s.

The long term strategy pursued by these and other colleges to obtain their objective was to initiate extensive co-operation activities, not only with Norwegian universities as intended in the Network Norway idea, but also with a number of foreign higher education institutions. For example, Stavanger College established its own doctoral education program, and several other colleges established study programs on the hovedfag (master)- level through similar collaborations with foreign providers (Stensaker 1995:31). Since students got their final degree from a foreign provider, the Ministry of Education had no power over whether such studies should be recognised or not.

Such internationalisation of higher education in Norway during the 1990s was difficult for the Ministry of Education to oppose since internationalisation was looked upon as a much needed characteristic of a higher education sector trying to improve its quality in the ´knowledge society´ (St.meld.nr. 40 1990-91: 14). During the 1990s, Norwegian higher education institutions were active in participating in various student exchange systems (Erasmus, Nordplus) (Stensaker 1995:28).

Thus, it is possible to argue that governmental attempts to coordinate the Norwegian higher education system in the 1990s (through institutional amalgamations, a new Act for higher education, the Network Norway idea, and new management and accounting systems), were partly counteracted by some entrepreneurial institutions seeking to improve their funding, their institutional status and their competitive advantage in an emerging higher education ´market´. On this background, it is perhaps of little surprise that the idea of Norwegian universities becoming ´service-institutions´ was launched by a professor in pedagogy in the late 1990s (Tjeldvoll 1997). Evidence of an emerging higher education ´market´ emerged in the shape of a nationwide student satisfaction survey launched in 1998 and financed by four Norwegian newspapers which aimed at giving students information about choosing study programs. Whether this situation represented a shift in state governance of higher education, or whether it affected the ´organisational ideals´ in Norwegian higher education in this period, is dealt with in the next chaper.

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4 Changed governance - new organisational ideals?

4.1 Dominating ideas - ambiguous policy signals?

The picture emerging from the previous chapter is one of the Ministry producing rather mixed policy signals for the individual institution to interpret. A number of the reforms implemented with respect to higher education during the 1990s can be seen as attempts to streamline the higher education sector according to its *administrative* functioning. The Network Norway initiative that was launched in the early 1990s can be interpreted as a plan to renew the Norwegian higher education system, not by the use of privatisation or increased competition, but by system rationalisation and state determined cooperation or specialisation efforts. Furthermore, the new Act implemented in 1996 replaced individual Acts for the universities, and standardised the legal framework for the whole sector. The amalgamations in the college sector were a direct consequence of the Network Norway initiative, and a vital part of the puzzle to streamline the public higher education system. The introduction of management reforms such as result-oriented planning and a new accounting system, can be seen as attempts to introduce a greater degree of task differentiation and coordination at the same time – a typical characteristic of bureaucratic thinking (Clark 1983:148). The fact that the white paper from the early 1990s commented on the need for national evaluations of certain disciplines in a chapter focusing on governmental steering instruments provides further indications of a state sending out strong signals about the need for administrative order (see St.meld.nr. 40 1990-91).

However, a close look at this white paper also shows signs of an inconsistency between governmental ´talk´ and ´action´. While the reforms implemented in this period emphasised standardisation and bureaucratisation, the political rhetoric also signalled the need for developing the professional responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning (St.meld.nr. 40 1990-91: 57). The composition of the ´quality´ committee that should assess the needs for improvements in 1990 had, for example, no members from outside higher education. In other words, the Ministry of Education, which appointed the committee, included no representatives from employers or other stakeholders of higher education in the ´formal´ national discussions on quality issues. In the white paper from the early 1990s, many statements were also included that pointed to the much needed development of the *academic quality* of the higher education institutions

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(St.meld.nr.40 1990-91: 56). For example, the white paper postulated that academic quality first and foremost was a responsibility for the higher education institutions, and the Ministry of Education followed up several of the recommendations given by the former ´quality´ committee. First, even if the need for more systematic evaluations of higher education was emphasised, the Ministry stated that improvement and not control should be the main focus of this activity. The need for increased institutional learning was in particular highlighted (St.meld.nr. 40 1990-91: 56). The Ministry also signalled that if the institutions developed their own skills in this area, national evaluation activities would be scaled down in the future (St.meld.nr. 40 1990-91: 57). Second, the Ministry did not develop any academic standards or gave any directions on what and how to teach even if an international evaluation of Norwegian higher education that created much attention and debate, strongly suggested that such changes should be made (see OECD 1988). In other words, the development and renewal of these activities were left to the institutions. Thus, for Norwegian universities, the traditional ´lehr- und lehrnfreiheit´ was in this way continued.

The many reforms in higher education in Norway during the 1990s were launched in a sector experiencing change in a number of ways, not least in terms of an increased student influx. In addition, the sector was characterised by institutional drift and a growing internationalisation. For institutions trying to navigate in this sea of reform and change, keeping up with the reforms was only a part of their challenge. As an indirect consequence of the Network Norway reform, one can also identify growing competition between the institutions for academic specialisations and for university status. In this process, institutional behaviour emphasising *entrepreneurialism* seemed to have been a strategy pursued by several institutions. Establishing new study programs in collaboration with foreign partners was, for example, not a move appreciated by the Ministry, but nevertheless paid off in terms of student recruitment and as a means for arguing that the institution should be given the formal right to obtain a certain academic specialisation at a later stage (NNR 2001:61). Attempts to obtain university status were also a significant feature in several colleges, and institutions ´sitting on the fence´ in this process must have felt a danger of being left behind in a future race towards university status. In other words, in the backwaters of the reforms in the 1990s, a ´market´ for the entrepreneurial organisation was emerging. Ironically, this entrepreneurial behaviour can in part be ´blamed´ on governmental policy-making. The expressed needs for developing Norway into a ´knowledge society´ and for developing innovative and entrepreneurial skills in higher education as means to reach this objective were very visible in the white paper mentioned earlier (St.meld.nr 40 1990-91: 14). But while the Ministry saw ´entrepreneurialism´

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as subordinated to national objectives and regulations, what it got was entrepreneurialism uncoupled from political thinking, more related to institutional needs and objectives.

If one analyses the reform and change processes of Norwegian higher education in the 1990s, it is possible to identify events and processes that must have been difficult for institutions to interpret. Important ideas and images highlighted in this period related not only to *administrative efficiency* but also to *academic quality* and *entrepreneurialism and innovation*. The ´steady state´ of the 1980s was, in other words, in the 1990s replaced by a state eager to reform the higher education system. As such these reform efforts, but also the internal developments in the sector, questioned the existing *cultural specific practise* that had previously characterised the relationship between the state and higher education institutions in Norway.

4.2 A precarious state?

Even if policy signals identified above are indications of a more precarious relationship between the state and higher education, it should be underlined that it is not unusual for the state to produce conflicting and confusing policies (Neave 1998; Maassen & Stensaker 2003). New policies may not necessarily imply changes in state governance, especially since some of the ideas and images highlighted, for example, related to academic quality and administrative efficiency, are not exactly novel to Norwegian higher education governance (See Smeby & Brandt 1999; Bleiklie et al. 2000).

Still, the last two decades have illustrated that the traditional pact between society and higher education has come under serious pressure both internationally (Maassen 2003), and in Norway (Olsen 2000). This has led to the introduction of new governance models, and consequently, to new organisational ideals reflecting how higher education institutions should function (Bleiklie 1998).

An important shift in governance arrangements in Europe during the 1980s was the change from *ex ante* planning to *ex post* evaluation. This shift reflected that traditional governance arrangements were not perceived as optimal for stimulating rapid institutional adaptation and change (Maassen 1996: 8). The new governance strategy gave institutional self-regulation a more prominent place (van Vught 1989), with the state as the evaluator of performance and results (Neave 1988). This shift was also identified in Norway (Aamodt et al 1991).

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Researchers observed a managerial model emerging through reorganisation of the governing boards of universities, the introduction of result-oriented planning, and the increased weight given to academic leadership (Aamodt et al 1991:143). Some power and responsibilities were transferred to the institutional level. Still, the Ministry was also strengthening its influence on higher education, for example, through tighter control and reporting systems (Aamodt et al 1991:144).

The example illustrates that the self-regulation approach to system level governance in higher education was not well defined, especially concerning the role of the government in a self-regulatory governance framework. While some theorists allowed for a rather prominent governmental role emphasising ´enforceable decisions´ and active state involvement, others warned against governmental ´power-engineering´ and opted for as little governmental interference as possible (Maassen & Stensaker 2003: 86). This theoretical lack of clarity was also reflected in practice. Consequently, not every change in the state-higher education relationship was necessary a result of applying a self-regulatory governance strategy (Maassen & Stensaker 2003: 92). Hence, one may argue that the spread of self-regulation as a governance approach in the 1980s and early 1990s was a result of many different possibilities for interpreting what the concept was all about, and that the introduction of a new governance approach did not necessarily mean an abandoning of all elements in the old one (Peters 1999:104).

During the 1990s, use of market elements became increasingly common in state governance of higher education. In Norway, this development can be linked to the implementation of private sector management approaches with respect to planning, personnel and financial management (Larsen & Gornitzka 1995; Gornitzka et al 1998). One should still be careful when arguing that all these measures actually were ´market approaches´. As Maassen (2003: 49-50) has pointed out, it is important to differentiate between market models of governance and deregulation models of governance. While concrete reforms in European higher education often have been accompanied by governmental ´guarantees´ of enlarged institutional autonomy, in practice, market models of governance implied that governments actually introduced new regulations for the public sector, including the management of higher education institutions. Hence, not all management reforms in higher education were related to the growing public interest for market models. During the 1990s, pragmatism subsequently became the dominant characteristic in state governance of higher education in Europe (Maassen 2003: 43). In Norway, the result was hybrid governance arrangements (Gornitzka & Maassen 2000: 281).

Due to this pragmatism and the complexity it creates with respect to governance arrangements, several authors have started to view governance arrangements as *sediments* that are put on top of existing governance arrangements (Bleiklie 1998: 304, Reed et al. 2002: xxvii, Maassen 2003: 42). Traditional and new governance dimensions may in this situation coexist, and lead to complex, competing and sometimes contradictory outcomes (Maassen & Stensaker 2003: 94). Still, if governance arrangements are best understood as sediments, the problem that subsequently arises is to be able to differentiate between different arrangements, and to depict the dominance of some governance arrangements over others.

In trying to differentiate between different governance approaches, Reed et al. (2002: xxii), in a book focusing on governance of higher education in the past few decades, have identified ´three logics of regulation´ in higher education. These are marked-based contracts, bureaucratically-based rules and professionally-based norms. As shown by Reed and his colleagues, governance arrangements in a number of countries can be seen as the outcome of different combinations of these three modes of regulation. With respect to the governance of higher education, it can therefore be argued that these regulatory modes make up a framework for understanding and depicting important constraints and opportunities within the field of higher education during the 1990s, and consequently, the ´available´ organisational ideals in this period.

4.3 Organisational ideals – a conceptualisation

Different elements relating to the three logics of regulation can also be found in Norwegian governance arrangements of the 1990s. For example, Bleiklie (1998: 305-307) identifies the existence of three organisational ideals in Norwegian higher education during this decade - the university as a public agency, the university as a corporate enterprise, and the university as an autonomuous cultural institution. Inspired by the contributions by Reed et al (2002) and Bleiklie (1998), and by incorporating the policy developments in Norwegian higher education in the 1990s, three organisational ideals will be presented below. In the following, they shall be referred to as the bureaucratic, the entrepreneurial and the professional organisation.

In Norway, reform initiatives such as result-oriented planning and the accounting reform, were not only implemented in higher education, but in the public sector in general following the political interest in increased quality, efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector. Hence, a set of policy expectations in Norwegian higher education in the 1990s was related to higher education as loyal

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implementer of these reforms. Rapidly increasing student numbers provided in addition an argument for more formal structuring to handle the quantitative expansion of higher education (Bleiklie 1998: 305). The organisational ideal that relates to this set of expectations is that of the *bureaucratic* organisation. This ideal emphasises the formal organisation, hierarchy and control, and also the process described by Clark (1983: 146) as ´layering´ - the establishment of new administrative structures and tasks, and an increase in the relative number of personnel working on such issues. A bureaucratic organisation would in addition emphasise task specialisation, where generalists are replaced by specialists with administrative credentials and expertise being more central for occupying certain positions in the hierarchy. The emphasis on control will in this organisation also lead to an expansion of rules and standardisation in how to behave and act in various situations and settings (Bleiklie 1998: 305).

A set of expectations in Norwegian higher education in the 1990s were related to higher education as producer of services for the society and as stimuli for increased economic growth (Bleiklie 1998: 307, St.meld.nr. 40 1990-91: 14). These expectations highlighted the need for increased internationalisation of Norwegian higher education. Further that Norway was in urgent need to develop into being a ´knowledge society´. The organisational ideal that relates to these expectations is that of the *entrepreneurial* organisation. Instead of state control via an institutional bureaucracy, institutional leaders should be given the power to explore the possibilities in the ´market´ for higher education (Bleiklie 1998: 306). Furthermore, in this market, each institution must establish its own ´exchange system´, to students, staff, and not least, to other higher education institutions (Clark 1983:62). Since the institutions are dependent on well built exchange relations to these constituencies and to serve and respond fast to any market changes, innovation becomes a central objective. Shifts in consumer choices and market characteristics require an organisation adjusted to change. Less emphasis is therefore put on formal structures, and hierarchical structures are replaced by organic and flat (temporary) structures. Specialists are required also in the entrepreneurial organisation, but due to the need of being sensitive to market changes, liaison and communication structures both within the organisation and between the organisation and various markets are emphasised. Information on what preferences the market might have is a requirement for organisational survival. Hence, various forms of evaluations become a core activity (Bleiklie 1998:307).

A last set of expectations identified in Norwegian higher education in the 1990s is related to higher education as a cultural activity (Bleiklie 1998:305). Policy initiatives, such as the establishment of the Quality of Studies Commission

consisting only of people with an academic background and the establishment of national evaluations emphasising learning, improvement and the need to adjust evaluations to disciplinary demands, are examples of political expectations that highlight the *professional* organisation. This organisational ideal is rooted in expertise structures, for example in personal, discipline-based, collegial, or guild forms (Clark 1983:158). Furthermore, authority is decentralised and located at the bottom of the expertise structures (Bleiklie 1998:306). Standardisation in the organisation is not a product of rules, but of skills and accepted collegial decisions. Thus, authority works through the informal structure, and by mechanisms such as socialisation, indoctrination and training. Even if there is a formal structure in the professional organisation, the work standards are not set by administrators but by the experts and the knowledge and information they authorise. In this way, the expertise structures not only control their own work, they also try to control the administrative decisions that might affect them.

Given the different characteristics of these organisational ideals, it may be asked whether the concept of quality actually can be adjusted accordingly. Does the concept of quality fit one of these ideals better than the others, or does the concept of quality fit all three ideals? To answer these questions, a small detour into the concept of quality is needed.

4.4 Quality as a flexible and global ´meta-idea´

The concept of quality is one of the most dominating and influenctial ´meta-ideas´ globally the last twenty years invading both the private and the public sector (Mickletwait & Wooldridge 1996; see also Czarniawska & Sevón 1996). In the mid 1990s, US observers Cameron and Whetten argued that the concept of quality also was at the very centre of attention in higher education:

> *A fundamental shift has occurred recently in the literature of higher education. This shift has been more gradual and less dramatic than it has been in the broader organisational studies literature, but it has been significant nevertheless. It is a shift away from considerations of the construct of effectiveness to describe organisational performance in institutions of higher education and toward considerations of the construct of quality. Quality has begun to replace effectiveness as a central organisation-level variable in higher education. With a few noticeable exceptions, effectiveness has largely been abandoned and quality has become the pre-eminent construct* (Cameron & Whetten 1996: 265).

However, even if one agrees that quality by the mid 1990s had become the central organisation-level variable in higher education, it was still difficult to find agreement on an exact definition of the concept, regardless of its application inside or outside higher education.

Reeves and Bednar (1994: 419) have listed numerous ways quality has been perceived. According to them, quality has been defined as value, conformance to specifications, conformance to requirements, fitness for use, loss avoidance, or meeting and/or exceeding costumer expectations. An empirical study revealed the same discrepancy when it comes to how the concept of quality was perceived by different stakeholders in higher education (Harvey & Green 1993: 11). Harvey and Green found that stakeholder's views on quality could be categorised according to five broad definitions: quality as exceptional, quality as perfection, quality as fitness for purpose, quality as value for money, and quality as transformation.

On this basis, one could easily agree with van Vught (1996: 187) that ´from an epistemological point of view, words and definitions (relating to quality) are not very important: words can be given whatever meaning is thought to be appropriate´. Quality is a term covered by the philosopher Wittgenstein's argument that a term sometimes is used extensively to preclude formulating a definition capable of conveying the full range of the term's meaning. This use, according to Wittgenstein, comprise a family of meanings in the sense that they are united ´by a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing; sometimes similarities of a general nature; in some cases, similarities in detail´ (quoted from Wagner 1989: 7). In other words, quality is a term that has a great potential to unite different stakeholders, at least on the surface. If one also acknowledges that defining quality touches upon some of the core values in higher education (Pollitt & Bouchard 1995: 18), one suddenly understands why several commentators argue that quality really is about power and politics (Trow 1994; Neave 1992; van Vught 1996; Zbaracki 1998; Brennan 1999).

Given this link to power and politics, it is not surprising that it is possible to relate the concept of quality to different purposes, including the three organisational ideals identified in the current study. Pollitt & Bouchard (1995: 16) argue, for example, that in principle there are only two major perspectives on quality, an output oriented view including definitions such as value for money, consumer satisfaction, zero errors and vice versa, and a process oriented view embracing only one of the earlier mentioned definitions, i.e., quality as transformative (cf. Harvey & Green 1993). Tuckman (1994: 731) claims that an output oriented

definition of quality can be linked to the politically ´New Right´ movement in western societies in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with its emphasis on deregulation of public services, greater managerial discretion, the introduction of market and quasi-market mechanisms and its focus on consumer needs (the *entrepreneurial* organisational ideal). In this situation:

> *Quality itself becomes an icon, a selling point for an increasing number of goods and services. The customer becomes deified, surveyed to find their demand and wishes. Meeting customers requirement is the definition of quality offered and employed* (Tuckman 1994: 742).

Those who see quality as transformative have opposed this view, and argued that emphasis should be taken away from a mere customer, product or managerial role, towards an improvement oriented approach, focusing more on those who can actually make a difference – teachers and students of higher education (see, for example, Barnett 1994; Dill 1995; Harvey 1995). Even if both parties have acknowledged the need for change in higher education, the difference between the perspectives becomes clear in the views of the latter who favour a process that:

> *Require re-weaving the collegial fabric of academic communities, the collective mechanism by which faculty members control and improve the quality of academic programmes and research* (Dill 1995: 107).

As illustrated quality here is related to the *professional* organisational ideal emphasising how important it is that expertise, collegial and disciplinary structures are in charge of any work related to quality.

However, a link to the *bureaucratic* organisational ideal can also be made if one relates the concept of quality to the field it ´came from´ - management theory. Critical observers of the history of management theory have claimed that there, in general, only exist a small number of management ideas that constantly are reproduced over time (Barley & Kunda 1992). Basic characteristics of such management ideas are that they must give the impression of being rational (efficient means to important ends) and progressive (new as well as improved compared to older techniques) (see Abrahamsson 1991; 1996; 1999). Even if there are many supporters of the rational and progressive sides of the quality concept (Grant et al 1994), one could still question whether ´quality´, or rather the assumptions behind the concept, really are as new as often claimed.
Several observers have, for example, pointed out that the quality concept may be seen as ´Neo-Taylorism´, highlighting the use of statistical methods and

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quantitative measuring together with the control-oriented intention of the original concept (Pollitt 1993: 189; see also Boje & Windsor 1993). Quality is, in other words, an idea that can be related to different governance approaches and political objectives (Ritzer 1996).

4.5 Quality adapted to three organisational ideals

Given the flexible nature of the concept of quality, it is at this point possible to depict how ´quality´ may be adapted to the three organisational ideals described in section 4.3.

In a *bureaucratic* organisation work concerning quality in teaching and learning would most likely be an administrative responsibility emphasising managerial, organisational and control aspects. Due to the hierarchical structure in the organisation, the administrative management would play an important role as initiator and implementer of work related to quality. Thus, initiatives from the central administration can be expected due to its general responsibilities in this field. Due to the strong link bureaucratic organisations have with public authorities, policy initiatives from the national level would be seen as important and sought implemented at the institutional level. Evaluations conducted would be a more technocratic activity, emphasising the spread of such systems, their regularity and the link to administrative and managerial decision-making systems. Due to a lack of expert understanding in disciplinary and other knowledge structures, quality indicators may be developed as a quantification of such qualitative dimensions.

In an *entrepreneurial* organisation work concerning quality in teaching and learning would emphasise the opinions of the ´customers´ and other stakeholders in higher education. Thus, students and employers would be seen as important groups, and the establishment of means of communication and information exchange between these groups and the institutions would be prioritised. However, since higher education institutions serve many different groups, one might expect that work related to quality also would be rather multifaceted, with individual units inside the institution having different strategies and activities towards ´their´ groups. Evaluations would probably focus on relevance issues, and stressing the link between studies and employability i.e., whether students get a job. Signals from the ´market´ on student abilities and of the education given would be important for institutional management and for various decision-making activities at the central level. Since the relations to customers and other stakeholders are so important, the institutions will also provide information on

their work to improve quality to these stakeholders – as a form of market information. Thus, that a given institution is accredited by an international agency, or has implemented a well known or widespread quality assurance system (e.g., ISO9000) could be seen as important for attracting students and further improving relations with the environment.

In the *professional* organisation work concerning quality in teaching and learning would emphasise activities relevant for the development of individual disciplines or specific knowledge structures in the institution. Hence, work related to quality would focus on the traditional ways teaching and learning are conducted, for example through the use of external examiners, teaching methods, examination routines, change in curriculum and study structures, and the link between teaching and research activities of the academic staff. A consequence of this orientation towards specific needs of a given knowledge structure might be a lack of an institutional system for evaluating quality in teaching and learning. Another consequence could be that management and the academic leadership is uncoupled from this type of work, and that work related to quality is seldom controlled by the central administration. Evaluation would in this organisation be conducted through a peer review system with internal and external colleagues and fellow experts as an important part. Professional organisations outside the institutions, for example in medicine, law, business studies, could play a role in these systems – either as an information source used in evaluations, or as a part of peer review activities.

The different models are briefly summed up in table 4.1

Table 4.1 *Some indicators of work concerning quality in teaching and learning in relation to three organisational ideals.*

	The bureaucratic organisation	The entrepreneurial organisation	The professional organisation
Institutional interpretations of quality (accountability) directed at	- managerial and administrative needs, regulatory requirements, national policy initiatives	- market change and more dynamic environments	- academic freedom and disciplinary standards
Institutional implementation of work related to quality linked to	- the formal hierarchical organisational structure - evaluation as a technocratic activity (rule-/taskoriented)	- costumers and stakeholders - evaluation as a check of relevance	- different knowledge and expertise structures (disciplines/institutes) - evaluation as peer review, and as a responsibility for the knowledge experts
Institutional effects concerning quality visible as	- administrative systems, routines, reports, documentation and rules	- student satisfaction surveys/stakeholder feedback systems - external information of the work to improve quality	- new teaching and learning initiatives, curriculum change - changes in didactics - pedagogical initiatives

On the basis of table 4.1, it should be underlined that the models are based on a conceptualisation. Even if these ideals incorporate important ideas recognisable in Norwegian higher education policy-making in this period, they are first and foremost intended as a tool for studying in which direction changes in organisational identities were headed in the 1990s.

5 Research design, data and method

Both within the field of organisation studies and in the literature on research methodology, a debate has been running on what is known as ´the crisis of legitimation and representation in social theory´ (Denzin & Lincoln 1998:21). This crisis is related to the increasing interest in interpretative and constructivist studies, in critical theory, and in post modernist studies of organisations and problems raised by these in relation to the methodological handling of conceptual dichotomies such as real/symbolic, micro/macro, change/stability, real/constructed and particular/universal.

The debate on these questions is highly relevant to the institutional framework used in this study consisting of elements from both ´old´ and ´new´ institutional theory. As part of the attempt to find some common ground between the two perspectives, the present study attempts to draw up a research design where boundaries between these dichotomies are considered of lesser importance. Thus, the methodological starting point belongs to a position that by some has been labelled the middle ground of methodology, where certain negative characteristics of empiricist thinking are rejected, but where inquirers simultaneously must avoid the subjectivity and error of naive inquiry through judicious use of method (Schwandt 1994:119). According to Smith (1989:157) the advocates of this solution take the position that:

> *Although the ideas of objectivity, detachment, and methodological constraint as defined by empiricists are a fiction, interpretative inquiry must be made more systematic and rigorous. The claim here is that methods cannot eliminate researcher subjectivity but they can certainly minimise it; they are thereby the criteria against which to judge that some results are more objective than others.*

This position puts certain leads on research design and methods. Not least with respect to the gathering of data, since the method must be able to fathom a large variety of factors; the external influence exerted on the organisation in question, the internal processes that lead to concrete decisions and actions, the effects of these decisions and actions within the organisation, and possible changes of organisational identity in relation to these factors. Hence case studies point themselves out as an obvious choice.

5.1 Selection of cases

Despite the fact that the choice of case studies may seem obvious – given the research questions of the study – various views exist as to how cases ought to be

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selected. Stake (1994:237) makes a distinction between three forms of case studies: intrinsic (where the intention is to learn something from a particular case), instrumental (where the intention is to provide insight into an issue or refining theory) and collective (which actually is an instrumental case study design extended to several cases jointly).

The present study is based on a collective case study design. The reason is that higher education in Norway comprises a number of institutions with different characteristics, traditions, geographic location, size, academic specialisations, and not least, reform history. However, they all belong to an organisational field. Thus, the selection of institutions within this study has been made with a view to embrace the breadth of the variation within this organisational field allowing for some *synchronic* comparisons (Yin 1989; Stake 1994). Consequently, six higher education institutions have been selected as cases: The University of Tromsø (UITØ) and The Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), the colleges in Stavanger (HIS) and Lillehammer (HIL) and also two privately owned institutions, The Norwegian School of Management BI (BI) and The Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology (MF). These institutions have been selected due to their variance on certain basic characteristics (see below).

In relation to *size*, and measured in student numbers, two of the institutions are relatively large with more than 15.000 students (The Norwegian School of Management BI and The Norwegian University of Science and Technology), two are medium sized institutions between 6.000 – 8.000 students (The University of Tromsø and Stavanger College). Two institutions can be characterised as small with less than 3.000 students (The Norwegian Lutheran School and Lillehammer College).

The selection of cases also includes *private* higher education institutions (MF and BI). Despite the fact that both private and public institutions in Norway may be allotted state subsidies according to the number of students, state subsidies, nevertheless, are smaller for private institutions. It could be argued that this might lead to less dependence on public support and a stronger dependence on ´the market´ in the form of student recruitment and legitimacy, and that this in turn increases the significance of a distinct institutional profile and identity.

In addition to the variation in size and ownership, the six institutions also had a quite different *reform history* during the 1990s. For instance, in 1994 Stavanger College was merged with an array of other colleges, whereas Lillehammer College was affected only slightly by structural changes of the same kind. In 1996 NTNU

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was established through a merger of an educational institution heavily based on technology, NTH, and several other institutions with specialisations more in the field of social science and humanities. On the other hand, The University of Tromsø has been going through step-wise, but continuous development since its establishment in 1969. Also this organisation was subjected to an internal re-organisation in the period between 1992 and 1997 as a result of adapting a new organisational structure. This process, however, was initiated internally, and not a result of an externally initiated merger process such as the one at NTNU, with the Parliament as a central actor in the process of re-organisation. As a privately owned institution, The Norwegian School of Management BI has been less affected by the public reforms of the '90s, and it expanded widely in this period following mergers with several other private institutions within the fields of economics and administration. On the other hand, The Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology (MF) may be said to be more of an institution marked by continuity and traditions than of any of the great institutional changes of the '90s.

However, the fact that the study takes up the ten-year period from 1990 to 2000 first and foremost implies that the design makes a *diachronic* comparison possible wherein each institution is compared to itself at various points in time. Hence, a central ambition is to illustrate how higher education institutions develop over time instead of merely presenting snap-shots of them at given points in time. It is the ambition of the present study to demonstrate connections between various events, processes and measures in order to emphasise the complexity involved in the creation of organisational identities. The fact that the study deals with a period rather close to the present is due to a methodological attempt to preserve a long span of time, keeping in mind that change takes time, while at the same time securing that the events analysed are contemporary enough for informants to remember details and processes of importance. For instance, one point of criticism that may be raised against recent empirical studies within organisational theory is exactly that the changes studied occurred so long ago that it is both hard to provide documentation and informants able to recollect the processes of change. Among the most well known studies which may be claimed to be based on this methodological approach are Tolbert and Zucker's (1983) study of the diffusion of a municipal reform in the period from 1880 to 1935, and Fligstein's (1985) frequently cited study on the diffusion of the multi-division structure in the USA between 1919 and 1979.

The fact that the study embraces the span of a decade also offers the possibility for commenting on whether the character of the changes that occur is merely ´symbolic´ or ´bona fide´. As mentioned previously, the perspective of the present

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study is interpretative which to some extent diminishes the importance and relevancy of this distinction. Nevertheless, a period of this length might contribute to new nuances being added to assumptions within recent organisational theory that, by and large, organisational change has to be understood symbolically as a de-coupling between organisational structure and behaviour and not as ´bona fide´ change (cf. DiMaggio & Powell 1983).

5.2 Selection and sources of data

The decision to undertake a collective case-study approach indicates that gathering and analysis of data will be carried out qualitatively. Thus, significant features will be made up by ´soft´ data i.e., document analysis and interviews. Links may also be drawn to an interpretative perspective within which gathering and analysis of data are to be understood as a process based more on subjectivity than on objectivity. For instance it may be claimed that in this way, data to a larger extent are actively ´constructed´ and ´picked out´ rather than being passively ´gathered´ (Alvesson & Björkman 1992: 41; see also Alvesson & Skiöldberg 1994).

All the same, a point of departure like this involves its own problems with regard to selection of data. Because the study deals with a period spanning a decade characterised by extensive changes within higher education, and also because the study comprises as many as six higher education institutions, one may rapidly end up in a situation where the large amount of possible interesting sources of data transcends possibilities for an analysis defined within frames of time and resources of the study. For this reason data has been very carefully selected and especially focused on activities, processes and measures related to more ´institutional´ quality improvement activities. Activities that appear to have been of significance for the creation of meaning and for the organisational identity have been especially drawn upon. Hence, the focus has been set on organisational events that to a larger degree than other organisational processes seem to have functioned as ´carriers´ of such significance.

Criteria for selection have typically been confined to events either initiated at the central level or by being of significance to several of the basic units at the institution. This has directed attention towards super-ordinate questions of steering, organisation and evaluation as well as towards processes of strategy and planning, processes which all, at least in theory, ought to be of great significance to higher education institutions. Not least plans and steering documents contain a lot of information that may be interpreted from a perspective of creation of meaning, wherein plans may be perceived as important symbols per se (Cohen &

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March 1974). Thus, at the outset, all strategy plans, documents on budget and single documents connected with questions related to quality of the institutions from the years 1990 to 2000 have been surveyed and analysed. Not always has it been possible, however, to procure all the documents desired. Among other things this is due to the fact that documents dating from before the reorganisation of the college sector in 1994 appear not to have been kept to any large extent after many of the mergers. In order to remedy this problem other sources like historical and other accounts of the institutions, and also external evaluation reports have been utilised.

At the same time strategic and other institutional processes have not been taken for granted as the only events creating meaning and challenging organisational identity. The study also includes data from processes originating from ´bottom up´ initiatives and natural features of development, but which later have proven significant to the development of the institution´s identity. Thus, another principle guiding the selection of data is that insofar as events have ´popped up´ which are used by informants as points of reference for institutional change and development these are included in the study. The latter principle is important, not least, in order to include processes and events which have other origins than the institutional leadership. In this way has the bottom-heavy nature of higher education institutions been taken into account (cf. Clark 1983). During this process, internal newspapers published at the institutions, various internal ´information bulletins´ and the intranet of the institutions have proven vary valuable as sources.

In addition to documents and document analysis, data in the present study are constituted by a series of qualitative interviews mainly with present and former academic and administrative leaders at the institutions. Giving priority to leaders may be accounted for in different ways. Firstly, leaders often possess a lot of information on both internal conditions and the relation and dependency of the institution to the surroundings, and also on various political aims that higher education is meant to fulfil. There is reason to believe that this also goes for the work on quality. Secondly there is reason to expect that the academic and administrative leadership on the different levels play a very central role in the processes of interpretation, decision-making and creation of meaning that lead up to organisational activities related to the work on quality. Thirdly, the leadership on different levels is probably the best at evaluating the potential effects of the work on quality, and the consequences work on quality may have for institutional identity. Consequently, the selection of informants has been based less on representation than on the fact that they possess insight and breadth of outlook

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related to questions central to this study. Informal contact with staff members in each particular institution was important during this process in order to be able to identify central informants.

A total of 72 interviews have been carried out at various levels in the institutions. Twelve in-depth interviews were carried out at each institution. As mentioned, priority was given to administrative and academic leaders at various levels. However, other persons who have held a central office, led work on quality, been involved in strategic processes, or who in other ways have been of importance, have occasionally been included as informants. An important criterium used to select informants was also that a majority of the persons interviewed at least had seniority corresponding to the period subjected to analysis, namely the years from 1990 to 2000. However, the limited amount of interviews at each institution may supplant richness in detail for the benefit of more extensive and significant features of development and general tendencies. Again this trade off has been necessary as a consequence of the frames of time and resources of the study.

All interviews were carried out within a time frame of 90 minutes. A pre-composed interview-guide formed a frame for the interviews (see appendix). The questions asked consisted of a combination of open, semi-open and closed questions (Merton, Fiske & Kendall 1990). The structure of the interview-guide was in accordance with the wish to survey central features and indications of institutional identity via so-called open questions. The questions dealt with characteristics specifying the particularities of the institution, of the boundary between ´we´ and ´the others´ in relation to what exactly makes each institution unique. This includes traditions of leadership and focuses on teaching and research (Välimaa 1995; Czarniawska & Sevón 1996). Questions within this section were often linked to comparisons between institutions, but also to comparisons between various organisational units within the same organisation in order to discern possible common traits in views, organisational practice and institutional visions. Further, the semi-open questions and the questions on examples were employed in order to identify processes of significance to the work on quality at the institution. Finally, closed questions were included on effects and results of the work on quality (Alvesson & Björkman 1992).

Nevertheless, the interview-guide was not adhered to slavishly at all times. For instance, situations often demanded additional questions in order to clarify various statements and the meaning attached to certain concepts stated by informants. Thus the interview-guide may be said to consist of formal and informal (open) interview-designs combined, with the purpose of making

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structured interviews possible to an extent where the institutions may be compared to each other with regard to various themes. At the same time it was designed to catch local and unique events of importance to institutional identity.

5.3 Validity, reliability and objectivity

As mentioned initially, the choice of research design – case studies – does not imply that the aim of the present study is solely ideographic, or that the ambition is only the description of singular cases. Despite the fact that the study may be classified as a typical example of qualitative research, the methodological point of departure does take into consideration that smooth transitions do exist between quantitative and qualitative methods (Østerud 1995:2, cf. also Holter & Kalleberg 1996). For instance, within the present study, qualitative interviews are sought combined with more quantitatively oriented ways of structuring interviews. In practice this implies an attempt to transcend the contradiction between ideographic and nomothetic research – that is: the contradiction between research attempting to describe singular cases and research aiming at uncovering general structures.

An approach like this, however, demands additional comments concerning validity, reliability and objectivity; not least because disagreement reigns as to whether these concepts are of any relevance and may be fruitful within more qualitatively oriented research designs (Silverman 1993:153). On the one hand, Kalleberg (1987 has claimed that validity and reliability are rules of method which to a large extent are connected to a tradition of quantitative research, and that a transfer of these to a more qualitatively oriented tradition of research might easily make them appear as mere scientific rituals. According to him, attempts to follow certain ´quantitative´ procedures within a qualitatively oriented research design will prove a meaningless activity:

> *The important consideration is whether data fits the research question, whether the central questions of the study are academically interesting or whether the forms of analysis chosen are apt for providing good answers to the questions* (Kalleberg 1987:11).

On the other hand Østerud (1995) seems to accept the use of the concepts of validity and reliability in a more qualitatively oriented research design also. In such a context, however, they will have to be reconstructed in order to make them useful as rules of method:

> *Usually ´validity´ and ´reliability´ are considered as mere technical rules within the rules of method. However, treating them only as this would, in my opinion, imply a backlash into a positivist paradigm. Of course there are methodological*

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> *rules, but they exist with clear epistemological and ontological implications* (Østerud, 1995:3, my translation).

The position of Østerud implies a strongly phrased argument for keeping, although reformulated, concepts as validity and reliability within a research design with a qualitative emphasis also. The emphasis should then concentrate on documenting how information was organised and systematised, and how interpretation and analysis was carried out (Kvale 1989, Gilje & Grimen 1993).

However, qualitative studies imply difficulties of interpretation. The researcher is forced to relate to a world already interpreted by the social actors themselves. One is confronted with the phenomenon that Giddens (1977:79) labels double hermeneutics. That is, the researcher will have to re-interpret something already interpreted by the informants. In this connection, the challenge posed to the researcher will be one of both reflecting the reality of the informant and also to transcend the self-images of the informants. Gilje & Grimen (1993:146) claim that one way of doing that is to utilise Clifford Geertz's distinction between experience-near and experience-distant concepts. Thus experience-near concepts will make it possible to be able to familiarise one-self with informants' perception of reality, whereas the proper understanding of such perceptions might be reflected through experience-distant concepts. It may sound tempting to use the distinction between experience-near and experience-distant concepts, but in relation to the informants of the present study it involves new problems. When informants themselves have a background within research and science – activities which have as an important task to utilise and understand experience-distant concepts – this may erase the distinction between the concepts and make it difficult to illustrate matters beyond the informants' perceptions. Hence the researcher's possibility of creating distance to the interpretations of the informants shrinks. With this in mind the reliability, the validity and the ´objectivity´ of the study will be commented on in some detail.

The *validity* of a given study can be determined on the basis of three criteria (Kvale 1989). The criterium of correspondance is concerned with whether what is described corresponds to the real world. The criterium of coherence deals with whether the results are logical and consistent. Finally, the criterium of pragmatics/utility deals with applicability and contingent possibilities for generalising the study. The first two criteria refer to what is often called internal validity, while the latter refers to what is often called external validity (Østerud 1995).

Within the present study ´the real world´ (the criterium of correspondence) is captured in several ways. Firstly variation is emphasised when it comes to the disciplinary background and the level of the informants´ formal position in the focal organisation. This variation is important due to the fact that the most important group of informants, academic and administrative leaders, may have different functions and have differing importance as decision-makers and coordinators at each particular institution/faculty/department. For instance, studies have shown that the importance of academic leadership may vary between different units, and this may be connected to both historical features and features of particular subjects (Becher 1989, Maassen 1996).

Secondly, informants belong to several ´worlds´. Often they are simultaneously members of an academic field, members of the larger academic society and they represent particular institutions (Clark 1983, Välimaa 1995). Expectations of leaders may also vary depending on which ´world´ makes demands on them. This is sought attended to by opening up for several interpretation alternatives, so-called interpretation pluralism (Gilje & Grimen 1993:157). Such pluralism, however, puts forth the question of which interpretation is the right one.

Several suggestions have been put forward as to how to solve this problem. A hermeneutic solution is to claim that the distinction between the subjective and the objective is artificial because

> *The interpretative turn is not simply a new methodology, but rather a challenge to the very idea that inquiry into the social world and the value of the understanding that results is to be determined by methodology* (Rabinow & Sullivan 1987:20).

Another solution is to argue for a synthesis between social realism and constructivism (Hammersley 1992). A third option, and the one pursued in this study, is to use methodology as a mediating tool (Kirk & Miller 1986).

This leads us to the question of whether the information gathered from the informants is logical, reasonable and consistent (the criterium of coherence). Often one may fall into the trap of becoming ´anecdotical´, for instance, by emphasising details and spectacular statements at the cost of the ordinary and less dramatic (Silverman 1993:153). In order to seek to avoid this trap, criteria for selection of quotations has been, firstly: that they must be focused on the questions directly relevant to the study. Secondly, quotations used must represent views found among several informants at the same institution. Therefore, any quoted viewpoint in this study represents a statement that several of the informants have made or seems to agree upon, either directly or indirectly.

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In addition different variants of ´method triangulation´ have also been applied in order to enhance the solidity of the interpretation. Firstly a number of independent evaluation reports and historical accounts of the different institutions have been utilised in order to nuance and control the interpretations presented in the study. Evaluation reports from various national evaluations of particular disciplines carried out during the '90s have been used. But historical accounts of the development at some of the institutions have also been pulled in. In relation to the University of Tromsø, NTNU, Stavanger College and the Norwegian School of Management BI such accounts have proven themselves very valuable (see for instance Fulsås 1993; Hård et al 1997; Lundin et al 1993; Bull & Vorren 1998; Arntzen et al 1999; Johnsen 1999; Amdam 1993; Selvik 1999). This ´observer triangulation´ may enhance both validity and reliability; especially if the independent observations appear to accord concerning the interpretation of a phenomenon (cf. Kirk & Miller 1986).

The other type of triangulation applied involved representatives of the institutions being given the opportunity to read descriptions and analyses of their own institution. Thus they have been made able to comment on the interpretations presented in the report. The problem with this type of ´informant triangulation´ is that among informants there may be an interest attached to presenting the institution or ones own position or role in a favourable light. However, to the extent that the researchers own interpretations, the interpretations of other observers and the statements of informants tally with each other, the degree of validity might be said to be high.

However, the validity of a study is not only connected to recognition and verification of earlier statements and interpretations. Not least it is important to focus on what is not formulated or given attention to by the informants. Tacit knowledge is a concept stemming from Michael Polanyi (1967), and refers to aspects of understanding that are unconscious or usually not reflected upon. Among other factors, the institutional and academic background of the leaders might contribute to the production of this kind of ´tacit knowledge´. Working in a higher education institution for years or having a specific disciplinary background could lead to acquisition of certain perspectives of understanding and frames of analysis, and to the exclusion of other relevant perspectives.

One way to uncover symbolic expressions and tacit knowledge is to illustrate the background to the understanding of the leaders via so-called ´thick descriptions´. This implies making explicit the context of various acts (Geertz 1983). Not least,

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thick descriptions will be relevant in relation to external validity (pragmatics /criterium of utility). As the informants of this study do not make up a statistically representative sample, the possibilities for generalisation in the perspective of a purely quantitative frame of understanding are limited. What is attempted is rather what Silverman (1993) and Yin (1989) call analytical generalisation. This form of generalisation refers to theoretical assumptions and statements rather than to the statistical universe.

Østerud (1995) employs a similar argument by claiming that more qualitatively oriented research aiming for understanding ought not to use generalisation as a criterion, but rather employ the concept of ´transferability´. His argument is that no matter what, a statistical generalisation will prove superficial and blurring, because the context of the object of study is of such decisive importance to the phenomena studied within the social sciences. Thus, the best a researcher can do is to offer a description, as complete as possible, of the context in question. This may offer a useful basis of evaluation to researchers interested in testing the theoretical assumptions in other contexts. At the same time it is important to make a distinction between opinions shared by many, and opinions which may only be related to a minority of informants. The use of expressions such as ´most suggest´ or ´a minority´, implies attempts to add nuance to the material.

In any case, however, the conduct and preferences of the informants must be coupled to their environment since the values and attitudes of the informants both are *communal and consequential in terms of (the) relations to a cultural community* (Bruner 1990:29). This may be of great importance for the ways in which informants express themselves, and for interpreting their expressions. Prelli (1989:87), for instance, claims that members of the academic community have their own:

> *scientific discourse* (which implies)... *selective use of symbols to induce cooperative acts and attitudes regarding a mediating symbolic orientation.*

For this reason, in order to be able to put statements and interpretations of informants into perspective, the interview guide contained some questions which sought to reflect the frame of understanding and background to values of the informants.

Attempts to increase the *reliability* of the study have been undertaken, as mentioned earlier, by using a partially structured interview guide during interviews. This in itself is supposed to enhance reliability (Merton et al 1990). Nevertheless questions may be asked as to whether data and information gathered

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are actually of high reliability. Uncertainty will always prevail as to whether gathering of data has been carried out accurately enough. Within a quantitative research design high reliability will always be the result of independent measuring providing the same results. Within a more qualitatively oriented research design, however, it will prove more difficult to fulfil the demands for many independent and identical measurements. Rubin & Rubin (1995:38), among other things, claim that:

> *qualitative interviewing assumes a continually changing world and recognises that what we hear depends on when we ask the question and to whom.*

Against this, Kirk and Miller (1986:72) and Silverman (1993:146) claim that such a position would eliminate all systematic research, as it would not be possible, then, to assume the existence of stable relations in society. These authors suggest that even though the world is changing, it is still possible for other researchers to replicate a study if the researcher describes and documents his actions during the research process. Consequently high reliability during different interviews will depend on whether the procedures followed are identical from one interview to another, that the informants understand the questions the same way, and that the answers may be grouped without misunderstandings occurring.

In order to enhance the reliability of the study, the interview guide was pre-tested on three persons who all had been in similar positions as the informants selected. This pre-test led to some minor corrections of the order and the wording of some questions. However, the interview guide contained relatively few questions with closed answering categories, something which Silverman (1993:148) claim contributes to high reliability. Instead the interview guide opened up for the informants' own alternatives. This choice was made because the author did not want to transfer his own pre-conception to the informants (cf. Gilje & Grimen 1993:148).

All interviews were carried out between November 1999 and September 2000. The reception of the author was very positive. The time allotted for the interview in most instances was sufficient, and when more time was used it was normally at the suggestion of the informant. Before informants were asked to respond about their role in the work on quality at the institutions, all interview situations were started with the author making an introduction about the purpose of the study and what publications would be the result. All informants were told that statements expressed by them might be used as documentation, but that it would not be possible to link statements back to certain informants.

On the basis of feminist theory, Rubin & Rubin (1995:38-39) have suggested that a situation of asymmetry may prevail during interview situations. It is the researcher who makes and puts forth the questions, and chooses their order. This may contribute to the interview being turned into a certain direction, thus forcing the informant into perspectives of interpretation that they would not have initiated or based themselves on. On the other hand, almost all of the informants either were, or had been, in positions of power at the different institutions. This fact must be said to have a strongly moderating influence on such an asymmetrical power relationship. A typical characteristic of the informants was also that they appeared assured in the interview situation. This, of course, may be explained by the fact that many of the informants themselves have been or still are researchers, and thus have experienced themselves in the role of the interviewer.

One condition which may have a negative influence in relation to the question of reliability is the fact that none of the interviews were recorded on tape due to scarcity of time and resources. Instead quotations from informants were written down directly on the pre-fabricated questionnaires during the interview. Of course this way of gathering data implies that not all information communicated was written down. At the same time this gave the informant an opportunity to correct and nuance statements while they were being set to paper. Informants were quite often asked to specify precisely statements that the author perceived as unclear. In the wake of the interviews, the pre-fabricated questionnaires were analysed both in relation to type of institutions and in relation to the informants' formal status and positions. In this connection various standpoints and opinions were identified and categorised.

Finally a few words ought to be said also about the author's own role in relation to the research problem of this study. At this stage problems related to *objectivity* and *cognitive bias* arises. In other words: whether the results presented are free from pre-conceived points of view.

Therefore it should be emphasised here that both NIFU and the author have undertaken assignments for the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs in connection with political initiatives related to evaluation and quality in the '90s. These assignments have comprised both steering, administration and analysis of possible experiences and effects at universities and colleges in Norway. Thus, as the aims have often been to contribute to an improvement of teaching and learning at the institutions, it is possible to claim that it is absolutely in the interest of the author to uncover the largest possible effect of the work on quality. Alternatively it is could be claimed that the author has wanted to interpret

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findings from certain standpoints – often labelled as the ´Halo´-effect. The study ought to be read with this in mind.

In addition, the fact that the author has been involved in work on evaluation and quality ever since the early '90s has led to extensive knowledge of and good relations to, some of the informants included in this study. Thus, potentially, the study is also viable to the so-called ´Hawthorne´-effect - whether the researcher has contributed to influencing informants in a certain direction (Silverman 1993: 156). For instance, a possible effect of personal relations may be that some informants have wished to be more sympathetically inclined towards the process and the effects they think that interviewer wants.

At the same time the informants' knowledge of the interviewer might heighten the degree of confidence in the interview process, thus enabling the researcher to uncover conditions that informants may not so willingly reveal to ´strangers´. Common frames of reference and experiences might also lessen the degree of misunderstandings in the process of interpreting the information, and hence be regarded as an advantage for the validity of the study.

5.4 Data presentation

Data presentation involves a wide range of possible choices for style of presentation, depending on whether the cases are to be communicated employing impressionistic, literary or other techniques (Van Maanen 1988). However, irrespective of choice of style of presentation, it is a requirement that the text must communicate meaning and analytical elements simultaneously. In the present study it has, not least, been essential to highlight factors of importance regarding the handling of work on quality, and consequently, to organisational identity. This has influenced the way the text is systematised. However, regarding the presentation of case studies, the last point may seem a bit paradoxical. Normally case studies imply exactly an attempt to catch totalities and complex connections and not fragments which may be easily labelled under certain headlines and put into sharply delimited analytical categories.

In a critical comment to this tendency of fragmentation, Czarniawska (1997:186) argues for the use of narrative and literary means in the data presentation as an alternative to catching the complex interplay between the many factors that contribute to organisational life. Not least, the use of narratives may contribute to greater clarity regarding the use of metaphors that students of neo-institutional

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theory so often become addicted to. It may thus create greater understanding of the dynamics that organisations usually consist of. A criticism against much organisational research is that texts are produced which reduce life and dynamics within an organisation and make it *stiff as rigor mortis* (Salzer-Mörling 1998:128). Researchers in organisational theory often create texts in which informants and other members of the organisation only to a small extent recognise themselves. Not least, this is a criticism which may be raised against some of the neo-institutional concepts. For instance, when defining the concept of ´institutional isomorphism´ the theory specifies the causes (successful ideas, examples in the environment) and the effects of this form of organisational adaptation (greater structural similarity in organisational forms), but does not specify the processes that may possibly lead to this result (Czarniawska 1997:187). The concept of ´imitation´ creates in a similar vein an impression that organisational adaptation is a rather passive process. It is a term that may hide organisational dynamics involved in adaptation processes.

Even though one may agree on the need for creating dynamic texts, it may nevertheless be claimed that this need is perhaps greater in relation to the communication of an intrinsic case design than in relation to instrumental /collective ones. As comparison and analytical generalisation are important aims of the latter design, a certain degree of systematisation and categorisation is needed. The compromise chosen in the present study is to establish a firm structure around the framing of each case presented, in order to make reading and comparison easy. On the other hand, the categories are rather widely defined in order to make space for various processes and events. In addition, a relatively large number of quotations from the informants have been included. The reason for this is both to make the empirical examples more alive in accordance with the need for the inclusion of narrative elements, and also in order to offer the reader possibilities of developing alternative interpretations of the data material.

Therefore the data presentation is arranged in a way that each case is introduced by a section that attempts to catch elements which all traditionally have been of importance as identity markers for the particular institution – sometimes going back to the establishment of the institution in question. There then follows a chronological going-through of how the institutions have imagined and worked on quality of their studies during the period of analysis. The following section of analysis has been divided into three parts. Firstly there is an assessment of whether and to what degree the work has been inspired and influenced by extrinsic conditions – something strongly emphasised in neo-institutional theory. After that comes an assessment of whether and to what extent the work has been

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influenced by institutional peculiarities and traditional ways of carrying through institutional changes – something which is strongly emphasised in the old institutionalism. The section finishes with an assessment of the effects related to the work on quality. This way of structuring the analysis may appear paradoxical, the purpose of the study exactly being the integration of the two different institutional theories. However, this integration is attempted carried out at the end of every case. The division into ´extrinsic´ and ´intrinsic´ factors respectively should rather be understood as an attempt to demonstrate that work on quality in higher education has both extrinsic and intrinsic origins[1]. In the presentation of data an attempt has been made to keep the various comparisons separate by making a comparison of each institution with itself over time (a diachronic comparison) at the end of the presentation of each case. Then, in the final chapter of the study synchronic comparisons are made of all the institutions with each other.

[1] The author is aware that within many organisations, and perhaps especially within higher education, it may be difficult to distinguish clearly between extrinsic and intrinsic factors. For instance, are students to be understood as intrinsic members of higher education institutions or as extrinsic ´customers´ or users of their services? A possible solution is to see them as both. In connection with recruitment, and as applicants for various studies, they may perhaps be understood as an extrinsic factor, changing over time, whereas they as matriculated students become an integrated part of the organisation by adopting behaviour and perspectives which are predominant at the institution where they receive their education (cf. Selznick 1957).

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6 Lillehammer College

6.1 Introduction

Lillehammer College (HIL) and the former Oppland Regional College (ODH) both stem from the establishment of a number of new regional colleges in Norway in 1972. According to claims from a number of informants, the then ODH was somewhat different in comparison to most of the other newly established institutions. In the Strategy plan for ODH 1992-98 (Strategisk plan for ODH 1992: 9) it is said about its establishment that the academic staff coming to Lillehammer was dominated by reform oriented pedagogues who had left the University of Oslo to establish themselves at Lillehammer. Furthermore it is claimed that ODH implied a Norwegian continuation of important European pedagogical currents. Problem-based learning, group and project work, a focus on combining projects and novel kinds of exams and study evaluation were important ingredients in this pedagogical orientation. Study programs at ODH reflected the reform background of the academic staff, and since its establishment in 1971 the institution had a relatively strong profile with regard to the social sciences and the humanities with an emphasis on studies in pedagogy, social sciences, economics, travel/tourism and administrative studies as well as studies in culture and media. The background of the academic staff and the profile of the study programs have also been a driver contributing to what several informants claim make up the university-orientation of the institution. Staff at the College believes that the current HIL is the most university-like college in the country, and at frequent intervals ambitions of becoming a university in its own right have been aired in discussions at the institution. Thus both the university-orientation and the reform pedagogy are elements that have given HIL an identity as an innovative, modern and research-based academic institution with many similarities to the ideal of the *professional* organisation.

At the same time the reform-pedagogues were concerned with questions on how the institution was to be managed, and already in its initial phases there was a wish to democratise the leadership and especially to involve the students in the process. These aims at reform and democracy guided the development of ODH throughout the entire 1970s and 1980s and also played a big role in the 1990s in the discussions on what sort of educational institution ODH was supposed to be.

The formulation of aims in the Strategy plan for the years 1992-98 suffice as an example (ODH, Strategisk plan 1992-98: 37):

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As a higher education institution, Oppland Regional College is expected to promote education and research with a significant emphasis on contributing to a development towards increased equality and solidarity among individuals and groups, a development towards increased co-influence and co-responsibility for everyone in their daily life and work.

However, in the course of the 1990s two external events posed new challenges to ODH. The first was that Lillehammer had been awarded the Winter Olympic Games of 1994, and the second was that The Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs carried through an amalgamation of the Regional College System resulting in the establishment of 26 new State Colleges in 1994. Both events stimulated intense activity at ODH in the period before 1994 (see also Lundin *et al* 1993). Important expectations were that ODH was going to expand facility-wise as well as in number of students, academic staff and new study programs. Among other things the College assumed that they were to take over a large part of the buildings left over from the Olympic Games, and that the radio- and TV-centre would provide fertile ground for new students of media and film. At the same time, there was a wish to develop ODH into a national centre for distance-education and distance-education didactics (HIL, Strategisk plan 1998-2003:13). Assessed in relation to the number of students which amounted to around a 1000 to 1200 full-time students in the early 1990's, it was assumed that 3000 full-time students would be enroled in the wake of the Olympic Games. Thoughts about university-status were introduced with force at Lillehammer.

Lack of political will to carry out expansion of this magnitude (for example, not all buildings from The Olympics were made available to the college), the number of students stabilised itself on around 1900 full-time students and around 1500 part-time and distance students towards the end of the decade. The reorganisation of the College in 1994 did not have any significant direct impact, as it was the old Regional College that formed the new institution. Towards the end of the '90s HIL was organised into three faculties: the Faculty of Health and Social Studies, the Faculty of Culture, Media and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Tourism and Social Science. In addition there is the Norwegian Film School - a unit directly placed under the Board of the College.

Compared to activities during the '80s some new subjects have been added during the '90s. Health and Social Studies was started in 1991, and is today the biggest faculty at the institution with three different study programs. In 1997 the Norwegian Film School was established at the College although only with a very limited number of registered students. However, the general impression of the decade is that instead of directing efforts towards breadth as sketched out in the

beginning of the '90s, the emphasis has been put on depth, with the establishment of more graduate (hovedfag) studies and further specialisation within several of the existing subject fields. The purpose to establish the College as a centre for distance-education has been partially attained, among other things, by being allotted Norway's first professorship of distance-education and by the establishment of a centre for the production of teaching aids for distance education.

6.2 Central quality initiatives in the '90s

As indicated in the introduction, HIL has been through a hectic decade marked by expectations of expansion, changes of curricula and changes in academic profile. However, the fact that such a quantitative expansion, especially regarding the number of students, might have a negative impact on the academic quality was already on the agenda in the early '90s. At the same time concern with academic quality during the first years was only to a small extent inspired by the work completed in 1990 by the National Committee for Improving Quality in Higher Education or other external sources. For instance, in the first strategy plan of ODH, measures concerning academic quality were mainly linked to the improvement of teaching qualifications of the academic staff and to the introduction of teaching schemes where graduate and Ph.D students were to take part. From this period, it is impossible to trace any attempts to define what meaning the College attached to the concept of quality, even though, judging from the documents, one could trace a tendency to focus on ways to improve teaching rather than quality improvement through more broad improvement of the whole environment surrounding teaching and learning, wherein, for instance, the social situation of the students would be emphasised too. The fact that thoughts pertaining to quality had not yet fully matured may also be illustrated by the fact that by 1992 there arose a wish to appoint a committee mandated to make recommendations as to which types of planning would secure the quality of studies offered, which forms of evaluation ought to be used internally and how to organise work on quality in an institutional perspective (ODH, Strategisk plan 1992-98:18).

This committee, appointed in 1992/93, and which later was to become a permanent organ called the Committee for Academic Quality seems to a large degree to have had an institutional perspective on its work. An indication of this was the wish to initiate a standardised and all-institutional student assessment scheme of teaching and learning at the College with the intent of *´obtaining comparable information on the quality of studies offered at ODH and how this develops*

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over time´ (ODH, Referat fra møtet i hovedutvalget for undervisning 26. februar, 1993). Even though this form of evaluation was not meant to compete with evaluations that might be carried out by any particular department, the idea was to develop certain superstructure standards at the College. The last point is also underlined by the fact that the organ also had as its purpose to *´develop common norms and common basis of experience for quality improvements at the College´* (ODH, Brev til studentene ved ODH studieåret 1992/93).

However, the joint survey initiated in 1993 had several weaknesses. One of the biggest was the low response rate due to difficulties in reaching students at different studies. Another was that several of the questions in it were imprecise, and several were apt to be misunderstood. Though the results of the survey could not be considered entirely reliable, they were nevertheless published without seemingly creating much of a stir at the College. An essential reason for this, however, was that all the questionnaires were processed as a whole, and in consequence this made it impossible to undertake a comparison between studies, a situation that might have created more turbulence.

To carry out the survey more efficiently the year following, a questionnaire originally designed by, and utilised at the Norwegian Technical College (NTH) in Trondheim was adopted. One important advantage of using this particular questionnaire was that its processing could be done via optical scanning, and consequently the results of the analysis would be available earlier. The response rate from this survey was much better than the one from 1993, and the possibilities of drawing comparisons between different studies were also utilised. For two of the studies that scored relatively badly in the survey, it was suggested that special measures should be undertaken, and that the studies should report on their measures to the Committee for Academic Quality later the same year. The survey also disclosed some disturbing phenomena about the College as a whole. Not least that so few students actively made use of the college library. Even though the 1994 survey was successful compared to the one from the year before, the experience of the Committee for Academic Quality was that too few resources had been set aside to have the survey properly analysed. Large parts of the documentation from the 1994-survey consisted of relatively simple statistical frequencies.

Experiences from the two previous surveys were taken into account in the study carried out in 1995 (cf. HIL, Studiekvalitetsundersøkelsen 1995). The response rate was satisfactory, and the survey was subjected to a thorough data-analysis carried out by personnel highly competent in the field. Another feature of the later surveys is that to a far greater extent, than was the case with the first round, they

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put an emphasis on the student's understanding of social and cultural aspects surrounding the studies including housing conditions, leisure activities etc. In summing up how this survey worked out, the Committee for Academic Quality wrote that though it represented a further improvement compared to previous years, still much remained to be done with form and content of the evaluation. Indeed the division of work between the all-institutional evaluation and what was supposed to be covered with by possible evaluations initiated by single departments, seemed to be a central question. Other questions raised were how various evaluations were to be followed up, who were to have formal responsibility for this task, and the division of work between different levels of authority. However, no final solutions were found to these questions, and they continued as recurrent problems in the following annual surveys carried out by the College.

Along with the annual institutionally based student surveys, several informants claim that the establishment of a part-time post in pedagogical development work meant a lot in regard to attitudes to work on quality at the College. This post was established in 1994/'95 with an external pedagogue from the University of Oslo, who frequently held courses and seminars for academic staff at the College. These courses and seminars appeared to be highly appreciated by the academic staff.

An important event in the work on academic quality at HIL was the drawing up of the first institutional quality improvement plan in 1997 (HIL, Handlingsplan for studiekvalitet 1997). This plan of action came into being following an injunction from the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs. It represented the first attempt of HIL to define formally the concept of quality. As its point of departure, the definitions of the National Committee for Improving Quality served as a basis. However, an attempt was made to integrate the work already undertaken at the institution through the annual student survey. Thus HIL emphasised that work on quality ought to be based on experience; a conclusion to which the previously collected data had contributed. A clear feature in the plan to improve teaching and learning from 1997, and in the following plan from 1998, was that in addition to the focus on internal measures and possibilities, great weight were put on the responsibility of the Educational Authorities to secure quality via the allocation of funds for the College. The College especially appeared negative towards a one-sided focus on results in connection with allocation of resources:

> *We have reason to warn against the signals on evaluation of results that have been sent from KUF in connection with the budget. If our budget depends on the flow of students this pertains to quantity and not to quality. This might possibly influence the quality of results negatively. The lesser the demands on the students,*

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> *the easier they will get out, the more productive we become, and the allocated funds will increase. Indirectly this might appear as a reward for reduced demands on the quality of results* (HIL, Handlingsplan for studiekvalitet 1998:4)

In the wake of the drawing up of the first plan of action, the Committee for Academic Quality at the College also began to take a greater interest in the work carried out at the institute- and department-levels of the institution. The Committee for Academic Quality made individual interviews and initiated systematic dialogue with those responsible for quality improvement work at each particular department/institute. It also mapped how work on evaluation and the safeguarding of quality of teaching was carried out in the departments (Heggland 1998). This mapping showed that even though the Committee for Academic Quality for several years had wished to establish common norms for work on academic quality, there remained nonetheless great variation in the ways each particular institute and department handled evaluations and other measures concerning quality. Some for instance made use of regular meeting as the forum for improvement. Others integrated the work on quality in curricular revisions and in regular contact between teachers and students, whereas yet others put emphasis on certain surveys or separate project to enhance quality (Heggland 1998:24).

Towards the end of the 1990s the institutional initiatives regarding work on quality moved from a singular focus on the annual survey at the institutional level. Thinking about the establishment of a career centre at the College exemplifies this tendency. The Career Centre, which originated from an idea hatched at one of the study programs was accepted relatively fast by other programs. Several of the informants argue that this was an important initiative at a College which offered such a wide variety of studies of a more general character, and where no clearly defined job-market existed for graduates. Another initiative in the offing was a ´day of teaching´, which was intended to be a day dedicated to the importance of the teaching at the College. The idea was that this day should to serve as a ´counterweight´ to ´the day of research´ which had already been established at the College.

A perusal of the last strategy plan of the College also showed that two further institutional initiatives were taken by the end of the decade: Firstly the strategy plan expressed the need for more transparent statistics of applicants to the College. This was meant to offer better information about the development over time in order to make possible changes at the particular studies and departments more predictable. Secondly the strategy plan also harboured ambitions to start

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graduate destination surveys, and whether they found relevant jobs when completing study. This initiative was linked to a larger plan to direct efforts towards lifelong learning, within which knowledge about graduates was presumed to make it easier to recruit them back into further studies.

If one compares the plans of strategy at ODH and HIL for the periods of 1992-1998 and 1998-2003 respectively, a pronounced feature of the plans emerges: whereas quality in the former was defined as efforts to attend the level of various study programs in a period with quantitative increase in the number of students, quality in the latter was seen as means to recruit students:

> *The College expects a certain decrease in the number of applicants for higher education. In order to be in the strongest position in the struggle to get students the main strategy in the period will be to direct efforts towards a heightening of academic quality and better marketing* (HIL, Strategisk plan 1998-2003, 1998:18).

In the course of the decade the concept of quality was re-defined from one purpose to another.

6.3 An analysis of the quality initiatives

The description shows that HIL has taken several institutional initiatives relating to quality in the '90s. This section consists of an evaluation of factors which have brought forth these initiatives and which can contribute to an explanation of the measures initiated.

6.3.1 External inspiration and influence

Starting with an evaluation of external factors that have had an impact on thoughts concerning quality at HIL, it is easy on the basis of the going through to draw up a relatively long list of influential events. The increasing number of students in the early '90s lead to distinct worries over the quality level at the institution, a fact which again was an important reason for the central initiatives taken to find out how the students experienced the studies at the institution.

The increasing influx of students, however, also lead to the institution losing some of the characteristic features, which internally were thought to have been typical for it. According to informants, the influx of students, which mainly were a result of increasing local recruitment contributed to change the features of the typical ´Lillehammer student´. One informant says it like this:

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Local recruitment has made Lillehammer College more like other schools. The engaged and motivated students who came here because of the reform pedagogy are a tale of the past. Students nowadays are customer-oriented in a way they were not before. Compared to this orientation our reform pedagogical ideals become rather naive.

However, several informants think that a higher degree of local recruitment has also raised the status of the College in the region, and that therefore the attitudes of the immediate surroundings are no longer characterised by the scepticism and distance that was experienced at ODH earlier on. The former lack of local contact points (cf. Lundin et al 1993:10) was at the end of the '90s replaced with a good dialogue and good connections to the local community. The local surroundings also developed a marked improved opinion of the College, even though perhaps students towards the end of the'90s make other demands, have other characteristics, and consequently perhaps render difficult the realisation of the reform pedagogical ideals that the former ´Lillehammer student´ encountered.

Also, directly related to the work on quality at the College, it is possible to point out several other external conditions of importance. One example is the fact that in the early phase, the questionnaire for the student survey was adopted from the Norwegian Institute of Technology. Furthermore, several informants motivate the need for the desired ´Work Forum´ by arguing that ´others have it´. Not least this indicates a tendency towards imitation of initiatives from other universities and colleges (see also HIL, Handlingsplan for studiekvalitet 1997:10).

Many informants are of the opinion that the college sector reform in 1994 only to a small degree had a direct influence on the thinking of quality at the College. Indirectly, and as a consequence of the emphasis on organisation and management of the new colleges (Kyvik 1999), quality was, however, put on the agenda. Due to the fact that the reform tended to strengthen the institutional leadership and the central administration, some of the informants think that the concept of quality offered the institutional level a possibility to ´do something meaningful´. The attitude was that if a strong institutional level is created, this level will automatically start looking for tasks to work on. At the same time several of these informants admit that probably institutional initiatives regarding quality have external causes, not least in relation to questions of resources and focus on results:

We are subjected to norms of efficiency rather than norms of quality. We receive the fixed numbers for the number of students from the Ministry, and we get resources in accordance with the fixed numbers. Our thinking on academic quality almost becomes a response to this way of thinking.

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In addition, as an extension of this comprehension, several informants accuse The Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs of having contributed further to the removal of the characteristic features of HIL by its injunction about individual exams and numerical marks instead of group and home exams and the former more general system of marking along a scale divided into three with the marks not passed, passed and passed well.

In addition to the influence exerted by the educational authorities and the increasing influx of students, the arrangement of the Olympic Games at Lillehammer in 1994 may be said to constitute a central, although indirect, source for change at the College. Especially in relation to what may be termed the frames for quality, where new buildings and new technology were supposed to be put to use in the wake of the Olympics, and in relation to the vision for a significant academic expansion in breadth, expectations were great.

Yet, disappointment because not enough resources had been granted to realise the visions for more subjects both within the social sciences and in the humanities seems not to have been the dominant mood at the College. The fact that the College had obtained very functional and up-to-date teaching facilities, had managed to relocate a number of subject fields that had previously been spread all over Lillehammer, and the fact that parts of the information and communications technology and distance-education ambitions had become realised, probably contributed to this.

As an illustration of the extent to which the external surroundings seem to influence HIL, it could be mentioned that whereas the Strategic Plan for 1992-98 mentions studies in health and social work almost only in subordinate sentences, the fact is that towards the end of the '90s, it is these studies and departments which have expanded the most during the decade. In contrast, growth within the academic fields pointed out in the Strategic Plan as fields of expansion has not been nearly as pronounced. Even though this point is illustrative of the importance of the surroundings, many informants still voice strong opinions about the importance of resisting tendencies towards adaptation to the surroundings. The following quotation, in which an informant sums up opinions about the changing of the norms of quality towards more relevance, ought to cover the point:

> *I refuse to genuflect to the market-mentality. Lillehammer students are not very pleased as students, but the more so afterwards.*

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In other words, the quotation illustrates that even though the external surroundings of the College has meant a lot to the development throughout the decade, there still exists a strong internal will to emphasise what has been the ´characteristic features´ of HIL. This leads us to the influence of local identity and traditions at the institution.

6.3.2 Institutional identity and tradition

At first glance it may seem a bit strange that the College, with its ideas about democratic leadership and with its reform identity – described by one informant as *´scepticism towards anything that tastes of aims, control and plans´* – should chose to carry out a centrally based student survey with the purpose of comparing different units and studies. A measure like that might for instance be interpreted as a break with the most important identity bearing elements at the College. The fact that the results of the student survey are reported in due course to the rector and the Board of the institution could be seen as a break with this tradition. At the same time there are other elements in the identity of the College that might explain the measure, although to a lesser extent the central initiative and responsibility for carrying out the student survey. In this connection three important features might be emphasised. Firstly, HIL is the carrier of a strong (university) tradition of research within which ´the scientific legacy´ in the form of ´hard facts´ is highly valued. For a long time applicants with solid research qualifications including a university degree and preferably a doctorate have been given preference of appointment. The student survey, with its emphasis on quantitative data, might be claimed to fit into this profile. Secondly, the former ODH also had nation-wide responsibility for evaluation research within a former national education research program (ODH, Strategisk plan 1992-98, 1992:25). Seen against this background, it becomes more understandable that a quantitatively based evaluation project was initiated. A third point is that many of those involved in the early phase had their educational background in pedagogy and thus belonged to the ´scientific paradigm´ that the student survey was based on.

Despite the fact that many informants stress that that the reform identity of HIL perhaps was more of a symbol than a reflection of reality, there is little doubt that this identity has influenced thinking about quality in the '90s.

> *In a way we are our own model. Reform pedagogy is the ideal at Lillehammer College with the weight we attach to processes as group and home work. Still, when I started, I experienced reform pedagogy as a disappointment. Probably it was more ideologically than professionally significant. At the same time, it is only now during later years that we as part of our efforts to improve ourselves actually have started to discuss the real contents of these activities.*

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If one scrutinises what has been emphasised and discussed in the wake of the annual student surveys, several features seem to indicate that reform pedagogical thinking throughout the entire decade has ground the groove for how follow-up is supposed to take place. Often it is emphasised that quality is attached to a particular student role, and this may be said to be a requirement for reform pedagogical praxis to be established in the first place: student participation, responsibility for ones own learning process, responsibility for the learning process of others, as well as practice in project work and participation in seminar groups.

However, the institutional identity of HIL is not only attached to reform pedagogy. In addition there is a strong orientation towards the academic, which among other things finds its expression in the fact that HIL is the college with the biggest share of basic research among colleges in Norway, at the same time as HIL is also the college with the relatively highest output of academic / scientific publications (Kyvik & Skodvin 1998:155-157). A member of the younger generation of the staff expresses it like this:

> *Lillehammer College thinks academically about all it does. One is supposed to abstract and theorise. The pressure is informal, but very forceful.*

An indication that this pressure is not only tied to the more university-like studies, but goes for the institution as a whole, is that the studies in health and social work has chosen to organise the first year in the same way as in universities, which is unusual in a Norwegian context. Another sign of the orientation towards research is that the College put much emphasis on external communication of research and presentation of the research competence of the institution in the form of reports and the like. Seen in comparison to a concept of quality more orientated towards education, the orientation towards academe manifests itself in the fact that the academic staff generally is of the opinion that the academic standards have to be maintained, even though the character of the student population has changed. The free role often associated with research at academic institutions has to a large extent been adopted by the academic staff at the College too, a fact that constitutes an important element in explaining the resistance against a too close follow-up of the annual student survey. A close follow-up in this context was perceived as an encroachment on academic freedom at department and individual level.

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6.3.3 Effects of the measures

The criticism raised against the institutionally run quality work at HIL was in 2000 not so much aimed at the student survey as such, but rather at a possible close follow-up at the basic units. It is possible to bring forth two different explanations of this situation. On the one hand the acceptance of the student survey and the resistance against a possible follow up means that the entire effort bears the mark of being a symbolic activity without any real meaning for the involved parties. On the other hand the student survey has by now been repeated for so many years that it is an integrated part of the annual routines of the College, and that it functions according to its purpose. Judging from the interviews with informants, many at the College lean towards the latter explanation:

> *The students probably would say that nothing has happened, but when you know your colleagues, you see that they change themselves and the way they conduct their teaching. The reason why it is so difficult to measure effects is that this happens over time. I am surprised at the effects that actually have been brought about by the work on academic quality.*

And:

> *The student surveys used to be a ritual, but today they have been improved and are taken seriously. The activities have now been adapted to our own needs. People realise that things are getting better over time, and the local follow-up has also been strengthened. Nonetheless it is probably fair to say that we still have a bipartite structure on the work: one visible centralised structure, and a de-centralised and less formal work on quality. What we probably see now is that those responsible for quality improvement at the departments stress formalities to a larger extent than they used to, and as a consequence things also become more visible locally.*

A majority of the informants see a tendency towards formalities and visibility of the work on quality as effects became more visible. Whether they experience this positively or negatively seem to depend on their views on the importance of work on quality. Among those who think that one has not come far enough in this field at institute level, there is a tendency to claim that the College to a larger extent ought to standardise the work on quality within the departments and on the student level too. Among those who think that the work on quality has already been formalised enough as it is, the clear opinion is that the student survey is only part of a wider process to ´bureaucratise´ the College. The latter among other things point to the fact that the work on quality at HIL has intimately been linked to plans of action and decision-making activities in the board of the college and that it has in a way been removed from its core area, namely teaching and learning. At the same time these critics realise that participation in the existing work on quality draws people into processes on which resistance is more difficult:

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One effect of the work on quality being executed under more formal circumstances, and other ´institutional´ processes for that matter, is that we all become attached to governing bodies and are made responsible. In such contexts, for instance, the plans that are made will be used, because we feel that we have to live up to the ´responsibility´ delegated to such organs. Viewed this way the plans made, do have effects.

In other words, the centrally initiated work on quality at HIL is in the process of becoming a routine and finding its form somewhat independently of the persons who participate in the work to improve quality or in other more formal positions. Not least, the work on quality does not seem to lead to conflicts at the institution to any great extent. The co-operation between teachers and students has improved over time, even though many possibilities for improvements still exist (HIL, Studiekvalitetsundersøkelsen 1998). Appraised as an effect of the efforts carried out at institutional level, this can be regarded as a very positive result of the work conducted through the years. At the same time a few informants point to possible negative consequences of too rigid routines and ´institutionalisation´ of this work:

At the same time, today the institutional survey probably restrains creativity and rethinking in this field somewhat. In a way we are tied up now, because we want to see changes over time, and there are limits as to how many measures we are able to have in this field.

´Institutionalisation´, understood here as an annual repetition of and attention attached to the student survey at the College, may also lead to a lesser degree of experimentation with alternative forms of measures on quality improvements. The paradox is that the reform identity of the College, within which continuous development and experimentation with various methods and techniques make up important values, may be weakened as a consequence of a measure partially based on the same reform identity.

6.4 Quality as a means for change

The picture emerging of HIL is that of an institution which in the early '90s possessed a pronounced ´academic´ (professional) identity, and where the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs made up an important point of reference as provider of resources and as regulator of activities. During this phase quality was strongly linked to research qualifications in the academic staff and the significance that good research might have for teaching. Initially the work on quality seems to have been adapted to a more academic tradition and to have an academic basis at HIL.

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The centrally initiated student survey can only be said to partially break with the institutional identity of ODH and HIL, since it had links to another part of the institutional identity – the reform pedagogy (see for instance ODH, Brev til instituttlederne ved ODH 1993). That this survey was established at all was a result of a strong engagement from the leadership of the institution. Questioning the rector about what contributed to this initiative, two conditions are emphasised. Firstly, that there was a need at HIL for something ´common´ that might generate information of steering to the institutional leadership and contribute to ´the profiling of the new institution´. Secondly, that there was a need for information which might say something about development over time. In other words, the student survey was viewed by the institutional leadership as a tool for steering and what one of the informants describes as an activity with an *´intention of institution building´*. This brings us to the question of whether the concept of quality and the thinking around quality at HIL has also been important to change the institutional identity of the College. Several conditions point in that direction.

Based on the interviews with informants there is for instance reason to claim that the reform identity at HIL to a large extent was a construction more ideologically than academically anchored in the period before a central initiative of an institutional student survey was furthered.

Even though the student survey alone cannot take the honour for the fact that during later years the real contents of such ´reform pedagogy´ started to be discussed, this measure has had the effect that quality was put on the institutional agenda. It had also the effect that the debates about the reform pedagogy were carried out beyond the individual department and into what could be called an institutional context. Consequently the work on quality contributed to the realisation of an organisational myth, despite the fact that the administrative and economic resources allotted for this work have not been among the greatest (see for instance HIL, Studiekvalitet – evaluering av studier 1994).

The fact that the Committee for Academic Quality was established at the College also meant that more recently appointed members of the academic staff have been able to contribute to the development of the institution. Several informants have pointed out that for those in the academic staff, recently appointed, and with a less developed social network at the College, the Committee for Academic Quality has been an arena where they have been able to further their viewpoints on what HIL ought to give priority and emphasise. Likewise the Committee for Academic Quality has constituted an important meeting place for students, academic staff and centrally placed persons in the administration.

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Even though it is possible retrospectively to claim that the student survey carried on important elements of the reform pedagogical tradition of HIL, it is nevertheless an important feature of the survey that it was first and foremost ´just were carried out´ rather than being the result of a thorough institutional process. The protests the survey caused in the first years were, however, silenced over time as new meanings were attached to the survey. In this process, the links to the reform identity of HIL was important to take the sting out of the many negative reactions. Towards the end of the 1990s many informants acknowledge that the student survey has found its form, and that it today is relatively un-controversial at the institution. Only when the first plan of action for quality was drawn up in 1997, the institution defined and specified more formally what was to be put into the concept – but then there were agreement that the survey was important for the reform pedagogic identity of the institution. A examination of this and later plans of action indicate, however, that they serve more as arguments for what has previously been done at the institution than as outlines of a new strategy for the work.

However, as mentioned earlier, the context of the work on quality at HIL was different towards the end of the decade than from what it was at the beginning. Whereas the work on quality was put into a context of worry about whether the level of quality could be maintained in confrontation with the large influx of students during the early 1990s, at the end of the decade, when growth in the number of students seems to stagnate, the focus is directed towards quality as a factor of competition. The efforts to establish a Work Forum and institutional efforts to improve contact with graduated students are indicators of this.

In addition, new political initiatives on the national level, especially those connected to lifelong learning were at the end of the decade linked to the concept of quality. Again HIL appears skilful in connecting external initiatives to local identity and traditions. Again the reform pedagogical argumentation is used, but this time in relation to new technology and the possibility of utilising information- and communication technology in connection with a greater focus on distance education and lifelong learning. The last strategy plan of the College among other things says:

> *The general development in society and the development of media and information- and communication-technology have changed the frameworks for teaching and learning. Our pedagogy must take this into consideration. For Lillehammer College it would be useful to discuss teaching in the light of reform pedagogical ideas about project organisation, problem based learning group work* (HIL, Strategisk plan 1998-2003, 1998:27).

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In summing up there is reason to claim that the concept of quality in relation to the organisational identity of HIL has played an influential role during the decade scrutinised. Undoubtedly the concept of quality has affected the institutional identity of HIL by specifying a ´organisational myth´ at the institution: the reform-pedagogic identity. At the same time it becomes clear that new external initiatives like lifelong learning are also linked to this identity, and that the concept of quality is part of this process too. The result is that neither the thinking on quality nor the identity of the College has been retained. During the decade both have changed through a strategic process that has merged external political initiatives with local traditions and values.

In rector's speech to the students in autumn of 1999, the idea about a ´Inland University´ with HIL as one of the participating institutions was brought to the fore. The Olympic Games at Lillehammer in 1994 did not become the process that paved the way for the university status that the College had imagined. Thus, in 2000, the college started talks with the closely located colleges of Gjøvik and Hedmark with the intention of establishing a multi-campus university.

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7 Stavanger College

7.1 Introduction

The institution, which today is called Stavanger College (HIS), was established in 1969 as a part of the great expansion of Norwegian regional colleges towards the end of the '60s and the beginning of the '70s. The establishment in Stavanger occurred simultaneously with the expansion of Norwegian oil-industry that had a central base in the same city. Therefore, what started as a regional college obtained a strong focus on science and technology, a profile that later has been strengthened.

Towards the end of the '90s, Stavanger College was a large educational institution by Norwegian standards harbouring around 6000 students and a staff of 550 occupying various academic and administrative positions. The College is organised into seven faculties: The faculty for health and social work, The faculty for humanities, The faculty of art, The faculty of teacher training, The faculty for tourism, The faculty for the sciences, and The faculty for economic and social science. In addition, the college has two larger research and development units, namely the Centre for behavioural science and the Centre for research into reading. Together these units offer various kind of professional and vocational education together with more traditional university-like studies.

Already from the outset university ambitions have been very strong in Stavanger, and the area where the College is situated today is in fact called ´the University Area at Ullandshaug´, a name given already in the '60s. Even though regional ambitions about university status have been very strong, the idea has traditionally been met with little sympathy on the national level (cf. St.meld.nr. 40 1990-91). This, however, has prevented neither the original Rogaland District College (1969 - 1985) nor the former College Centre in Rogaland (1986 - 1994) and the ensuing Stavanger College (1994-) from working consciously and long-range towards this goal. Thus it is fair to say that the identity of all three organisations has been tied closely to this vision, where ´entrepreneurial spirit, oil and education´ have been connected together to realise the objective (Johnsen 1999:20). Thus, traditionally the organisational identity of Stavanger has many similarities with the ideal of the *entrepreneurial* organisation.

However, the reorganisation of the regional college sector initiated by the State in 1994 implied quite big challenges to HIS, as several formerly independent colleges

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were to be integrated into the new institution. The institutions merged were: The College Center in Rogaland, The School of Health and Social Work in Stavanger, The Norwegian College of Hotel and Tourism, The School for Nursery Education in Stavanger, The School for Teacher Training in Stavanger and Rogaland School of Music. Most of these institutions became new faculties in HIS, and almost all of them were in addition relocated at the Ullandshaug area. In other words, different cultures and traditions were supposed to melt together into one single institution. Not surprisingly this lead to what might be labelled ´cultural clashes´ where various research traditions and teaching ideals were whetted against each other, and where the old college center's visions about university status were tested against other visions verbalised by, for example, vocational study programs (Selvik 1999). However, the vision about a university in Stavanger survived the reorganisation process of 1994, although with regional disagreements about the best way forward to achieve this goal. Representatives can be found for a confrontational line against the reluctance of the Ministry to establish a university in Stavanger, but also for a more pragmatic strategy towards achieving university status (Johnsen 1999, Titlestad 1998). In retrospect, it is possible to claim that it is the latter strategy which seems to have paid off towards the Ministry. As the first Norwegian state college HIS in 1999 was entitled the right to award doctorates within the fields of petroleum technology and off-shore technology. This event seems to be interpreted by the College itself as a major step towards full university status (Dirdal 1999, Bø 1999).

A significant feature of the old Regional College and the former College Center carried on after the establishment of HIS is the close contact existing between local authorities, trade and industry in the region and the college. These are contacts that seem to have been created and kept up by the college through a conscious long-term strategy (cf. Titlestad 1998). The establishment of the ´University Fund for Rogaland´, a consortium consisting of business, industry and regional authorities, is a visible manifestation of this. Furthermore, since the end of the '90s annual ´University Conferences´, where regional development is a central topic, have been arranged with the University Fund as formal organiser. Another initiative is the establishment of a ´Research Academy´ aimed at being an umbrella organisation for all the various research institutions in the region. With support from the University Fund, a special Center for Information and Communication Technology was also established at the College. An essential purpose for this innovation was exactly to establish closer co-operation between HIS and regional business and industry.

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7.2 Central quality initiatives in the '90s

On going through central documents and talking with informants with time of service at HIS, it is hard to identify any significant institutional measures and initiatives cocnerning the quality of teaching and learning at the different colleges and schools before the merger in 1994. This, however, does not mean that quality was not on the agenda during these years, but perhaps rather indicates that work on quality was a responsibility bestowed upon the various basic units at the different institutions. For instance, also before the merger in 1994 it is possible to identify initiatives related to student assessment of teaching at various study programs at the former College Centre in Rogaland and at several of the other colleges that were later integrated into the new institution. Just before the merger was implemented, a contact committee consisting of representatives from the different colleges and schools was appointed, and it was decided that all newly appointed academic staff, who were not able to document pedagogical competence, would have to undergo a compulsory course in pedagogy.

However, the first institutionally based initiative concerning the quality of teaching and learning which might be interpreted as a result of decisions taken by HIS emerged very quickly in connection with the reorganisation in 1994, when the Board of the College passed the following resolution:

> *The Board of the College recommends that an evaluation of teaching at Stavanger College is carried out as a part of the work to improve the quality of education offered at the institution. The evaluation is to have as its purpose to be a tool to improve the quality of teaching and not to be a means of control. The work goes on shaping a common model for evaluation at Stavanger college* (HIS, styresak 136/94 1994).

In the wake of this resolution, the Board asked the administration at the college to continue the work on finding the best way to improve quality. The result was the note ´Quality at Stavanger College´ (Studiekvalitet ved Høgskolen i Stavanger, HIS 1994) drawn up by the administration and addressed to the Board of the institution later the same year. In the note various ways to define quality was relatively thoroughly discussed, even if the most notable feature was the external orientation of the paper. Thus what opinions the National Committee for Improving Quality in Higher Education had had about academic quality, what was written about quality in the then present white paper on higher education, and how quality was secured in industry and trade were central elements. In line with what the National Committee for Improving Quality in Higher Education had intended, the concept of quality was defined relatively widely in this note, and courses in study techniques, access to data equipment and space in reading

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rooms were mentioned on par with general student welfare measures, where co-operation with the Student Welfare Body was introduced and considered as meaningful.

In 1995/96 the Board of HIS passed its own ´Model for Student Assessment of Teaching´ (Modell for studentevaluering av undervisning, HIS 1996). It can be questioned, however, whether it is possible to talk about a common model for evaluation – especially because the ´model´ opened up for several ways for student assessment of teaching and learning. In addition it was delegated to single departments and the individual teacher to formulate concrete questions that the evaluation was supposed to give answers to. The only thing that might possibly be claimed to make up a common superstructure in the resolution seems to be the specification that evaluations should be carried out at frequent intervals. The responsibility for carrying out and the follow-up of the evaluations involved a number of persons and units at the College. Several informants report that such follow-up measures were relatively complicated in a situation where allocation of resources for such activities was managed by the administration, whereas the process itself was to be carried out by members of the academic staff. Furthermore, the administration and the department heads were both responsible for the follow-up in a way that was partially overlapping. The possible establishment of a co-ordinating unit which for instance had the full responsibility for student assessment work was not suggested.

The College Board was the body which formally initiated the institutional quality work in the wake of the merger in 1994. For instance it was the Board of HIS which in 1996 initiated and established The Committee for Improving Quality (SKU) at the institution. Among the main intentions behind this establishment were that work on quality at the College in this way would become more uniform, and thus contribute to making the institution more competitive in recognition of the fact that the competition for students had already started (HIS, styresak 36/96 1996). In practice, the purpose of the committee was to:

> *Develop a frame for the work on academic quality so that the College may achieve a co-ordinated and good learning environment. The committee (SKU) is meant to contribute to the strengthening of the College's position as a first class educational institution within the university and college sector of the country* (HIS, styresak 60/96 1996).

The committee was authorised to design a plan of action giving priority to tasks within the four areas that the National Committee for Improving Quality in Higher Education (1990) had already outlined (the four areas were structure, input, process and results). This plan of action was supposed to be presented to

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the staff and to the Board at the last meeting every calendar year. The committee headed by the deputy rector had in total 16 members with representatives from both the academic and administrative staff as well as representatives from the students. The Student Welfare Body was also represented in the committee. According to the mandate SKU was supposed to hold monthly meetings. At its establishment SKU neither had its own budget nor decision-making authority in relation to departments and institutes. The large amount of members in the committee also led to problems of a more practical nature; it proved difficult to assemble regular members all at once, and the consequent presence of substitutes contributed to a lack of continuity and legitimacy.

SKU managed, however, to fulfil its mandate for drawing up a plan of action for improving quality in the four areas identified. It was presented for the first time in 1997 and gave an outline for measures to be implemented in the period 1998-2000. In 1998 SKU for the first time was also allotted its own budget of NOK 100,000 with the possibility of an increase depending on the level of activity in 1999. In order to solve the problems attached to the large amount of members of SKU, the Plan of Action drew up an array of smaller projects each of which was to be lead by a co-ordinating group with members of SKU participating.

A total of seven projects were drawn up in the Plan of Action: continuation and improvement of the existing arrangement where experienced students guided first year students at the College; more emphasis on student arrangements at the beginning and at the end of the semesters in order to improve the profile of the College vis-à-vis the students; improve collegiality through mutual guidance in teaching issues; support of the work on evaluation carried out within the departments; measures to improve conditions for international students and visiting foreign academics at the College; information for and guidance of first-year students; and also evaluation of the environment for teaching and learning. According to the Plan of Action the idea was that co-ordination between the different projects were to be maintained via close contact between on the one hand the groups running these, and on the other the deputy rector who chaired the Committee and the Committee's secretary. Common full meetings for SKU were only meant to be held once a year. As an overall activity at the College several seminars and debate meetings supposed to be open for both students and staff were suggested. Seminars and meetings like these were held in 1996 and 1997 with topics for instance focusing on how to improve the administrative service towards the students (´On good terms with the Student´).

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However, a proposal from SKU in 1998 to set apart NOK 200,000 in the central budget of the College in order to carry out an annual external evaluation of various subjects at the institution was not supported by the central administration of the institution (Studentavisen Hugin, 22. mars 1999:2). In addition both the quality standards and the work to improve quality at the College got bad report, when the results of a nation-wide survey among Norwegian students initiated by Norwegian newspapers suggested that the students at HIS to a lesser extent than students at other colleges were satisfied with the academic and pedagogical quality of the teaching. As a response to the survey, the leadership of the institution admitted in the local student newspaper that the College had not yet ´found a good way of carrying out assessments of studies, but that effort were taken in order to find a satisfying system´ (Studentavisen Hugin 1999: 5). The leadership of the College also pointed out that part of the problem was due to the fact that ´information on evaluation which might be useful in the coordinated work to improve quality at HIS is lost on its way from department to leadership, and that the reports received are not suitable for implementing measures´ (Studentavisen Hugin, 22.mars, 1999:4).

Thus, in an internal summary of the work to improve quality at HIS towards the end of the '90s, it was said that an important future task had to be to improve the contact between SKU and each department at the College. This was intended to be carried out through the leader and secretary of SKU having meetings with departments and units in order to discuss their work in this field. In the same letter it was further said that a number of excursions for members of SKU to other universities and colleges should be carried out. The intention with these trips was to carry out ´fact-finding´ on what others had done in the quality improvement area. As the College itself expresses it in an internal document, it was ´really on the look-out for good models´ in the field of quality (HIS, Evaluering og kvalitetssikring i høgre utdanning. Status Høgskolen i Stavanger pr. desember 1998, 1999).

However, in addition to the work directly initiated by SKU, other institutional initiatives of significance for the work on academic quality have also been taken at the College. This work was less visible and profiled at the College, but nonetheless seems to have contributed with concrete effects (see point 7.3.3). In the Annual Report for 1996 from the administration at the College, it was for instance said that during the year new routines and procedures for approval of studies and curricula within the different fields of study had been drawn up, that efforts to improve the institutional student statistics had been carried out, and that work had been done

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to improve statistical tools at the department level. Finally, a going through of the administrative routines regulating exams had also been carried out.

7.3 An analysis of the quality initiatives

7.3.1 External inspiration and influence

One of the most distinct features of the work on quality at HIS is that the College already at the outset had a very strong external focus, within which work on quality might be viewed as a form of adaptation to ´external pressure´. For instance, the documents and resolutions from 1994, but also in the following years contained huge amounts of references both to the National Committee for Improving Quality in Higher Education (1990) and other white papers of significance for higher education. Also the College's traditions for contact with trade and industry exerted an influence on the early ways of thinking about how quality could be improved, where industrial quality assurance systems (ISO-9000) was high on the agenda. The institution's concern with and adaptation to its surroundings is strongly confirmed during conversations with members of the academic and administrative staff:

> *Stavanger College is concerned to a sickening degree with showing that they respond to external demands. An example of this is that we without hesitation establish new studies to please various local and regional interests.*

As a matter of fact the establishment of SKU was a direct result of the ideas of the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs (KUF) that quality improvement was something that universities and colleges ought to take seriously.

> *One might say that that we established SKU because we had to follow up the injunction from the Ministry. Because KUF was so centred on student assessment of teaching, it so happened that we in SKU became that as well.*

However, as the quotation indicates, the consequence of this focus perhaps was that the College internally narrowed the possibilities given for developing the work on quality locally in order to adapt it to local needs. Also it cannot be claimed that the work to any mentionable degree was implemented in the wake of the resolutions. Rather, a search was started to find suitable ´models´ supposed to solve the problems experienced in the attempts of anchoring the work on quality at the institution. By the end of the decade this search was still going on (cf. HIS, Evaluering og kvalitetssikring i høgre utdanning. Status Høgskolen i Stavanger pr. desember 1998, 1999).

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A question that may be raised is whether this external focus is only significant of the work on quality at the College, or whether it can also be held accountable for other processes. On being questioned on this, a clear majority of informants answer that the externally influenced consciousness has almost become institutionalised at the College, and that this is also relevant in relation to the aim of acquiring university status. One informant made this synthesis:

> *These days the College goes to Sweden to ´learn´ how to become a university.*

Hence the work on quality was yet another of an array of measures and processes of being on ´the look-out´ for models and practices which might be adopted and implemented at the institution. Seen against this background, the meetings and seminars arranged by SKU are perhaps expressions of the same basic attitude. For these events the College invites lecturers from outside who may, it is hoped, offer ´useful tips´ on questions on how quality could be improved (Studentavisen Hugin, 22.mars 1999).

7.3.2 Institutional identity and tradition

However, HIS also was distinguished by a feature of a more internal kind - a strong and marked central leadership at the institutional level. In a note in which an external consultant investigated possibilities for increasing administrative efficiency and effectiveness at the College, said that within the staff:

> *Comparatively many who view Stavanger College as a political arena and as an instrument of domination for the institutional leadership* (Selvik 1999:8)

Interviews with various informants seem to confirm the impression of a central administration which ´runs the development´. The same informants further express the view that a strong central administration also established implicit guidelines on how the work on quality was formed at HIS. For instance, the references to political documents and external reports on quality, rather than putting emphasis on internal experiences and knowledge, indicate a relatively administratively governed process with less participation of staff from the lower echelons of the organisation. Not least, the ´drive´ of the central administration is expressed by the fact that HIS, in the wake of the merger in 1994, had invested a very large amount of work in drawing up an impressive number of plans of strategy and action for everything ranging from research to internationalisation. This work was mainly carried out by the central administration.

With so much emphasis having been put on various plans and strategies, it is perhaps not that odd that the central administration was experienced by the lower

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echelons as being *´steering and controlling´* (HIS, Omstillingsutvalgets innstilling 1998:45). However, it is perhaps not strange that many of the staff, who before 1994 had come from colleges where it was easy to participate in the decision-making process and with a shorter distance to the central administration, experience that life has changed, when one suddenly become part of an educational institution with a much larger academic and administrative staff and 6000 students. Even academic staff with time of service from the relatively large College Centre in Rogaland seems to share this opinion:

> *We have changed since 1994. Today we work in a more split-up and fragmented fashion than we used to. When we were a college centre, we felt that we were ´participants´ – now we have become ´observers´.*

When one is supposed to integrate the amount of different cultures, traditions and interests that these colleges represented and at the same time is supposed to establish new organisational routines on top of this, problems of capacity may often arise; especially when, in addition, so much energy was invested in comprehensive work on planning. As the external consultant remarked, this might have *´become a bit too much for a newly established joint administration´* (Selvik 1999:9). Concerning the work to improve quality it is possible to outline two consequences of this situation. According to a member of the academic staff one seems to have been that:

> *The Committee for Improving Quality (SKU) was not given first priority by the leadership of the institution. At the same time they (the leadership) are so far removed from the departments and know so little about what we are doing that they do not have any influence.*

Lack of attention in connection with the work to improve quality and lack of knowledge about activities further down in the organisation may be an understandable effect of the previously mentioned conditions. This fact may partially explain the apparent lack of departmental anchoring of the centrally initiated work on quality at HIS.

Another consequence of a strong and ´occupied´ central administration, however, was that possibilities for being attentive to suggestions and initiatives from the lower echelons were also reduced. This contributed to putting a lid on local initiatives taken at different departments of the College, where these only to a small extent were lifted up to an institutional level. Thus, transfer of knowledge between departments and a greater degree of dialogue between different academic environments and studies did not appear:

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Stavanger College is marked by a strong administrative culture and tradition within the central administration. It is evident that this has had an adverse effect on local initiatives of action.

In fact it was only towards the end of the '90s that this situation started to soften up a bit. Signals indicating this has been that work is carried out to delegate various functions from the central administration to the particular departments (HIS, styresak 25/99, 1999), and that SKU in 1999 put considerably more emphasis on increasing contact and interaction with departments and institutes (HIS, Evaluering og kvalitetssikring i høgre utdanning. Status Høgskolen i Stavanger pr. desember 1998, 1999).

7.3.3 Effects of the measures

Seen in the light of how the work on quality has been organised, and what must be described as a disconnection between what happens centrally and what happens locally, it is perhaps not so strange that as far as ´successes´ in the work on quality are reported at all, they are attached far more to administrative than academic conditions (cf. also Bai Andersen *et al* 1996:37-41). Among the effects mentioned most frequently by the informants as having been successful are for instance the measure ´On Good Terms with the Student´ which dealt with the reception of and general service to the students; measures like better co-ordination of the reception of first year students (in co-operation with the student interest organisation at the college); improved information routines and improved routines for the registration of students (cf. for instance HIS, Årsrapport fra Studieavdelingen 1996). Concerning projects and measures more directly attached to teaching and learning far fewer claims that the work on quality has been of any special importance.

The fact that there was an administrative focus on the work on quality at the College, and the close connection to the administrative apparatus, is viewed by many informants as a very important factor when explaining how quality has been interpreted at the institution. As one of the informants claim, the attitude was that:

The work on quality so far has not involved staff, and has only partially managed to focus on the students. Only to a small extent one has been able to see that the organisation and the academic staff as such has benefited from this work.

However, as indicated in the previous section a dawning realisation of this seemed to be spread at the College at the end of the decade. Thus was an increasing concern with getting various levels and actors connected. Regarding

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this process there also were concerns about what kind of legitimacy SKU had in relation to the academic staff, what kinds of incentives that should be controlled by SKU, and not least, whether the representation within SKU was the right one. One member of SKU, on being asked to reflect over what role the committee has played and ought to play at the College, expresses it like this:

> *At the outset SKU were supposed to be ´inspectors´ reporting about the status at the different departments rather than being ´advisers and supporters´. Gradually the need has changed without the representation within SKU having been changed accordingly. As an adviser one also needs people with great academic legitimacy.*

Among the measures that was discussed and partially implemented towards the end of the '90s, a couple of the most central were own budgetary means for SKU, and the idea that the deans of each particular department to a larger extent ought to be connected with the committee. Consequently, one effect of the ongoing work on quality may be said to have been an increasing awareness that the way this work is organised is of great importance for the results achieved later. On the downside, it is also possible to claim the opposite, namely that an increased representation of deans in SKU could represent a continuation of the formal and administrative steering of the work on quality.

7.4 Quality as a means for change

The picture of HIS which gradually appears is one of an organisation with an entrepreneurial identity, but where the merger in 1994 and the subsequent increase in size has affected the institution resulting in a more hierarchical functioning and with more focus on administrative and organisational issues. In the wake of this process, the organisation has given priority to the establishment of formal systems and administrative routines, and activities centrally have been centred round leadership, strategy and organisation with the Board of the College as a central actor (see also Bai Andersen *et al* 1996:37).

This has marked thinking on quality. The establishment of SKU and the measures and plans of action which emanated from there have to a larger extent been connected upwards by responding to decisions made by the central administration, rather than downwards to problems affecting individual department and studies. One implication of this is that the work on quality only to a small extent has become embodied in relation to staff at the basic units:

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I guess people still get a bit starry-eyed when the concept of quality is put on the agenda. I think it's because they don't know the meaning of the concept. People do not share a common platform to speak from.

The statement also illustrates an important point about the way in which the work on quality has been carried out at the College: no ´institution building´ aspects of the work have been emphasised to any important degree. Rather than possibly looking upon the work on quality as an activity which could contribute to the integration of the new college, documents and measures are marked by a process which to a larger extent has complied with what has been grasped as ´demands´ from and adaptation to the surroundings – especially in relation to the educational authorities. For instance the College only to a very limited degree have based the work on quality upon existing experiences and knowledge from the previous colleges. Instead SKU was established and given the task of producing a new ´model´ for this work. The line of procedure apparently chosen seems to emphasise that quality was to be promoted through organisational structures and managerial follow-up (cf. HIS, Strategiplan for 1999 – 2001, 1999). Instead of building a self-initiated system, the institution during the 1990s continuously searched the surroundings for relevant models. Thus the work on quality seems to have remained unused as a tool for ´building´ and ´developing´ the institutional identity at HIS. Regarding the engagement of the leadership when it comes to quality, the leadership has only to a small extent functioned as an active propellant within this field during the 1990s. Rather the institutional leadership has responded and carried out ´fire extinguishing´ when specific problems have arisen. Again problems of capacity related to other important tasks dominating the institutional agenda may be a contributing cause.

In the same way that there was a want for informal meeting places for the leadership at the College (Selvik 1999:14), there also was a want for common meeting places where quality and development of quality at the College could be discussed informally. The lack of institutional measures, or projects as points of departure for such a debate, may partially explain that there is little in common to talk about and not much specific to base any talk on.

Instead of creating something new together after the merger, the feeling among many in the staff is that:

We are still at the ´grief and bereavement´ stage after the merger. So the work on quality has not contributed to giving us a new deal. Stavanger College is not an institution people feel proud to belong to. I often hear that people would prefer to belong to one of the universities, or that they identify themselves more with their own department.

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Seen in relation to this statement, it may seem paradoxical that the most significant feature of HIS having survived the merger in 1994 is the vision harboured by the old Regional College and the former College Centre about university status. Even if not everyone at HIS shares this vision (Johnsen 1999, Titlestad 1998, Selvik 1999), it is nonetheless the proponents of the university vision who have put the strongest leads on the development of the College after 1994. Thus the strategy at the threshold of year 2000 was that HIS should become a new ´technical´ university modelled after NTNU (Bø 1999). However, there is reason to maintain that the university ambitions have partially blocked systematic work on quality related to the studies. The emphasis has rather been put on the improving the qualifications of the academic staff (see for instance Björnland *et al* 1993:20 and Bai Andersen *et al* 1996:36). This emphasis on qualifications which, among other things, has led to HIS being the college with the largest amount of doctorates among the academic staff (Kyvik & Skodvin 1998:150) has characterised the College throughout the 1990s. In 1995, for instance, an evaluation committee thought that one of the biggest threats facing the civic engineering study at HIS was:

> *…not to solve the cultural gap between teaching and research. A sense of ´we´ admitting a mutual respect between teaching and research must be created. Both components: good pedagogy and good researchers, together create a good college milieu* (Aas et al 1995:72-73).

Towards the end of the '90s, however, many informants had the opinion that there was still much undone in this area. One of them claimed that:

> *The ambitions of becoming a university led us to thinking on quality based on the assumption that better teaching goes through research qualifications – via training of the academic personnel. After all, members of the staff have discovered that by focusing on ones own subject, promotion is obtained. It is evident that this attitude weakens the collective responsibility for teaching and learning.*

Thus in summing up, the work on quality at HIS has been strongly dominated by national politics when it comes to initiation, administrative leads within formal organisation and strategic leads in practice. Together this has added up to a result where quality has not functioned as an integrating concept in the institution and where the work on quality has not contributed to change or affect the institutional identity. The work on quality was not connected to the ´management´ of the institutional identity – it was ´just´ related to responding to external demands. An explanation is that problems and challenges attached to the merging process overshadowed all other questions after 1994. However, towards the end of the 1990s, many of the administrative and managerial problems have been solved

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gradually, and this may explain what seems to be an increasing importance attached to the work on quality. At least there are strong intentions of connecting this work closer to what is going on at the various basic units.

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8 The University of Tromsø

8.1 Introduction

The University of Tromsø (UITØ) was established in 1968 after a heated national debate about the need and conditions for a university in Northern Norway. The debate had been running with varying strength since the early 1900s. The increased amount of students in higher education towards the end of the '60s, however, had put the need for a new university on the agenda again. In the debate on where to locate a new university, political considerations and regional needs of Northern Norway were strongly emphasised. No university or college had been established in that part of the country, and regional relevance became a key word for the establishment of the university and its development.

In existing universities, the plans about a new university in Northern Norway were met with much scepticism. Arguments used against the plans were lack of economic resources together with a poor basis for recruitment of both students and academic staff. This scepticism was especially made relevant in relation to the proposed study program in medicine at the new institution. However, medicine had been specially emphasised in the discussions on the establishment of the university where the lack of doctors in the region was a main argument (Hjort 1973, Fulsås 1993). After the decision to establish the university had been reached, many therefore thought that regional needs had weighed more heavily than academic ones.

The academic scepticism in relation to the establishment of UITØ laid the foundations for the identity of the new institution. Central keywords in this context were related to being ´different´, ´modern´ and ´innovative´. In order to create support for and interest in the establishment it was exactly questions of what the new institution could add to higher education that were in focus. Two principles became central. First, an ambition about a close and inter-disciplinary integration of different disciplines and fields of study under the slogan ´the university with the low fences´. Second, a more democratic internal governance system than traditionally had characterised higher education institutions in Norway (Hjort 1973). The traditional discipline-based organisation of study programs and the traditional faculty structure, typical characteristics of Norwegian and Continental universities at the time, were not seen as relevant. Instead, study programs were placed in huge interdisciplinary departments that in the beginning comprised a department for social science, a department for

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language and literature, a department for mathematics, a department for biology and geology together with three medical departments: department for clinical medicine, department for biomedicine and department for socio-medicine. Concerning internal governance, a two-tiered structure was established with the huge interdisciplinary departments as the base and the central administration and the Rectorate as the only super-structure.

The organisation of study programs was also unique in that the importance attached to medicine laid down decisive premises for the organisation of the sciences, and especially the biological studies (they were in part integrated in medicine). At the same time became the medicine study in itself an innovation with early patient contact and a problem-based study model. Ambitions of disciplinary integration became the basis for placing subjects traditionally belonging to the humanities at Norwegian universities like history, archaeology and philosophy in the department for social science. Furthermore, ´artificial´ dividing lines between social science subjects were to be broken down through inter-disciplinary cooperation within smaller teaching and research groups. The ambition was to create a *´social scientific and humanistic consciousness´* (Allardt *et al* 1995:87).

Over time, however, the project of inter-disciplinarity at the University dissolved and a more traditional division of disciplines, both when it comes to teaching and organisation, has evolved (Fulsås 1993, Løchen 1998, Dahl & Stensaker 1999. Thus, it is possible to argue that the organisational identity of the University is rooted in elements from both the *professional* and the *entrepreneurial* organisational ideal.

The growth in the number of students and staff went slowly during the first years after the establishment. Throughout the '80s, however, the development of a number of new study programs led to an increase, and in the early '90s the general influx of students into higher education made the number of students at the University peaked at about 6500 in 1995. In a situation where other higher education institutions wanted to control the influx of students, the attitude at UITØ was marked by a desire to expand. Because of the financing system within Norwegian higher education, where the number of students determined the allocation, an increase in the influx of students was a means to further an enlargement of the academic staff.

For this reason the University has expanded in both academic breadth and depth over the last decade. A number of new study programs have been established and new graduate studies have been estabilised within already established disciplines

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and subject areas (Bull & Salvesen 1999). This academic expansion is marked by regional needs and regional considerations. Still, UITØ has an aim to become a full-fledged university, and this puts demands on academic breadth. In addition, increasing demands on internationalisation of activities seem to have put regional considerations somewhat into the shade during the '90s (cf. UITØ, Internasjonalisering og studentmobilitet ved Universitetet i Tromsø 1992).

Consequently, the University is characterised by dilemmas concerning breadth or depth, consolidation or further expansion. The position the University has concerning these dilemmas is that it is still a young and expanding institution. During the '90s, however, it became more difficult to to argue for expansion in a national context (Bull & Salvesen 1999). Nevertheless, concerning infrastructure and facilities, the University has managed to expand throughout the '90s – especially on the modern campus in Breivika.

From 1992 to 1997, a major internal reorganisation took place at the University where structure and academic organisation were central issues. Both external and internal developments can be said to make up the background for the reorganisation. Internally, a lack of a uniform structure and differing degrees of formalisation and delegation hampered leadership and control. Externally, national disciplinary structures became more important leading to a need for academic reorganisation at UITØ. There was a wish to be academically and terminologically on par with other universities. Also considerations concerning national integration in connection with Network Norway idea were central. The result was that the University became organised on three levels: department, faculty and institution.

The solution, however, reflected the past history of UITØ. For example, biology was still spread among several departments, and several of the humanistic subjects did not ´leave´ the social sciences. Towards the end of the '90s the University had six faculties comprising fishery sciences, humanities, law, medicine, mathematics and sciences, and social science. Further, the new academic basic structure consists of a total of 39 departments and four research centres.

8.2 Central quality initiatives in the '90s

Concerning work on quality, the initiatives of UITØ during the '90s have to a large extent been characterised by the ´alternative and modern project´, emphasised by the institution ever since its establishment. Thus problem and project-based

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learning have been central in the efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning (UITØ, Bedre læring for nye tider 1995:4).

Early in the '90s the University defined work on quality as comprising both academic, social and welfare aspects (UITØ, strategiplan for 1992: 8). Even though this interpretation of quality may be said to be founded on the recommendations of the National Committee for Improving Quality in Higher Education (1990), the university, however, critisised this committee for not paying enough attention to the fact that students needed more differentiated follow-up and teaching than previously. Therefore, in the report ´Focus on the Student´ which was a local response to the national Committee, it was among other things suggested to strengthen general student welfare by merging the Student Welfare Body and the University. The suggestion, however, was not considered realistic given that support from the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs at the time would not be forthcoming for such a merger. Still, ´Focus on the student´ was a contributing factor in making the University and the Student Welfare Body apply to the Ministry for funds for an experimental project in order to gain experience from an organising cooperation of that kind.

This project initiated in 1992 with economic support from the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs was a starting-point for the work on quality at the University in the '90s. The project named ´Vision and Cooperation´ (VISAM), had as its objective to initiate, plan and coordinate measures of development within the field of university pedagogy including the social milieu of students. VISAM led to the implementation of a number of measures. During the first years these were especially aimed at integrating writing practice with the studies. Also, in this connection, assistant teachers were engaged to conduct group and project teaching, and a further emphasis was put on university pedagogy. Rather extensive financial support was allotted by the University for backing up the projects (UITØ, strateginotat for 1992-1994, 1992:17).

However, the VISAM project was hampered by a weak organisational attachment to both the university and the student welfare body, and only to a limited extent did it manage to draw up the more overarching and wide-ranging plans of strategy and action for improving quality that the project was also supposed to stimulate. Thus separate measures rather than systematic work were to characterise the VISAM project (UITØ, Brev til Norgesnettrådet 1998).

For this reason VISAM in 1994 was replaced by a special committee for work on quality, namely Forum for Teaching and Studies (FUS). The idea behind FUS was

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to establish a more comprehensive form of work on quality at the University of Tromsø. FUS took over the functions of the former VISAM project that was formally closed down. Organisation-wise FUS was attached to the University Centre for Teacher Training, Distance education and Lifelong Learning (UNIKOM), and in addition was given the responsibility for the coordination of the work on university pedagogy. Directly and indirectly FUS contributed to the production of several reports and studies. Not least reports on writing and study techniques were produced.

It was not FUS, however, but UNIKOM and the administration at the University that functioned as central actors in drawing up the note ´Better Learning for New Times – the Educational Profile of the University of Tromsø within the Network Norway´ (´Bedre læring for nye tider – Universitetet i Tromsøs utdanningsprofil i Norgesnettet´) in 1995. The note, which was later dealt with by the Board of the University, had a clear and externally oriented profile, and it focused on ways in which the University ought to relate to the Network Norway idea in order not only to give priority to academic peak competence and networking within research, but also to be able to value special competence within teaching and learning:

> *At least one of the institutions of higher education in Norway ought to take care of a special function as an arena for testing different study models and study forms. As a small, flexible and innovative university in a region where innovations and rethinking are necessities, the University Board is of the opinion that the University of Tromsø possesses all qualifications necessary to administer a national key function within teaching and learning* (UITØ, Bedre læring for nye tider 1995:2).

The foundations upon which the University wanted to build its key function were on the one hand problem and project-based learning as a basis for work on quality, and on the other hand distance education, or flexible teaching as the University itself preferred to call it. In the note it is further stated that the administration at the university and FUS in conjunction were to draw up projects to embody these new forms of learning and anchor them at department level at the University.

As a matter of fact, these ambitions have to a certain degree become rooted in a few studies like for instance pedagogy, medicine, law, history and to some extent in fishery science (UITØ, Selvevalueringsrapport 1999: 37). Since the middle of the '90s UNIKOM required the students to keep a log-book during their studies. In the log-book, experiences of and reflections on the teaching given are recorded, and the students are obliged to show the log-book in order to get the course taken

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approved. In this way evaluation and the teaching situation as such are integrated. The Faculty of Medicine has also continued its integration of basic, clinical and socio-related subjects in the teaching, its posting of students in the health service and early patient contact. Together with the Faculty of Law, which has also introduced compulsory practice and problem-based learning, these examples illustrate that ambitions harboured centrally to some extent have been implemented locally. At the same time these initiatives to a large extent appear to depend on individual persons inside the milieus, whereas the University centrally has problems integrating the work on quality in the desirable systematic and overall way (UITØ, Brev til Norgesnettrådet 1998).

Appreciating that closer institutional collaboration would be difficult to achieve, the Board of the University decided in 1997 to close FUS and responsibility for the work on quality was transferred to the new faculties to be organised within each of them. Among other things the faculties were given the responsibility of making out their own guidelines for the implementation and follow-up of the student assessment of teaching. The overall responsibility for co-ordination was placed under the central administration. The same year the Board of the University decided to set aside NOK 1 million a year for work to improve quality at the faculties for the coming three years. These resources the faculties would be able to spend on either problem and project based forms of learning, on measures to improve the writing skills of students or for other measures including improving the pedagogical skills among the academic staff. How the resources were spent would have to be reported annually to the central administration.

An evaluation of how the system had worked, however, led to changes in the system of funding in 1998. From now on the faculties would have to apply in advance for the funding of concrete projects instead of reporting afterwards. The reason was that it was felt at central quarters that many faculties did not manage to utilise the resources systematically and according to plan. Conversations with academic staff at UITØ reveal that the new system is looked upon as problematic. To have to apply for funding of quality measures may contribute to more reflective efforts within this field. At the same time departments with established measures ended up with fewer resources than those that only to a small extent have implemented quality measures and made them function. Various informants report that for this reason a possible outcome may be that ´the reward´ for carrying out work on quality in fact turns out to be reduced resources for keeping up the level of activity. This, of course, is not the best stimulus for continued engagement within the field.

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At the University, work on a new strategy plan for the period till year 2010 has been initiated. In a preliminary draft it is stressed that still:

> *…problem and project based forms of learning shall make up central elements of the work on quality. It is desirable to strengthen the development of the institution from being exam producing into becoming educative and focused on student learning.* (UITØ, strateginotat for perioden frem til år 2010 [utkast], 1998).

In an article dealing with challenges facing UITØ at the turn of the Millenium, the rector as one of the co-authors, stressed that it will be a *´strategically correct choice to go much more in for the strengthening of quality in the area of teaching and learning in the years to come than we have managed so far´* (Bull & Salvesen 1999:118). Thus the work on quality was still given high priority and attention by the central leadership of the University at the turn of the century.

In addition, the leadership at UITØ initiated an external evaluation of the institution in 1999. An important aspect of this decision was, not least, to obtain an evaluation of whether the general way of organising research and teaching did contribute to the maintenance of a high quality level in relation to these activities. The idea was that the process of evaluation should contribute to the development of a new strategy plan for the institution.

8.3 An analysis of the quality initiatives

8.3.1 External inspiration and influence

The establishment and the history of the University, including the scepticism this novelty was greeted by the academic community in Norway, did not lead to imitation and mere copying of procedures, ways of organising and systems of leadership at other universities. Hence it is possible to claim that the identity of UITØ contributed to a focus on entrepreneurship, and that the academic scepticism towards UITØ nationally led to a rejection of existing academic traditions in the new institution. Internal reports at UITØ confirm this view, where:

> *…it was important for the University of Tromsø to appear as a different kind of university. (...) The University was to take its own route and not become a copy of the other universities. The University of Tromsø was meant to be integrated into society, socially oriented and democratic. Many of those who came to the University of Tromsø wished to create a new and modern university – and not a new ivory tower* (UITØ, Reorganiseringsprosjektet, sluttrapport fra fase 1, 1993:20).

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In appraising the efforts on quality carried out during the '90s, several factors indicate that the ´doing otherwise´, and also the ideas on relevance in relation to social needs and developmental features of the surroundings, put leads on work in this field. The document ´Better learning for new times´ was, for instance, just as much to be a document meant to profile the University towards the national educational authorities and other academic organisations as a document indicating new internal possibilities for development. This point is underlined by a large part of the informants:

> *We too have to adapt to the ´market forces´. Continuing within the same terminology, you may say that we have to establish some ´comparative advantages´. Our efforts to improve quality may perhaps give us such an advantage.*

The statement indicates that the University consciously and actively utilised the concept of quality as a strategic device to bolster the image of UITØ as an institution characterised by entrepreneurship and innovation. Several of the informants, however, point out that the concepts of problem and project-based learning were not unique to UITØ at all. Rather it was the favourable ratio of students to teachers, together with a new and modern infrastructure of buildings and teaching facilities that provides the institution with good conditions for maintaining and developing this study model. Thus the conditions for problem and project-based learning have been, and remain, comparatively favourable at the University, and that consequently the strategy regarding problem and project-based learning was rather obvious. If one studies the documents that deal with work on quality, however, these conditions are not the most emphasised. Importance is attached, rather, to an ambition of continuing and developing the ´modern project´.

The University in the period from 1992 to 1997 put efforts into changing its organisational structure and hence became more similar to other universities, at least structurally. This did not change the vision of being ´different and modern´. The work on designing strategies and plans of action for quality still presented the University as *´innovative and flexible´* (UITØ, Bedre læring for nye tider 1995:2).

Among the academic staff at the University, however, opinions differ as to whether a statement like this is truthful or not. This goes for both research and teaching:

> *Today probably not many among the academic staff experience the University of Tromsø as anything special compared to other universities. In fact, academic staff is increasingly concerned with their subject fields and discipline, nationally as well as internationally. However, I think that the students probably still have a different image of the University.*

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Others among the academic staff, however, emphasise that the University still has some unique features as an organisation:

> *We still are an organisation that views entrepreneurship positively. The contextual conditions for this concept have changed over time, however. In the past entrepreneurship was associated with ´small is beautiful´, about creating something from scratch, whereas now entrepreneurship is connected to networking, relation building and internationalisation.*

The fact that many of the institutional plans and strategies concerning quality not always appear to have had an impact at the basic units of the University may be explained with another factor of importance, namely the influx of students in the early '90s. For instance it is possible to claim that whereas problem and project-based learning may be an appropriate strategy for a small educational institution, this strategy may become far more expensive and far more difficult to implement, when the number of students grows radically. For instance, the ability to offer distance-education / flexible learning also depends on the presence of the information and communications technology necessary for these forms of learning. An undertaking of this kind again demands resources.

Thus, the influx of students was the single most important factor hampering the work on quality at UITØ. It is a paradox that the factor which in the '90s influenced the growth of the organisation and academic development also became the factor putting most obstacles in the way of one of the most highly profiled initiatives of the institution – the work on quality. Among examples mentioned by informants is the fact that the previous extensive experimentation with alternative examination systems has become more restricted in the '90s. Instead the increase in the number of students has demanded a more efficient and rational winding up of studies and exams. Also the number of students has contributed to a greater concern with carrying through planned activities and work on the basic levels, than reflecting on and evaluating how well existing study models works. The pressure on the flow of students through the system seemed to remove the focus from the contents of teaching and learning.

8.3.2 Institutional identity and tradition

According to informants, entrepreneurship that appears to have worked as an identity marker for the University in relation to its surroundings, has also contributed to putting leads on the internal life of the University; not least in relation to the work on quality. It is possible to claim that the ideal of entrepreneurship has become ´institutionalised´ within the plans worked out for

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the field of quality. In this case the strategy for problem and project-based learning rests on traditions and experiences gained for almost three decades at UITØ. In other words, UITØ seems to have been very good at working out plans for the future based on distinctive features of the institution.

However, the most visible and distinctive proof of this, the document ´Better Learning for New Times´ (´Bedre læring for nye tider´) was not the outcome of a process with broad institutional participation. On the contrary, the document was written by rather few persons working in the central administration and UNIKOM. The strength of the group could be related to their visions for ways in which UITØ might profile itself in relation to the ideas about the Network Norway idea, and not least, they demonstrated a well-developed sensitivity in relation to how such an effort might be combined with the identity of the University. In ´Better Learning for New Times´ this expresses itself in, among other things, the fact that it is first and foremost UITØ, rather than for instance UNIKOM, which is accentuated in the document. Thus it is emphasised how UITØ is characterised by features very compatible with the ideas behind the Network Norway. ´Better Learning for New Times´ therefore serves as a good example of how local initiatives can gain acceptance on an institution-wide level.

The ´institutionalisation´ of the idea of entrepreneurship and the institutional identity attached to being different did, however, lead to some organisational paradoxes at UITØ. The small is beautiful attitude, which dominated the entrepreneurship during the early phases of the development of the University, often was attached to local initiatives taken by basic units themselves or to a group of individuals. Once local initiatives had been taken, no routines had been implemented to safeguard their acceptance on higher levels of leadership at the University. Quite simply an initiative would be implemented waiting for a later decision and possible institutional acceptance. Being the case that problem and project-based learning has been elevated to the status of an institutional strategy, a minority of informants are of the opinion that this in fact may weaken the entrepreneurial qualities of the University:

> *People are not really motivated to teach anymore because of this work on quality that has been bestowed upon us. Instead of letting ´the thousand flowers bloom´, we ended up with pretty standardised models like, for instance, problem-based learning. After all, there are other ways to improve quality and stimulate student learning.*

The fact that an institutional strategy has been worked out for ways to improve the quality of teaching and learning, appeared to some as an institutionalised obstacle to further local innovations within this field.

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At the same time this development did not take place within the field of quality only. An increasing amount of students, administrative reforms, larger demands on reporting in connection with both economy and academic results also contributed to the ´formalisation´ of the University during the '90s (cf. Allardt *et al* 1995; Dahl & Stensaker 1999). However, in taking as a starting point its own history, this formalisation did not contribute to the formation of an image of the University as an increasingly bureaucratised organisation despite the fact that interviews with informants strongly indicate that organisational growth, administrative reforms and a closer focus on economy have led to the need for administrative and academic co-ordination. Also there was a need to improve lines of communication between the central administration and various basic units, due to the fact that the latter experience an increasing ´distance´ between themselves and the decision-making bodies at present. The paradox is that despite this development, many among the staff at the University feel that the entrepreneurial spirit is still alive although to a varying degree at the different institutes.

8.3.3 Effects of the measures

An awareness of the contents of both strategy and plans of UITØ within the field of quality were by and large well developed among both academic and administrative staff at the University. It was also acknowledged, however, that a full realisation and implementation of the visions within this field had not been brought about at the end of the decade, and that an institutionalised ´system´ for work on quality was still lacking (Dahl & Stensaker 1999:33, Leijonhofvud *et al* 1999:42). A member of the academic staff expresses it as follows:

> *I am very pleased with the efforts we have invested in the field of quality. The plans that we have developed are good. What remains now is their implementation.*

Some faculties and institutes, however, have come far in relation to work on quality (cf also UITØ, Selvevalueringsrapport 1999:37). The Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Medicine for instance seem to be way ahead, when it comes to problem and project-based learning. As an example in this context it ought to be mentioned also that the Department of Psychology at the Faculty for Social Science in 1998 received the annual ´Evaluation prize´ awarded by The Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs.

The fact that UITØ is evaluated as the best in a nation-wide survey among students at Norwegian universities, when it comes to the balance between

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lectures, group work and other academically organised activities, and when it comes to the balance between teaching and independent work (Dahl & Stensaker 1999:31) – central elements in more problem and project based forms of teaching – also serves as a general indicator of the fact that this ideal has gained a foothold at the institution. At least the students seem to be positively inclined towards the curricula, study models and the other efforts of the institution within this field (e.g. see UITØ, selvevalueringsrapport 1999:37).

At the same time it is relatively easy to identify other faculties and departments, where, for instance, student assessment of teaching has had less consequence for students and teachers, and where a systematic follow-up of evaluation activities has not been organised. Also there are departments at UITØ that only to a small extent have gone in for forms of learning inspired by problem-based learning. Nevertheless it seems to be a general opinion among the informants that academic staff is concerned with work on quality:

> *Most among the academic staff have always been concerned with quality. We are continuously carrying out evaluations of courses and studies, and I still experience that activities are going on in this field. I think that this evaluation activity has been important in relation to the recruitment of students. We are aware that we have to maintain a high quality if we are to get students to come here.*

This statement indicates that the work on quality to a large extent is related to external conditions, like the challenges of recruitment, which the University are forced to live with permanently, and which are taken very seriously by both the leadership and the academic staff of the institution.

The previously mentioned tendencies of formalisation at UITØ, however, also seem to have exerted an influence on the work on quality both negatively and positively. On the positive side, the formalisation made the work on quality much more of an institutional responsibility than was the case before. Now reporting and a higher degree of visibility are regarded more seriously. On the negative side, the development mentioned also led to opinions of the work on quality as being more of an administrative burden than an academic enrichment:

> *We probably take evaluation more seriously than we did only a few years back. Before we were only a few employed, and we were able to use informal channels. Today we are so many that we have to establish more formalised structures and channels of communication. Probably it is at this point that most feel that the shoe pinches with regard to work on quality.*

Not least such channels of communication are sought after in connection with the follow-up of the work on quality, a fact that UITØ itself seems to have been aware

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of (UITØ, Selvevalueringsrapport 1999:38). That the faculties took over the responsibility for the implementation and the follow-up of the work on quality in 1997 after the central administration, several ad-hoc based and central organs had had the responsibility since the early '90s, but that this has already been changed, indicates the problems already experienced regarding the institutional anchoring of the work. Thus, at the end of the decade the University was only able to follow up the work on quality at the department level to a limited extent (see also Leijonhofvud *et al* 1999:21). One of the measures that UITØ itself brings forth to improve this situation is that:

> *The University ought to consider an incentive structure that may motivate pedagogical development and enforce the quality work at UITØ* (UITØ, Selvevalueringsrapport 1999:53).

8.4 Quality as a means for change

In a report that aimed at describing the development at UITØ in the 1990s both quantitatively and qualitatively, Dahl & Stensaker (1999:78) claimed that the institution was undergoing a transformation from being a ´modern´ into becoming a more ´traditional´ university. Even though this description is valid in view of the reforms and reorganisations that have taken place during the 1990s, it seems, nevertheless, as if the University has managed to preserve the identity of the institution as a different and innovative kind of university characterised by entrepreneurship.

Moreover, the work on quality and the plans and measures that have been implemented within the field seem to constitute central elements of this identity. Quality formed part of a conscious strategy for the continuous maintenance of an image of the University as being ahead of societal development. At the same time as the internal organisation of the University has been changed into becoming more on a par with other universities, the work on quality is utilised for signifying its being ´different´. Quality appears to have become a possibility of distinctiveness for a university experiencing its identity under pressure.

Still, the pressure against identity has changed its character over the decade. The experience in the beginning of the 1990s was that the University was too different compared to other universities, and this was an important reason for the comprehensive process of reorganisation implemented from 1992 to 1997 (UITØ, Reorganiseringsprosjektet, sluttrapport fra fase 1, 1993:48). In contrast, towards the end of the 1990s, UITØ experienced that it had become too ´similar´ to other universities, and that there was a need for profiling the uniqueness of the

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institution. However, during both phases work on quality has been utilised to signify and emphasise the institutional identity. During this process, the institutional leadership have been both attentive to initiatives from below, and they have also worked to promote the visibility of this profile.

When the competition for students increased towards the end of the 1990s, the work on quality also became attached more closely to the recruitment of students and external profiling. Behind these efforts, however, there seemed to be a genuine desire for improvement, and here the work on quality does not at all appear to be meant as a mere symbolic activity by the institution. To quote the rector at the University:

> *We (the university) should not be regarded and mentioned as a mere regional political measure, but as an institution attended by students and teachers because it represents a clear alternative to standardised courses which may be taken in many places, within many subjects and at many colleges and universities. (...) Only a somewhat united University will be able to halt the unfortunate development and develop further positive characteristics and market these both internally within the organisation and externally in the country as such* (Bull & Salvesen 1999:115).

At the same time it is possible to find several examples of a kind of internal de-coupling concerning the work on quality. In many ways UITØ experiences a contrast between what may be labelled as ordinary student assessment of teaching procedures carried out as a separate (´bureaucratic´) activity, and the view on quality and evaluation which is built into the problem-based thinking (cf. the logbook project of UNIKOM). Arguably the University simultaneously had two separate strategies for how quality could be improved that not necessarily tally too well together. Whereas the student assessment of teaching, implemented mainly as a result of political initiatives by the Ministry, emphasises formalities, reporting and follow-up, the University's own emphasis on problem and project- based learning is more dependent on entrepreneurship, informal initiatives and the ability to discover new forms of communication and learning. In practice it seems as if UITØ is still struggling somewhat to smoothly integrate the two forms of work on quality.

Thus it may be claimed that whereas the student assessment of teaching is connected to the formalising and the administrative reforms that the University is going through, the problem-based learning efforts are part of a larger identity forming project initiated by the leadership of the University. Starting in the early 1990s as a vision, it today serves as a guideline for the departments in their development. Seen in relation to the demands and expectations directed at them by the surroundings, UITØ have been critical towards parts of what the national

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Committee for Academic Quality outlined, but also very positive concerning the possibilities opening up in relation to the quality concept. Hence the work on quality has only to a small extent meant pure adaptation of the University to its surroundings. Rather it has been a process attempting to create a fusion of the needs for external profiling with internal development.

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9 Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)

9.1 Introduction

Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) is a ´new´ university established in 1996 as a result of a merger between the Norwegian Technical College (NTH), The Schools of General Science (AVH), The Science Museum, and the Medical School in Trondheim. Together these units made up what was previously called the University of Trondheim (UNIT). UNIT, however, was more of an umbrella construction than an academically integrated university. This fact was underlined by, among other things, the fact that both NTH and AVH had their own rector before the merger.

In addition to the units mentioned, the new NTNU also consisted of The Art Academy of Trondheim, and Trøndelag School of Music. Towards the end of the '90s NTNU had about 18,000 students and 3,000 staff divided among 11 faculties, 72 departments and several reseach centres. Academically the University offers study programs within most subjects (except law), and thus it can be considered a classic full-scale university. Still, as the name indicates, technological and science subjects is prioritised at the institution. The fact that 152 out of 194 doctorates conferred at NTNU in 1998 were within technological and science subjects illustrate this point (NIFU 1999).

The establishment of NTNU did not occur without conflict. Although some actors and groups did support a merger, NTNU was not the result of a voluntary fusion promoted by the former UNIT (Kvaal 1997). Political authorities on the national level drove both the former integration process that led to the construction of UNIT in 1968 and the construction of NTNU in 1996. Strong and differing institutional identities within UNIT was a particular problem during the merger. This goes especially for the difference between NTH's professional studies within engineering, and their strong ties to industry and business, and the more academic tradition in AVH, where the majorities of the studied offered was within social science and the humanities (Kvaal 1997).

The decision to establish NTNU was finally taken in the Norwegian Parliament during the debate on a new university act in 1995, after prolonged tugs of war and negotiations between and within the different units that constituted UNIT. According to informants, much credit for the merger, having so far occurred

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without serious hindrances, is due to the committee appointed by the Government to review the academic shaping of the new university – the so-called Underdal Committee (Underdalutvalget) – and the regular internal meetings of the deans, at which a number of structural and academic compromises were made. Among initiatives meant to minimise conflicts, a special ´Charter´ for NTNU was established, and initiatives were taken to form new inter-disciplinary studies at the institution. These initiatives, however, have not prevented continuous criticism, especially from former AVH staff, that the ´entrepreneurial NTH-culture´ would dominate and overshadow other subject fields (cf. e.g. CRE-report 1997:8). Not surprisingly, rather mixed opinions exist as to whether the establishment of NTNU has been ´successful´ or not. Hence, a picture of an organisation with a somewhat split organisational identity occurs, between that of the *professional* and of the *entrepreneurial* organisational ideal.

One feature of NTNU that made integration difficult was the fact that the University is physically located in different places in Trondheim. This does not facilitate communication and the creation of informal relations between different academic fields. Thus the former NTH is located on Gløshaugen, while the former AVH still is mainly located on Dragvoll. Despite the fact that a special bus service between the two campuses has been established, it seems evident that this situation is not exactly advantageous for NTNU (CRE-report 1997:7). As a consequence the ´two cultures´ are still kept physically separate. In an external evaluation of NTNU initiated by the University itself, and carried out by CRE (Association of European Universities) in 1997, it is in fact stated that:

> *The identity as well as the dominating culture in the University – defined in the Act of the merger – are barriers to smooth integration. Within the boundary condition of the given name and mission, the University must find a way to soothe the sensitivities...*(CRE-report 1997:17).

In their recommendations about what NTNU ought to do to solve the problem, CRE among other things suggested that:

> *In the building up of the integrated University, more centralisation of decisions, e.g., with respect to curriculum, may be a (temporary) necessity* (CRE-report 1997:16).

Simultaneously with the CRE-evaluation, NTNU also carried out a self-initiated and comprehensive project for organisational development (ORGUT). The purpose was to analyse and improve ´the organisational and administrative systems of the University aiming at a considerable heightening of quality and efficiency´ (NTNU, Styrevedtak 24. april 1997). ORGUT was to contribute to the setting free of 50 to 100 million NOK to be transferred from administrative

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functions to the primary functions of research and education. The ORGUT-project can be related to the need for co-ordination and integration which the NTNU-construction had created. There was a wish to increase the efficiency of the administration and what was regarded as an increased ´bureaucratisation´ of NTNU. However, the project contributed to great uncertainty among the staff, not least in relation to what kind of university structure would be the final result. There was much scepticism as to whether ORGUT would lead to a more ´management oriented´ governance structure taking over from the former collegially spirited traditions of leadership at the University (see for instance Andersen 1998).

The ORGUT-process did lead to changes towards a more ´management oriented´ style of steering and leadership at NTNU. This was, however, combined with a wish for de-centralisation and a strengthening of the capacity for management and leadership at the department levels. Management teams were created to strengthen academic leadership, and collegial bodies were intended more to fill the role as strategic actors. The number and influence of various ad hoc committees were reduced, and remaining committees were warned that they should not to limit the new autonomy of the department heads. Also the boards of each department, being the highest managing organ of the basic units of NTNU, were to consist partially of external representatives, albeit in minority (NTNU, Styrevedtak 23. februar 1999). In the final report from the ORGUT-project it is further said that:

> *In accordance with the suggestions of the CRE-evaluation, it is recommended that the strategic freedom of action of the rector should be strengthened. In this context strategy is understood as measures to realise the aims of the institution (as well as) the adaptation of the institution to its surroundings* (NTNU, Rapport fra ORGUT-prosjektet, oppsummering og anbefalinger 1998).

As part of the implementation of ORGUT in 1998, the central administration at NTNU was reorganised, and a new department for organisational development was given special responsibility for implementing the decisions of ORGUT.

9.2 Central quality initiatives in the ‘90s

Since NTNU was first established in 1996, this scrutinising will start out with the initiatives prominent within the field of quality at the central institutions constituting the former UNIT-construction, namely NTH and AVH. Even though units, like for instance the Medical School which established a new 6 years study program in 1993, may be said to be far ahead when it comes to work on quality, with the said study program being based on problem-based thinking (PBL), and

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with both external and internal evaluation attached to the activities, the number of students at this faculty is nevertheless very limited seen in relation to the larger NTH and AVH. Therefore activities at the Medical Faculty will be mentioned to a lesser extent in the following.

Also it ought to be mentioned that UNIT established a committee for improving quality in teaching and learning already in 1990 with representatives from the central administrations of NTH and AVH, the teachers, the Student Welfare Body (SiT) and the students (Magnussen & Larsen 1995:2). In the course of the work of this committee, suggestions were put forward for various measures concerning the quality at UNIT. The suggestions from this committee were, however, first and foremost attached to what the basic units might do to improve teaching and learning, and did not contain any central initiatives with aims of a more institutional kind.

NTH

Work on quality, and especially attached to evaluation, has a long history at NTH. In this connection the Central Committee for the Study Programs (Den sentrale utdanningskomiteen, SUK) played a major role. Not least, it was this body that contributed to the establishment of the so-called Committee for Academic Activities (Virksomhetskomiteen) in the period from 1992 to 1993. The starting point for this work was an apprehension that even though the engineering studies at NTH was academically good, efficient and goal oriented, it had several flaws. For instance, great demands for efforts in studies and very large syllabuses encouraged the development of techniques for surviving exams rather than inciting to optimal learning. Furthermore, the separation of theoretical and practical subjects led to a situation more characterised by fragmentation than integration of knowledge. New societal challenges for technologists also created demands for knowledge on communication skills and ethics. So far, only little attention had been paid to such themes in the curriculum (NTH, Vilje til forbedring 1993:9).

Among the efforts invested in the Committee for Academic Activities were discussions, partly in detail, on these problems. In the final suggestion from 1993 it was argued that the existing studies ought to undergo an extensive revision on several points. In addition to prolonging the civic engineering studies from 4,5 to 5 years, the committee also suggested that the number of subjects ought to be reduced in order to put more emphasis on the basic subjects, thus enhancing possibilities of understanding and reflection. Among other things suggested were more self-tuition and project work, an extension of the main (master) thesis, and

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that problem- based learning ought to be introduced to a larger extent. Concerning evaluation and quality assurance it was suggested to continue with the existing student assessment of teaching at NTH, but that this form of evaluation ought to be extended with more comprehensive evaluations of various studies, and, not least, that *´a quality system proper for the future civil engineering education at NTH´* ought to be developed (NTH, Vilje til forbedring 1993:33).

In a summary of NTH's activities concerning forms of learning and development of competence the way these are reflected in, for instance, the efforts of the Committee for Academic Activities (Fuglem 1997:95), stressed that much of the basis for the changes in opinions of what an civil engineering study ought to be, may be ascribed to the strategic plan drawn up in 1986 and its revised version from 1991. Not least the fact that extensive activities of evaluation concerning student assessment of teaching were initiated at NTH is ascribed to these strategic plans. At the same time, when the student assessment of teaching was finally accepted, its introduction may have been a slight bit too mechanical. This seems to have led to a certain ´evaluation fatigue´ in the early '90s as well as a revision of the student assessment of teaching practice in 1993. The consequent changes mainly implied a reduction of the extent of written evaluation forms and more focus on follow-up (Fuglem 1997:96).

The students at the former NTH also appear to have been boosting the work on quality. Hence, inspired by the intentions latent in the strategic plans mentioned, they initiated a project that was later to be known as ´learning to co-operate´, and they established the Student Group for Alternative Methods of Teaching at NTH (Studentgruppe for alternative undervisningsmetoder på NTH, ALTUND). This engagement also led to a focus on the pedagogical competence of the teachers that, in its turn, contributed to the establishment of a pedagogical competence program for newly employed academic staff (PEDUP) in the early '90s.

In summing up, it appears that many of the initiatives taken at NTH in the period before the merger in 1996 culminate in the efforts and recommendations of the Committee for Academic Activities. Not least the width of the committee with its several different sub-committees working on concrete approaches to problems contributed to increased participation and engagement in relation to the efforts (Øverli 1997:123). Consequently, taken as an institutional effort to improve the quality of NTH's studies, the work of this committee must be regarded as the most central before 1996.

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AVH

A starting point for the work on quality at the AVH appears to be the history and institutional identity that AVH bare. What was gradually to become AVH, originally was a teacher's training college and a carrier of many of the characteristics typical of this kind of education: a strong occupational orientation, a long teacher's training tradition, and a focus on didactics and pedagogy. However, the academic drift of AVH already started in the '60s. It overlapped with the characteristics already mentioned by for instance opening up for experimental schemes in connection with the education given (cf. Aasen & Telhaug 1985, Wale 1997). This history have put its mark on thinking concerning quality at AVH.

The project which put quality on the agenda to the largest extent at AVH, ´The Pedagogy of Big Subjects´ (´Store fags pedagogikk´), was started in 1992 on the initiative of the then dean at the Faculty of Social Sciences (SV-fakultetet). The project included subject fields (mathematics, pedagogy and history) which all had experienced a large influx of students in the early '90s, and which all had problems with the flow of students and as a consequence problems with quality. Although the project was located under the UNIT-umbrella and included the Department of Mathematics and Statistics, the initiative must, nevertheless, be said to be an ´AVH-project´, not least because the project was administered by ALLFORSK. This is a research foundation attached to the AVH-milieu and managed by a group led by the rector at AVH and the dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences. In addition AVH figured formally as employer. The project was launched as a 3 years experiment in university pedagogy with the aim of starting measures to enhance the flow of students and improve the teaching and learning at the three fields of study mentioned. Concretely the project raised the following question:

> *Will an increased amount of resources for the improvement of teaching and tutoring, and an improvement of the work environment of the students have any effects on the completion ratio, the amount of credits taken, the level of performance (better marks), the students' apprehension of the learning environment, the effort, the well-being* (Rønning 1996:3)?

To a large extent ´The Pedagogy of Big Subjects´ also bore the mark of being a research based project. Quantitative measuring of effects was an important ingredient, and the project had a theoretical foundation. Furthermore, it was attempted to get the project placed under the categories of work on quality outlined by the National Committee for Improving Quality in Higher Education (1990). The costs of the project amounting to about 11 million NOK were divided fairly equally between The Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs and UNIT. The concrete measures that these resources were spent on included

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higher density of teachers, extended offers of supervision and improvement of learning and study conditions for the students. At the same time, the three participating departments emphasised the three elements somewhat differently from each other, and consequently spent their resources on somewhat different measures with varying degree of systematisation. This fact rendered an evaluation of the measures more difficult than originally expected. In addition, the project suffered from somewhat insufficient administrative co-ordination and management. Nevertheless, the experiences from the project were positively received by both students and departments participating (Rønning 1996:115-117).

In the beginning of the '90s, the central administration and the faculty leadership at UNIT/AVH also started to pay attention to the situation of the graduate students (especially at Masters level (hovedfagsnivå). Especially it was considered desirable to make a survey of conditions that might contribute to improve the flow and the academic quality during this phase of the study (Skog & Haugen 1994). Once again research efforts were called for. For instance, a survey was made in 1994-95 among academic staff in order to throw light on supervision and to identify factors that might improve it (Børve 1995). In the wake of these surveys, measures were implemented to improve information to the graduate students, to increase the extent of writing practise and to formalise supervision to a higher degree.

´Searchlight on the Student Explosion´ (Haugen & Otterstad 1995) (Søkelys på studenteksplosjonen) was another initiative with a certain institutional profile. Among other things, this relatively limited project, initiated by ALLFORSK and financed by the Faculty of Social Sciences at AVH, had as its purpose to find out to what extent the establishment of NTNU would lead to a need for readjustments at the faculty. In the conclusion of the report it was indicated that the processes of admission and reception of new students were important in a context of quality, and that the introduction of a common first semester or a common basic course might make the start of studies tidier and clearly set out for new students. Further, the report recommended better introduction to various study techniques and also to academic forms of work in small groups. Also the report recommended the establishment of some kind of work forum for the students in Trondheim modelled after, among other things, a similar undertaking at the University of Oslo (Haugen & Otterstad 1995:64-66).

NTNU

The transition to NTNU initiated several projects that had as their purpose to throw spotlight on work on quality at the new institution in a major way. These

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activities were meant to contribute to the integration of the new institution, and in this context the development of new educational and evaluation activities was essential. Most important among these, the establishment of a new common introductory subject (examen philosophicum) at NTNU, was a direct result of the recommendation of the previously mentioned Underdal Committee. Not least the fact that the student would have to develop a scientific way of thinking, stimulate an ability for critical reflection and enhance the ethical consciousness were important arguments for the establishment of an introductory subject like that. At the same time emphasis was put on arranging the subject in accordance with the aims of problem-based learning (Fermann & Vik-Mo 1998:5). The decision to establish a common introductory subject was taken in 1995, and after considerable work on the project the new common subject was implemented in spring of 1998. In order to meet the intentions of founding it on problem-based learning, the common subject was made dependent on a large extent of student participation. For instance, they themselves were supposed to gather information and prepare their own project papers with appurtenant seminar groups (Fermann & Vik-Mo 1998:18). In a preliminary evaluation of the common subject, it was indicated that despite some practical problems, the students thought that the ambitions of creating an inter-disciplinary and multi-thematic profile, a project oriented method of work and ways of preparing material had partly been fulfilled (Fermann & Vik-Mo 1998:70). Parallel to the new introductory subject, efforts have also been made by NTNU to establish new inter- and multi-disciplinary studies at graduate level. So far, however, co-operation between researchers has been predominant, and few full-fledged studies have been established. A significant exception, however, is the subject of industrial ecology, starting in 1999, which will make up a complete study on the civil engineer/master level. Moreover, in 1999 an initiative was taken at the civil engineer studies to start an experimental project called ´Experts in Teams´ (´Eksperter i team´), where students from different academic backgrounds worked on inter-disciplinary approaches to problems during one semester in order to acquire practical skills in project-based methods of work. This form of study, which may be seen as an extension of the recommendations of the Committee for Academic Activities in the former NTH, was intended to be fully implemented at the civil engineer studies by 2001 (Fuglem 1999).

At the establishment of NTNU, a central educational committee for the institution (SEUT) was also established. The idea was that good routines and good practice at AVH and NTH were to be exchanged for mutual benefit. However, this committee was more of a debating-society than an action oriented organ, even though it managed to initiate a project meant to enhance women's interest in information

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technology and computer science. The committee was later shut down in connection with the ORGUT-project.

During the establishment of NTNU a project was also initiated by the Student Welfare Body in Trondheim (SiT) with NTNU (by the central administration) and The Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs as partners. The purpose of the project called ´Academic and Social Experimental Project´ (´Faglig sosialt prøveprosjekt´) was to investigate how academic and social aspects of studying influenced each other and how students might benefit from integrating academic and social factors when studying. The concrete aim of the project was to:

> *contribute to the development of a better co-ordinated and organised tutoring apparatus (both socially and academically) in order to improve the entire didactic milieu of the student, improve the academic progression of the student, improve the possibilities for reaching ones own educational goals* (Rønning 1998:1).

The project was led by the person who was also behind the ´Pedagogics of Big Subjects´, and judging from its concrete aims, the former may be said to be an extension of the latter (Rønning 1998:3). Represented in the project were the subjects of psychology, sociology, english, history, mathematics, biology and the introductory study at NTNU. As was the case with the previous project, the ´Academic and Social Experimental Project´ may also be said to be solidly based both methodologically and theoretically. Among other things, control groups consisting of students, not otherwise involved in the project, were used in order to be able to measure effects of the initiatives more precisely. Among the initiatives implemented in practice were: reception of students, courses in study techniques, seminars on supervision and tutoring, courses on economy and housing and courses to improve writing skills (Rønning 1998:2-3). At the end of the project, Rønning (1998:72) summed up a major finding: that students at the ´free subjects´ to a small extent are prone to let themselves be led by regularly arranged supervision and tutored courses, and that more demand governed ways of conducting, for instance, supervision of studies and advice on job hunting might perhaps be more appropriate for them. In the wake of this project, funds have been allotted for a more limited study of causes for drop-outs among different groups of students.

Partially inspired by the ´Academic and Social Experimental Project´, but independently organised, the so-called Origo Center at NTNU was established in 1997 on the initiative of the central administration at NTNU. The Centre is run as a co-operation between NTNU and SiT, and its purpose is to conduct study and career guidance for students at NTNU. During the first years, the Centre was

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located at Dragvoll only, but at the end of 1999 a branch was established at Gløshaugen. The Origo Centre appears to harbour an ambition of becoming an ´institution building´ activity at NTNU, and in its introductory brochure it is stated, for instance, that *´two cultures think better than one´* and that *´inter-disciplinarity open up for entirely new categories of competence´* (Origo-senteret, Presentasjonsbrosjyre av Origo-senteret, undated). In 1998 the Origo Centre also took the initiative of carrying out the first survey of graduated students at NTNU (Origo-senteret, Kandidatundersøkelsen 1998). The survey, carried out by a private poll firm, received great and positive attention internally at NTNU, and was immediately intended as a regular activity the following years (Universitetsavisa, 17. June 1999).

In addition, a separate teachers' training course (PLU) at NTNU was approved by the university board in 1998. This initiative, recommended by the so-called Underdal Committee, had as its main purpose the strengthening the practical pedagogical competence of the academic staff at NTNU. PLU also had as its purpose, however, *´to take responsibility for further development of university and supervision pedagogy as a prioritised activity at NTNU´* (NTNU, kollegiesak 95/98). In the strategy plan that was gradually developed for the project it appears, however, that the project had become more ambitious with regard to its aims. One was now no longer supposed to take ´responsibility´ only, but also to contribute to the *´development of PLU as NTNU's central organ for university pedagogy´* (Program for lærerutdanning, Strategidokument 1998). As part of this effort, PLU applied for the establishment for a permanent position in university pedagogy. In the strategy document it was also stated that:

> *Taking as a starting point NTNU as a ´learning university´, it would be an interesting extension of today's university pedagogical activities to develop these into also comprising experiments in new forms of learning and evaluation. Seen against the background of NTNU's national tasks, profile and special competence within various fields, the institution ought to become a pioneering university when it comes to converting novel forms of pedagogy into practice. What is meant here is, for instance, problem-based learning (PBL), inter-disciplinarity and the utilisation of information technology in the study programs... In addition, the development of ways of evaluation adapted to aims and forms of learning at the various studies, will be an important task in order to improve the quality, and thus NTNU as an educational institution as such* (Program for lærerutdanning, Strategidokument 1998).

In 1998, simultaneously with the PLU-initiative, NTNU also prepared a plan for a comprehensive pedagogical development program (PEDUP) for members of the academic staff lacking basic pedagogical qualifications. On the one hand, the initiative was a response to demands for formal qualifications drawn up in earlier strategic plans, but on the other hand it was also meant as a possibility for

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university teachers to develop further their skills in teaching. PEDUP was based on an array of various modules that people were enabled to combine according to needs, and thus adapt the course to fit their level of knowledge and interests.

Then, in 1999, the board agreed to the establishment of an ad hoc committee called the Committee for Strategies in Teaching (Undervisningsstrategiutvalget, USU) at the institution. The idea behind this establishment was that the committee should formulate *´suggestions for a strategy of teaching at NTNU, and suggest exact goal formulations for the educational activities at the University´* (NTNU, Referat fra møte i Undervisningsutvalget 1999). Within the mandate, it was further stated that it ought to be debated in what ways the quality of the environment for teaching and learning could be raised at all the studies of NTNU. This includes the specification of measures for evaluation of subjects and pedagogical measures for the academic staff. The USU Committee agreed that the aim of the efforts should be to prepare a strategy document before 1999 (NTNU, referat fra møte i Undervisningsutvalget 1999). As background material for their work, the USU Committee was handed two documents at the first meeting: a recommendation on how the University of Oslo thought it could raise quality standards, and the previously mentioned document from the University of Tromsø, ´Better Learning for New Times´ from 1995.

At the same time, however, there already were projects going on at NTNU which experimented with new forms of learning in combination with information and communication technology (IKT). In 1997, for instance, an initiative was taken at NTNU involving a group of professionals (the PBL Project Group) with the aim of developing a ´Scandinavian Learning Lab´, inspired by, and partially in co-operation with, Stanford University. This was both a national and an international co-operational project focused on the development of new forms of learning based on new technology.

9.3 An analysis of the quality initiatives

9.3.1 External inspiration and influence

Many of the activities concerning work on quality at the former UNIT, and the later NTNU, have been caused by external factors. Especially the influx of students, and consequently a focus on efficiency and student flow, came to dominate the initiatives implemented within this field during the UNIT-period. In addition, the fact that resources were allotted by the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs was a determining factor in the implementation of

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´The Pedagogy of Big Subjects´ and the ´Academic and Social Experimental Project´. All in all, a very adept ´reading´ of the surroundings is a dinstinct characteristic of the university, not least during the UNIT-period but also at the later NTNU.

The external inspiration and influence which meant the most for the NTH-milieu – and today NTNU – is the close mutual contact and communication existing between the civil engineering studies and what may be called the profession of civil engineers represented in industry and business (Gjeitnes 1997). Not only was this contact important to the appearance of the new NTNU-construction, but it also influenced the efforts of the so-called Committee of Academic Activities at the former NTH, and this meant a lot in relation to thinking on academic quality at NTH – especially in relation to problem-based learning (Aas 1999). For instance, the committee focused closely on what a civil engineer is supposed to be able to do after having graduated, and what skills are desirable to possess in future business oriented lines of work. According to this committee, quality was defined as competence, knowledge and attitudes. In other words, it was strongly attached to the concept of relevance. In fact, the entire work of the Committee of Academic Activities was based on a survey carried out by a Norwegian poll firm (Norsk Gallup) in 1993 among graduates of civil engineering and a selection of business leaders. In addition, it may be claimed that the focus on problem-based learning that the Underdal Committee was an exponent for has become rooted in the new common introductory subject at NTNU.

When it comes to the efforts carried out by the National Committee for Improving Quality in Higher Education in 1990, they seem to have had somewhat varied impacts on UNIT/NTNU. At the former AVH, it played a major role in defining the concept of quality and in the projects implemented. Other educational institutions in Norway also inspired the AVH-projects. For example, the project ´The Pedagogy of Big Subjects´ was to a large extent inspired by the measures taken by the University of Oslo regarding first year students. At NTH such nationally oriented models did not nearly have the same impact. An informant associated with the civic engineering studies claims that the reason is as follows:

> *We have a very ´American´ self-image here at NTH, we have a desire to be ´best´. Symptomatic of this, probably, is that when the recommendations of the Committee for Academic Quality arrived in 1990, we experienced them as far behind us with respect to the thinking on quality.*

Other informants share this opinion:

> *After all, we compare ourselves to the best, but we do not copy. At the same time we have to be informed about what is happening at MIT or Stanford. After all, we*

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want to be ahead of development. I read strategic plans from Stanford to know what is going on.

Whether one ´copies´ or not is still questionable. Firstly, the so-called ´co-operative learning´ project which was developed gradually (by the students) at NTH was fashioned after an American model, directly ´imported´ after an academic excursion to the USA, and implemented with the assistance of lecturers from the Cooperative Learning Centre at the University of Minnesota (Birkland & Hagen 1997:23). Secondly, the development of the new study model for the civic engineering studies was based on international contacts and educational networks, where for instance:

Membership of the Conference of European Schools for Advanced Engineering Education (CESAER) has convinced us that the concept for our revised study model at NTNU was solidly based on modern visions for the role of the engineer in society (Aas 1999).

Thirdly, the extension of the period of study for the civic engineering studies, from 4,5 to 5 years, was to a great extent inspired by the length of similar studies abroad where: *´The average actual period of study is shortest at NTH´* (NTH, Vilje til forbedring 1993:10), and that the (engineering) *´studies must be scientifically based and on an international M.Sc./M.Art. level´* (NTH, Vilje til forbedring 1993:13). Despite the assertion that the new common introductory subject at the NTNU was the real reason for the extension of the civic engineering studies (Fermann & Vik-Mo 1998:6), a 5 years duration of studies fitted perfectly, however, as an adaptation of these studies to an international Master level (3 + 2 model). The initiative of establishing a ´Scandinavian Learning Lab´ may perhaps be said to be yet another example of ´copying´, although basically it was also a project of co-operation with other institutions.

During this examination one has the impression that The Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs meant little to NTH/AVH/NTNU. This is not true, however. For instance, even though the Committee of Academic Activities at the then NTH primarily focused on professional demands on engineers of the future, the work of this committee contains many and partly extensive references to national political document and white papers on higher education. For instance, the Committee for Academic Activities, not least, acquired its arguments for the view that the studies in technology also had to contain insight into culture and society from the then current white paper on higher education (Stortingsmelding nr. 40 1990-91) (NTH, Undervisningsmetoder 1993:4). The Underdal Committee, which was appointed by the Government in order to co-ordinate the academic organisation of NTNU, may also be said to have been of great importance. Not

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least in relation to the appearance of the new common introductory subject/examen philosophicum.

Although the AVH-milieu may be said to have been good at forming relations with other educational institutions in the region and nation-wide by, for instance, being early in introducing a credit system that facilitated student mobility, AVH did not pay the same attention to interested parties within business and industry. In this regard, the new NTNU-construction stimulated increased interest in such actors also within the humanistic and social science milieus. In connection with reduced growth in the number of students at the former AVH, this seems to have led to a shift in attention away from restricted admission, flow, and problems of finding resources and lecture halls big enough in the early '90s, and towards a larger emphasis on relevance and learning at the end of the decade.

9.3.2 Institutional identity and tradition

As we have seen, (at least) two different institutional identities encountered each other at the establishment of NTNU in 1996. The new institution, with external aid from the Underdal Committee, sought to use work on quality as part of the establishment of a new superstructure (the common subject) to provide staff and students too with a more uniting and identity forming point of departure. Even though this integration process takes time, it have started at the University (CRE-report 1997:17), and ideas about the ´two cultures´ forming an insurmountable barrier to integration seem to belong to the past – also within the former AVH (cf. e.g. Aaslestad 1999).

An inclination for quantifying, ´making scientific´ and emphasising ´hard data´ formed part of the basis of the work on quality at both AVH and NTH. At NTH this resulted in very extensive (survey based) arrangements for student assessment of teaching. At AVH it led to several quasi-experimental methodological arrangements inspired by (American) pedagogically founded evaluation research (Rønning 1996:23, 1998:11, cf. also Allardt *et al* 1995:56). As Rønning (1996:4) herself writes, this resulted in a very individualistically oriented work to improve quality aimed at the individual student. This approach has been experienced as problematic by some of the informants:

> *NTH has been conducting student assessment of teaching since the mid-1980s. You know, they have a system for this which more or less runs like a ´self-acting machine´. This entire evaluation system is very individualistically oriented in contrast to other institutions that, for instance, award prizes for the best courses etc.*

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At the same time, the efforts invested by the Committee for Academic Activities, and the later common introductory subject/examen philosophicum, may be said to represent a departure from this individualistically oriented tradition where the studies and the educational process became more central. It may be claimed, however, that the perspectives of the Committee for Academic Activities were a result of other traditions at NTH, namely the link to various professions and the closeness to the students in connection with tutoring in relation to teaching. That several different traditions runned up against each other, on questions of how the quality of the civil engineering studies should be developed further, seems to have had a constructive effect. During the process a new vision and a ´new´ apprehension of what constitutes quality were developed. This vision held up the importance of problem-based learning as the link between external professional needs and internal possibilities for academic development. Although ambitions about quality as inter-disciplinarity orientation and skills seems to receive wide institutional support, and that many students, for instance, are positively inclined towards the new common introductory subject at NTNU, there are also signs, however, that processes of this kind take time, and that scepticism towards other subjects than the ones ´needed´ is still widespread among students of civic engineering (Fermann & Vik-Mo 1998:72).

In addition, the more institutional work on quality at NTNU after 1996 can be characterised by another old NTH-tradition, namely to base work on quality on various strategic plans. This tradition started at NTH as early as in the '80s (Fuglem 1997:95), it was carried on in the beginning of the '90s, and it also formed the basis of the work that the new USU committee was meant to carry out (NTNU, Referat fra møte i Undervisningsutvalget 1999). Therefore, in summing up, the work on quality has been based on various elements and traditions at NTNU.

9.3.3 Effects of the measures

Looking more closely at the effects of the measures implemented in the '90s, the heterogeneous character of the basis of work on quality has been important to the effects that may be traced. For instance, a common feature of many of the projects implemented appears to be accumulation, only to a small degree, of knowledge from one project to another, and that horisontal and vertical exchange of experiences has not occurred to any large extent internally. As an example, informants from the milieus participating in ´The Pedagogics of Big Subjects´ claim that knowledge and experiences from this have been little sought after by other academic milieus. Neither have the experiences from the project been promoted internally through extended information and seminar activities.

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Another example came when NTNU established its USU Committee in 1999. At the outset, work has only to a small extent been based on the measures already implemented at UNIT/NTNU. The basis of evaluation, upon which USU was supposed to build its recommendation, among other things, was mostly taken over from the universities of Oslo and Tromsø. Therefore, although it is possible to document effects of particular projects (see e.g. Rønning 1996, 1998) and in cases where a project, for instance ´The Pedagogy of Big Subjects´, is evaluated as a successful measure by an external evaluation committee (Arkeryd *et al* 1995:14), the experiences from such projects have only to a limited extent been utilised in further work on quality.

Insofar as systematic accumulation of knowledge occured, it functioned best in the civil engineering studies, where the system for student assessments of teaching still existed. Even though informants claimed that the follow-up of each particular evaluation has been problematic (see also Arkeryd *et al* 1995:10, Bugge *et al* 1995:47), this kind of work on quality is considered important by several of those interviewed:

> *What means most is that it has an impact locally. In that case the subject assessment is probably the best, in that it focuses on the core-activity: the encounter between student and teacher.*

At the same time administrative staff claimed that the reception of new students as well as information to them, improved over time, and that they were proud of the development in this area. These informants belive that at least to some degree, experiences have been accumulated contributing to incremental, but systematic improvements over time.

The establishment of the Origo Centre also played an important role in co-ordinating activities connected with supervision and tutoring of students. Not least, it enabled supervisors of studies from various academic fields to meet and exchange information. In the first phase, however, this only happened at Dragvoll, even though identical results probably occurred with the establishment of another Origo Centre at Gløshaugen. It has been possible administratively to bring about an accumulation of knowledge that to a lesser degree was managed academically, is something that, as one of the informants explained, may be related to a high degree of continuity on the administrative side:

> *Both AVH and NTH had their own administrations which to a high degree were independent units. We appointed people there to have sole responsibility for the work on academic quality. However, this led to the work on quality becoming separated from the academic activity. We were allotted both academic and administrative work on quality, where especially the latter variety focused on flow and efficiency.*

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An additional point that may contribute to an explanation of the fragmentation of the work on quality is the strong environmental orientation at NTNU, where established routines for ´reading´ the environment to some extent lead to opportunism, where one, to a high degree, lets oneself be governed by the resources that The Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs, for instance, makes available. To sum up: a majority of the informants admit that overall these factors led to fragmented efforts. Focus was often changed and institutional adaptation to changing environments is almost considered a tradition. Concerning the work on quality of teaching and learning, the result becomes a sort of ´pinprick strategy´.

However, one feature of the development during the '90s has been relatively consistent over time: the focus on Problem-based learning (PBL), and the development which emerged in relation to acknowledging this form of learning as being entirely central for the development of quality in connection with the education offered. The establishment of a new study model in medicine in 1992/93, the work of the Committee for Academic Activities, and the new common introductory subject had a lot of influence on attitudes that proliferated. Much of this can be explained by the fact that during these processes, the contents of the studies were attacked, thus engaging the academic staff in another way than through ´administrative´ measures. As a consequence they showed very great interest in providing contributions to the processes. However, that all the processes were relatively extensive and ´heavy´ regarding work-load and people involved made potential opponents of a new study model realise that this was something that could not be changed or adjusted on an individual basis. To very many among the academic staff ´PBL´ became part of the standard vocabulary and the revision of existing study models and curricula have become more central activities:

> *Probably the attention paid to the questions on quality has become greater during the '90s. Much of this can probably be attributed to the Committee for Academic Activities. We now realise that an increasing amount of hours are spent in making study plans, when it comes to revision of syllabuses etc. This has now become a continuous job of ours.*

An indirect consequence of the work of the Committee for Academic Activities is the establishment of the so-called ´PBL Project Group at NTNU´ that consists of a group of professionals with great interest in PBL-thinking. Among other things, this has led to a co-operation with the University of Oslo on the so-called Scandinavian Learning Lab that is to enter into co-operation with other Nordic universities like KTH in Sweden and Aalborg University in Denmark as well as

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Stanford University in the US. Furthermore, that this concept of learning has also a central place in the work of the USU Committee indicates that preferences in favour of PBL as a way of teaching have gradually reached the institutional level of NTNU.

9.4 Quality as a means for change

In the first years after the establishment of NTNU, questions related to the quality of teaching and learning were only to a small extent used as a means for integrating the former institutions of UNIT/NTH/AVH. To a large extent, quality was seen more as a ´administrative´ concern often connected to questions of, for instance, effectiveness. Concerning outwards profiling towards new students, the ´learning environment´ in Trondheim has been used as the main element in marketing, rather than quality. This, however, is understandable when placed against the background of the former NTH's traditional high status as an educational institution (cf. Moe 1997). National evaluations of various academic fields have also demonstrated, however, that many departments and institutes at AVH are of high academic standard (cf. Allardt *et al* 1995:70; Arkeryd *et al* 1995:13).

At the same time, in the wake of the establishment of NTNU, some measures were developed, where quality was also indended to contribute to the development of the new university. The establishment of SEUT, the introduction of the new common introductory subject and the newly appointed USU Committee are examples. All these initiatives represent ambitions intended to contribute to the integration of NTNU. None of them affected the organisational identity of NTNU to any extent. However, to understand the problems associated to implementing these measures, informants tend to end up with problems of integration and its built-in conflicts.

Not only two academic traditions, but also two administrative systems, encountered each other: NTH, with its large central administration and high degree of centralisation on the one hand, and AVH with its comparatively limited central administration and high degree of decentralisation (strong faculties and departments) on the other. Even though AVH, in terms of student numbers, actually outgrew NTH in the beginning of the '90s, this ´power switch´ only partially led to AVH exerting stronger influence on how NTNU was to be developed. Looking at NTNU today, several typical NTH-features catch the eye, not least the focus on strategic planning and management by objectives which had long traditions at NTH (cf. Hjulmand & Rasmussen 1994, Kuvås 1997) seems to be

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carried on at the new institution. Another indicator is that the ORGUT-report ended up removing various permanent and temporary committees that have central roles to play in a more collegially spirited tradition of governance of which AVH has a part. Still, the latter reorganisation might become very important to further institutional work on quality. As one of the informants said:

> *After all, somebody has to be centrally responsible for the quality of this institution! The ORGUT-model de-centralises a responsibility which perhaps ought to have been institutional. However, I still think that this is part of a process during which the central administration may acquire a stronger role after a while. I guess this is a part of the process of ´building´ NTNU.*

The emphasis of the ORGUT-project on the de-centralisation of work on quality may, for instance, be regarded as a formalisation of practices already well-established at NTNU (student assessment of teaching was a departmental responsibility at the old NTH). Some years ago, however, the CRE-evaluation recommended that more emphasis ought to be put on various institutional measures instead (CRE-report 1997:11), exactly because:

> *Faculty autonomy – especially in the engineering faculties – is such, that the teaching and the research in the University seem completely compartmentalised* (CRE-report 1997:11).

Co-operation between research and teaching and also inter-disciplinary integration of various studies are still not always perceived to be connected. That responsibility for the new inter-disciplinary common introductory subject/examen philosophicum at NTNU has been given to milieus at the former AVH, apparently without seriously involving the technological and the science milieus is one example (see e.g. Fermann & Vik-Mo 1998:12). Such an organisation may be called inter-disciplinary within the social sciences. It is hardly inter-disciplinary in the sense that was originally intended for the NTNU-construction.

Therefore it may be argued that further de-centralisation of the work on quality only have contributed to cement former traditions of leadership at AVH and NTH respectively. This is acknowledged by another informant:

> *This has a lot to do with power. As a rule, people do not like to have their activities checked. De-centralising and individualising the work on quality to some extent also makes it more harmless.*

Many informants hold the view that the institutional leadership at NTNU did not actively promoted the work on quality at the institution during the 1990s. Such lack of involvement is a central factor explaining why work on quality not affected the organisational identity of the institution. The ORGUT-process appears to be

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focused on the ideal that power and responsibility within each particular organisational unit are supposed to be de-centralised and visible. Yet the consequences of this process may instead be that common functions, for instance work on quality, suffer, because this work often implies co-ordination between different organisational units and different organisational levels. The need identified in the CRE-evaluation in relation to work on quality, that there ought to be a integrated ´management information system´ (CRE-report 1997:12) at the institutional level, for instance, does not appear to be integrated into the organisational structures now worked out.

However, the PBL-focus at NTNU can change this picture in the future. The argument in the previous sections has been that structures and power relations at the former UNIT/NTNU have stalled and ´delayed´ the work on quality. Still, it is also possible to see that the germ of the work on quality, in the efforts invested in the Committee for Academic Activities, the ambitions of the new inter-disciplinary introductory subject, and what has become part of the mandate of the USU-committee, may over time influence the structures and power relations at NTNU as well. The work on quality could be in a process of being re-defined from an independent, isolated and administratively related activity to becoming part of NTNU's visions of the university it is supposed to become. A central figure from the leadership of NTNU expresses it this way:

> *Quality interpreted in a traditional academic way is a wrong focus. We ought not to focus on teaching, but on education. We ought not to focus on information, but on learning. Today this has gained acceptance here at NTNU.*

The processes, that appear to lead to this change in attitude at NTNU, are connected both to the Charter, the name of the University, and to recent work carried out by the Committee for Academic Activities. The work was laid down in connection with the new common introductory subject and to a rising interest in using information and communication technology for teaching and learning. The ORIGO Center that started out as a Dragvoll-project, later expanding its field of action to also include Gløshaugen, is an interesting element in this context. It represents one of the few examples of measures implemented by the Dragvoll-milieu being accepted at Gløshaugen. This centre also contributes to co-ordinating quite a few activities within the field of quality. Thus, even if the identity of NTNU has not been affected very much by activities related to quality in the 1990s, the picture emerging is one of a tendency of various ´bottom-up´ measures, little by little, being adopted as ´institutional activities´.

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10 The Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology (MF)

10.1 Introduction

The Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology (MF) is a private academic institution situated in Oslo. MF offers various undergraduate, graduate and doctorate studies, and a professional study program in theology. The history of MF is related to what the institution itself refers to as a ´confused theological situation around the turn of the century´, when some Christian clergymen and lay people wanted a more committed attitude to the Word of God, that the creed should be the starting-point for all preaching, teaching and clerical service. To accommodate this view, MF was established in 1908 with three teachers and eight students of theology. The institution was financed via donations from various Christian communities, supporting associations and individual persons. The institution continued to be privately financed until 1972, when MF, after a parliamentary resolution, was granted partial state support. State support was fixed on a rough estimate. During the first years, it constituted around 40 to 45 percent of the annual budget. Later, state support increased steadily. At the end of the '90s, it represented around 70 percent of the annual budget (MF, Virksomhetsplan 1998-2000, 1997: 5). Gradually, state support has been given in a more organised way. Today, it is regulated according to the Act on Private Education of 1986.

Academically, MF has developed from being an institution strongly attached to theological education of clergymen into an institution where freer academic studies of religion and religious knowledge, life-long learning and post-graduate courses, gradually have become more central. Thus the establishment of a particular department for religious knowledge in 1967, the establishment of a one-year seminary for catechists in 1977 and also the establishment of comprehensive provisions of post-graduate courses for teachers in primary and secondary school in the '90s, make up important elements in the development of MF. In the spring of 1990, for the first time, more students were admitted to the study program for religious knowledge than at the study program in theology. In the spring of 1999 there were more than twice as many students of religious knowledge than of theology. Nevertheless, interviews give the impression that during this period MF preserved a self-image of being a ´different´ and a ´unique´ educational institution grounded in religion.

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From having been established as a protest against theological developments, MF has also, over time, become an increasingly research-oriented institution and more strongly attached to the academic standards in public higher education. Both MF's right to offer various academic degrees and its rights to public funding were during the 1990s regulated by the Act of Private Education of 1986. In 1990 MF, as the first private higher education institution in Norway, was also given the right to confer doctoral degrees (Dr. Theol). This combination of an academic and a religious basis seems to have provided the institution with an organisational identity akin to the ideal of the *professional* organisation.

Towards the end of the '90s the institution organised its studies into one three broad areas: A study program in theology, one in religious knowledge and one in practical theology for clerical- and curate students. The institution also offers a doctor education program. Towards the end of the '90s the institution had almost 800 students, of whom a little over 600 were full-time. The academic staff amounts to about 50 full- and part-time employed, among whom almost a third qualify as professors. Over the last few years the number of graduated doctoral candidates has been stable and high.

Administratively, the Managing Board (FS), with 21 members, is the highest decision-making body at MF. However, it meets only once a year. It delegates daily business to a Board with five members coming from and elected by FS. FS draws up the Basic Rules – MF's Charter – that set goals and regulates the running of MF. It is the only body with authority to change them. Academic activities at MF are headed by a dean (read: a rector) elected for a period of 3 years by the staff meeting. A director takes care of administrative activities.

10.2 Central quality initiatives in the '90s

MF has had a system for student assessment of teaching since the mid '80s. This form of evaluation may be said to have been institutionalised long before demands for systematic evaluation schemes emerged from The Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs in the early '90s. However, the student assessment performed at MF is special. It is student initiated and run by the local student interest organisation. At the same time, the design and the follow-up of the evaluations are more traditional: around the middle of the semester, written questionnaires are handed out to the students. Afterwards the teacher goes through the forms and is responsible for the follow-up.

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MF will be 100 years old in year 2008, an occasion which in 1988 inspired the Board of MF to appoint an Executive Committee to formulate and draw up possible lines for institutional development for the institution as well as fundamental ideas and goals which might help realise these scenarios towards this occasion. The inspiration for the entire process came from the work on strategy then carried out by the University of Oslo in connection with its own 200th anniversary (Universitetet i Oslo - 2011). In other words, the Board of MF wanted a study of future prospects intended to:

> *Be a tool for creating a good sense of identity at MF by clarifying MF's role and vision, by offering clues as to how to appear outwards, by expressing wishes on how to arrange oneself internally* (MF, Menighetsfakultetet frem mot år 2008, 1990:25).

An important part of this study was made up of a survey among its graduates. The survey revealed that teaching and syllabuses ought to be rearranged in several of the study programs at the institution. Graduates, for instance, wanted less priority given to traditional subjects like Latin and Hebrew, to the advantage of more methodologically and practically ´useful´ subjects - spiritual guidance and pedagogy (MF, Menighetsfakultetet frem mot år 2008, 1990: 34).

Drawing on the findings of the survey and on discussions in the Executive Committee, they then presented the document ´The Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology towards year 2008´ (MF, Menighetsfakultetet frem mot år 2008) in January 1990. In it, the Executive Committee drew up several different scenarios for MF. One scenario was that of an institution totally adapted to the continuously changing expectations and demands of the surroundings, but without visions and ideas of its own. Another was that MF, as an institution with potential internal academic and religious conflicts, might become isolated with neither religious nor social impact.

The desirable image for the future was an institution with a conscious attitude towards its own historical peculiarity and profile, yet ´modernised´ through increased inter-disciplinarity and closer integration of theory with practice. A wide range of life-long learning initiatives and post-graduate courses, among which courses on ethics in relation to business and industry and on cross-cultural communication, were suggested as new pillars of the institution (MF, Menighetsfakultetet frem mot år 2008, 1990:10). In the drafts of a plan of action, a strategy plan and a plan of activities, which the Executive Committee also drew up, several revisions of existing study programs were suggested, along with measured intended to improveme teaching and learning. It was also proposed

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contact between teachers and students ought to become closer and more regulated (MF, Menighetsfakultetet frem mot år 2008, 1990:21).

Among measures implemented in the wake of this group's work, a flourishing and investment in work on pedagogical development took place in the beginning of the '90s. In 1993, quite extensive resources were set aside for pedagogical and didactical schooling (MF, Virksomhetsplan 1993:8). In 1994, the term quality assurance was used for the first time in connection with planning, in relation to the need for more efficient running of the institution and better utilisation of available resources (MF, Virksomhetsplan 1994:6). The general aim was to:

> *…develop a strengthened system of evaluation of teaching including the implementation of an analysis of flow in order to improve the ´production´ of the Faculty* (MF, Årsberetning 1994:8).

Related to the ambitions of developing a more institutional system of evaluation, also considered was, on the institutional level at MF, to get the institution certified according to the ISO-9000 standard. A study tour was made to higher education institutions in Sweden to learn from their experiences. As part of the interest in quality, then prominent at MF, ´evaluation of suitability´ was introduced at the Study of Theology to identify possible graduates unsuitable for taking up holy orders. Responding to the wish for a more institutionally run system of evaluation, the MF leadership introduced more comprehensive evaluation meetings at which 12th semester students of theology were invited for an extensive individual conversation with the academic co-ordinator for the study program and the study adviser. One outcome of the meeting would be a note analysing the student's experiences of his or her study program.

Another feature of the work on quality during this period was the introduction of the concept of students´´environment for learning´. This concept was often connected to the establishment of joint religious congregations, to the development of guidelines for closer contact between teacher and student and also to the appointment of advisers of practice. According to an informant, one sign of how the concept of an environment for learning appears to have been interpreted, is that the post of vicar for the students, which had been part of MF since the '70s, was redefined in the early '90s, from being ´spiritual guide´, to becoming an ´activist of the environment for learning´. At the same time, on an institutional level, what is implemented first and foremost during this period was management by objectives (MBO). In the beginning of the '90s, MF spent much energy in establishing various plans and drawing up strategic initiatives.

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However, the processes that most informants think put the work on quality on the agenda at MF are the curricular revisions of all study programs from 1995 to 1998. This work may partially be seen as implementing the measures drawn up in 1990 by the previously mentioned Executive Committee. The study program for Religious Knowledge, the first subjected to an extensive revision, was also strongly influenced, however, by the reforms following a resolution in Parliament of 1996. A new subject of religious instruction in primary school was introduced, and this created changes in teacher training education for the schools. The new curricula generally emphasise increased student engagement, practical experience, different forms of teaching, as well as closer contact between teachers and students. The curricular revisions appear to have implied very extensive change processes. They involved visits to institutions that recruited graduates from MF, in order to get feed-back on what sorts of qualifications were needed. In such cases the internal 12th semester evaluation at MF was widely used. Engagement among students and teachers at MF has been very strong. Furthermore, when new curricula are implemented, they are evaluated after a first trial run to ensure the syllabus, the curricula and the examination systems are adjusted appropriately.

Curricular revisions led MF to understanding the need for critical evaluation of traditional forms of teaching, and, not least, to focus more on the reality and professional challenges that graduates might encounter. It led to creating a new semester subject of practical theology within the study program of theology. Students responded very positively to this. Attempts to improve the interplay between teacher and student have also been carried out through various smaller projects initiated in 1997 and 1998, to *´stimulate academic rethinking and inter-disciplinary co-operation´* (MF, arbeidsplan 1997:5). Together with two other developments of great importance to MF, the increasing degree of internationalisation, including a new master degree study and an increasing interest in distance/flexible teaching, this resulted in MF, towards the end of the '90s, spending serious efforts on problem-based learning (PBL) as a new central strategy for teaching. As part of these efforts, the academic staff´ were ´trained in problem-based learning and challenges posed by this study model´ (MF, Arbeidsplan 1998:5, see also Eriksen 1998).

10.3 An analysis of the quality initiatives

10.3.1 External inspiration and influence

The influence of the so-called Executive Committee that drew up ´The Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology towards Year 2008´ on the development of the

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institution throughout the '90 cannot be ignored. Inspired by a similar project at the University of Oslo, but, above all, by a general contemporary concern with planning, and especially MBO in relation to higher education in Norway (cf. Christensen 1991), the committee both shaped a vision for what MF was going to be like in the year 2008, and drew up measures required to get them there. Indeed, the Executive Committee expressed the opinion that MF would have to reorient from a focus on rules to a focus on objectives (MF, Menighetsfakultetet frem mot år 2008, 1990:14).

Thus, the committee marked the beginning of a decade, where various plans of activities and strategies were to occupy the leadership of the institution, and no less so, the elaboration of measures concerning the quality of teaching and learning. In addition, the use of planning documents changed the entire language at MF. For instance, in the annual plan from 1992, concepts like ´business idea´ was introduced (MF, Virksomhetsplan 1992).

However, the concern with formal plans is not due only to a local interest in such processes. It may also arise from a need for external adaptation. For instance, as a private institution of higher education, MF was obliged to submit its curricula to the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs for approval. Thus, the focus on curricula and, sometimes, a vehement focus on study revisions make up parts of an ever recurring process of legitimising the institution towards the surroundings. However, that a lot of work is spent on revisions is also due to procedures of approval being very time-consuming. It is in MF's own best interest that approval occurs without undue delay. Such delays could mean postponing internal readjustment processes at MF commensurably. Given competition with other educational institutions, this is something MF wanted to avoid.

To a very large extent MF, as an institution, is influenced by its surroundings. A majority of informants concur:

> *Often we are said to be a conservative and exclusive institution, but that is certainly not true. We are extremely change-oriented and focused on our surroundings.*

This orientation towards the surroundings may be explained in part by the history of MF. Traditionally, private donations made up a large part of the funding of the institution. For a long time this made it important to be on good terms with potential financing sources. Eventual state support altered the focus of this orientation towards the surroundings. It became more important to adapt to the public higher education system as well as remaining up-to-date on changes in

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educational policies relevant to MF as an institution. Several changes throughout the '90s show that MF, to a large extent, has directed its focus towards the public education system. Clear examples of the adaptation and ´regulation´ of MF occur in the frequent references – found in plans of strategies from the mid-'90s – to the need to profiling MF in relation to the Network Norway idea; in the later setting up of the administrative student system (FS) used by other Norwegian universities; and in the realisation of the need to enhance internationalisation at MF in relation to European and Nordic student-exchange programs like Erasmus and Nordplus.

Opting for PBL towards the end of the decade may partially be a result of the revisions of curricula undertaken earlier. External sources of inspiration are also evident, however. Firstly, during the '90s awareness that students are also educated to carry out a profession increased. The growing importance of teacher training at MF strengthened this awareness. This student profile changed MF quite a lot internally with the gradual realisation that the college was not educating vicars for the Church, but also teachers for primary school. As one informant put it; *today we are educating people for a variety of labour markets.*

Secondly, opting for problem-based learning occurred as a consequence of a high degree of orientation towards what happened at other educational institutions both in Norway and internationally. One informant motivates the going for PBL like this:

> *It is evident that one reason for us to introduce PBL now, is that practice has become so much more important during the '90s. Today students are concerned with being able to master the practice of their profession when they have graduated from here, and hence they are very pedagogically oriented. Our inspiration concerning problem- based learning have we obtained from study programs in medicine.*

This ´inspiration´ has also become embodied however, by MF inviting people from medical education who have themselves experienced what problem-based learning entailed. In addition, MF sent representatives to higher education institutions in the USA to gain more knowledge of this study model. Yet, among informants the conviction that one has not ´copied´ anyone, but that ´we know who we are, and what we stand for´ appears to be strong.

The biggest problem experienced by MF towards the end of the '90s was a communication gap between the institution and interested parties lacking detailed knowledge of MF. The institutional leadership gave priority to increased external contact in the future:

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Also, I am very concerned with replacing all the myths about MF through meetings. Often MF has become disabled because of all the myths hovering over Church and society about MF being narrow-minded, deeply conservative, anti-feminist, philosophically backward etc. This we shall have to argue against by people of the faculty encountering people and institutions face to face (Lys og Liv 1999).

10.3.2 Institutional identity and tradition

Interviews with informants at MF clearly indicate that the institution´s identity is well-known to the staff. This identity rests on two pillars. First, it rests on a familiar knowledge of the phase of establishment of MF and the religious quarrels contributing to its establishment in 1908. Second, it rests on an increasing realisation that the institution is also an academic organisation, and thus is a part of a larger academic community:

After all, theology is part of the humanistic subjects, and traditionally we are placed in a European humanistic academic tradition. As an academic institution we are probably more similar to, than different from, other academic institutions – what we are doing is research and teaching on university level.

Still, it academic identity is to a large extent an outcome of the conflict about the establishment of MF. That MF met criticism and scepticism, especially in relation to its academic level, has surged a strong determination in staff to maintain high standards of quality within research and teaching. Being given the right to confer doctoral degrees in 1990 meant a lot to the academic self-confidence of the institution. However, the tensions the two pillars created at MF, were still alive at the end of the '90s when informants report that this tension was hard to handle. Depiction from the outside of MF as primarily being a ´religiously´ based organisation occur quite often, whereas MF to a much larger extent are conscious of and concerned with its academic qualities. This relation of tension may be illustrated by the fact that demands for ´religious clarity´, often raised by individual students and actors in the surroundings, may be experienced as difficult to combine with more academically inclined demands for objectivity and analysis.

Work on quality, however, have contributed to linking the religious and the academic foundations of the institution. An example is to be seen in the definition and local shaping of central concepts that the focus on quality helped to introduce. For instance, the way the concept of ´environment for learning´ was interpreted at MF clearly illustrates this point. The concept included the need for religious meeting-places and joint congregations as parts of measures to improve the environment for teaching and learning. One informant explains the local interpretation of the concept as follows:

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Thoughts about an environment for learning struck home at MF, because, after all, we cherish the principle of developing «entire human beings». Surely, students are not supposed to use one cerebral hemisphere only. They also have to be part of a community outside the teaching as such.

The National Committee for Improving Quality in Higher Education in 1990 defined environment for learning in terms of the academic and social life of the student as a whole. MF, however, added a religious aspect that ´fitted´ in with traditions already established at the institution. The concern shown by MF towards problem-based learning later in the '90s appears to be interpreted in the same vein. Many informants perceived problem-based learning as a means for realising an old ideal at MF, namely closeness to, and interaction with, congregations – the field of practice. This is part of the central history of MF, since the institution was established precicely to be on speaking terms with congregations and ´grass roots´, to make theology relevant (MF, Menighetsfakultetet frem mot år 2008, 1990:5). Yet, problem-based learning represents a renewal of the academic tradition of communication, even though it was not fully implemented as practice at MF by the end of the decade. However, problem-based learning serves to integrate the latent contradiction between more academically and more professionally oriented studies:

For the last ten years we have been more conscious about what we are doing. We have formalised both our academic and professional identity. I think that today we are better equipped to live with the fact that tension between these two dimensions still exist – we want to keep the cake and eat it too.

That MF during the '90s put such great emphasis on carrying through these changes on the basis of a comprehensive apparatus of planning can, in the first instance, be seen as a departure from many of the characteristics of steering and leadership typical for a traditional academic institution. In many ways, this is also part of a tradition at MF. For instance, the emphasis put on curricula derived from the need for their approval by the educational authorities, and hence important for the activity of the institution. However, the priority given to curricula has led to the work on quality being, focused to the contents of particular subjects rather than on constructing a more comprehensive institutional system of evaluation and control.

10.3.3 Effects of the measures

In assessing the results of the efforts spent on revisions of the various curricula and in the introduction of new study forms, informants agree that they feel a change has occurred in both the attitudes and the behaviour of students:

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Students have changed in the sense that they have become more critical. Students no longer ´parrot´ their teachers. Diversity and individual features have increased among the students.

Whilst informants admit that these changes may also have been caused by changes in recruitment to MF as an institution as well as a general societal drive towards increased individualisation, they maintain that curricular changes meant a lot. In support for this view, they frequently refer to changes in attitudes of academic staff following the work on revisions.

The curricular revisions have done a lot to the attitudes of the academic staff. After all they now see connections between the design of the studies, the curriculum and the evaluation that we carry out. There is a new realisation of what constitutes quality.

Another consequence of the curricular revisions, and partially the efforts spent on problem-based learning, has been a wish to get away from a ´exam-focus´ for the benefit of a focus on ´learning processes´. Modernisation and the up-dating of curricula, the number of students in studies in religious knowledge strongly increased throughout the '90s, removed some of the ´old´ profile and characteristic features of MF. For instance, the number of theology students dropped towards the end of the '90s. Student surveys suggest that it is little more than coincidence whether a student ends up at MF or at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oslo (Lys og Liv 1999). At the same time this development was far from a mere coincidental side-effect of the curricular revisions. Informants are very conscious that they depend on the students´ at MF, and that it is only by providing attractive studies that the further running of the institution is secured. In deliberating whether to preserve the characteristic features and at the same time remain an attractive place for studies, informants admit that perhaps some of the characteristic features may have to be sacrificed in the competition for students. Still, many informants express ambivalence in relation to this development. On the one hand, there is a desire to preserve the peculiarities, but on the other, so is the realisation that certain academic standards and ´external moorings´ are needed in order to gain the legitimacy required in order to attract students.

Seen in relation to the effect of the student assessments of teaching run at MF, there is wide agreement that the curricular revisions have been far more important and yielded more significant results than the evaluation activities. Actually, there need not be such a sharp divide between these two processes; especially not because the evaluation meetings in relation to the 12th semester students have been used a lot in connection with the revision work. Nevertheless, informants discern differences between the two processes due to their respective institutional

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moorings. In this connection the problem with the student assessment of teaching appears to be that it is entirely left to the individual teacher to do the follow-up without colleagues or the organisation as such being brought in:

> *Evidently it will have an effect if one is criticised, but the difficult part is to actually change. Nobody I know wants to overlook student reactions – that just is not done at MF. Whether the individual teacher is capable of changing, I do not know.*

Thus, at the end of the '90s, this form of evaluation appears to have been of relatively little interest to MF on an institutional level, as it does not offer information useful in a more overall context of leadership (MF, Brev til Norgesnettrådet 1998).

10.4 Quality as a means for change

In summing up, the work on quality must be said to have been of great importance to the development of MF during the 1990s. The self-initiated strategic vision embodied in the document ´The Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology towards year 2008´ provided a guide-line for these efforts. The altered external conditions like the changes in recruitment of students for various studies, the growth within the market of life-long learning and further education courses, and the closer ties to the educational policies of the State were important drivers behind this developmental process. At the same time the interpretative and adaptive processes based on the identity, traditions and history of the institution contributed to the ´modernisation´ of MF. Thus the identity attached to being ´different´ and ´unique´ have been preserved and developed further, despite the fact that MF has become more closely attached to the public higher education sector and, at the same time, also been in a process of academic drift.

The changes that the concept of quality contributed to at MF should not, however, be interpreted as a smooth process with no conflicts, and with an entire staff immediately rallying around the new visions drawn up in 1990. The work on quality was directly linked to what could be called the ´democratisation´ of MF that implied a building-up, over time, of a broad legitimacy of the changes and decisions initiated. Again the Executive Committee, which put forward scenarios for what type of institution MF was supposed to be, was important. One of the main reasons for this committee having an impact on the measures drawn up was exactly that it consisted of central persons (both in formal and informal positions) at MF who, among other things, managed to establish strong coalitions in support of their view. The dean, who was appointed in the following ´period of

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implementation´ from 1990 to 1993, had also been a member of the committee. During these efforts the Executive Committee was very conscious about the symbolic potential of the concept of quality:

> *Academic quality is a concept implying potential for change because it is not so easily defined. Hence anyone can use the concept as a peg to hang various challenges on. The Executive Committee used it in order to modernise the Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology.*

At the same time, by emphasising the importance of various strategy plans and an increased degree of systematisation and well-functioning routines at MF, the Executive Committee also saw to that the power base of the Central Administration of the institution got strengthened in the '90s – partially at the expense of formerly strong and significant individual personalities at the institution. This increasing influence of the central administration has been described by several informants as a form of ´creeping professionalism´ at the institution. The fact that some decisions of a more administrative character have been removed from collegial bodies and left to the administration is a visible sign of this process. In its turn this has, to some extent, contributed to the possibility of slimming down the extensive and complicated governance system having run MF during the past. According to one informant these were decision-making and consultative bodies mainly concerned with *´discussing the same issues over and over again´*. Hence measures decided upon during the 1990s concerning quality were implemented to a higher degree than before.

However, even though these processes point in a direction of structural measures being more important in relation to the work on quality than the other way around, it is exactly within the field of quality that arguments can be found for why the thinking related to strategies and planning is considered a success at MF:

> *The curricular revisions that we have undertaken during the 1990s have increased our self-confidence. After all we realise that we are ´market-leaders´ within this field, and we are looked to by other institutions as a model. This has meant something to our self-understanding: we now realise that we have to offer a study that is experienced as contemporary and thus compatible with any other education. We cannot sit in a ´ghetto´, neither in relation to the Church nor to other higher education institutions. Therefore we must continuously be attentive to change and development: This is what our strategy and curricular revisions has contributed to.*

In other words, it is argued here that the effects of the work on quality has demonstrated that all the planning conducted has been far from being a symbolic activity, and that this fact has rendered it more support. One may claim that towards the end of the '90s the curricular revisions have become a self-reinforcing process.

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Furthermore, the work on quality has not only exerted influence on and become influenced by the changes within the internal leadership at MF. The work on quality also affected attitudes among many of the staff at MF about what sort of education and what sort of institution one is part of. In this case the work on quality has worked in conjunction with the changes in student profile witnessed during the '90s. The result is that:

> *We have become more oriented towards relevance, we are moving away from being an organisation of struggle into becoming one of professionalism. After all, we are far more open today than most people really imagine. Perhaps we may even be more open than is the case at the Faculty of Theology* (at the University of Oslo).

Informants interpret this ´openness´ along two dimensions. Firstly one has become more open to external impulses than was the case before. For example, open discussions about religious/academic questions in a less dogmatic vein are reported upon by several informants. Secondly, this ´openness´ also apply to conditions concerning internal management. Not only staff, but also students have been granted more influence regarding the development of MF: Several informants claim that a significant underlying factor in order to understand the efforts invested in the curricular revisions of the 1990s was that the students and the leadership of the institution ´found each other´ through these questions and functioned as a joint motive power in relation to their implementation.

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11 The Norwegian School of Management (BI)

11.1 Introduction

The Norwegian School of Management BI (BI) was established in 1943. It is a private higher education institution with a strong emphasis on disciplines and subjects within the field of economy, business administration and related subjects. In 1969 the institution was changed into a non-profit foundation, and today BI consists of a number of regional study centres and institutions that offer undergraduate and further education courses within business administration and related subjects. However, the main campus is located in Sandvika outside Oslo. BI Sandvika offers a number of undergraduate, graduate studies in business administration (MBA, master degrees, degrees in accountancy, marketing etc.), and doctoral degrees within the field of economy and business administration. In addition BI has a comprehensive program within life-long learning and post-graduate courses organised independently. In the end of the 1990s the School had about 17,000 students, including part-time students, and about 350 academic staff, most of whom work at BI Sandvika. Also there are about 650 part-time teachers and guest lecturers with fixed teaching assignments. The main bulk of the about 17,000 students are attached to the regional institutions, while about 1700 are attached to the ´flagship´ - the ´graduate school´ located in Sandvika.

As an independent foundation, regulated by Act on private Education from 1986, BI receives state funding. In 1998 this amounted to more than 70 million NOK. This, however, is not enough for covering expenses. As a consequence, students pay tuition. In 1998 this amounted to about 530 million NOK in total. In addition income from contract research amounts to about 40 million NOK a year for the foundation. Hence, it is fair to claim that the expansion and the development of BI have by and large occurred *´on its own account´* (Amdam 1993). Its organisational identity is thus closely related to the ideal of the *entrepreneurial* organisation.

In the 1980s and '90s the BI-system has expanded extensively both regarding the number of students, the number of study programs, and the number of subjects taught. The reason is related to BI's buying and merging with other private education institutions within the field of business and administration. Some of the more important mergers were with The Norwegian School of Marketing, The Oslo School of Marketing and The Norwegian Institute for Management and Administration (NILA) in the years of 1992 and '93.

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These processes of merger appear to have contributed to the institution reaching the *´critical mass´* regarding both the number of students as well as academic staff. Thus, during this period BI became recognised as a *´bona fide advanced business school´* (Lundin *et al* 1993). This status was obtained very quickly. The first professors of BI were appointed in 1983, co-operation on offering a doctorate education program was established with the University of Oslo and Copenhagen Business School in 1993, and the right to confer doctorates was finally granted in 1998.

Despite the fact that the BI foundation consists of many regional institutions which offer undergraduate business-administrative studies, and where a large number of studies and courses within this field is offered, the institution may still be described as integrated. The studies offered at undergraduate levels at the regional institutions are academically subordinate to BI Sandvika. It is the academic staff at Sandvika that is responsible for the quality, and all the shaping of study programs, courses, curricula and examinations takes place here. Also regional teaching staff is academically brushed up through various courses and seminars carried out by the academic staff at Sandvika. Graduation from undergraduate studies at one of the regional institutions also gives admission to apply for entrance at the graduate studies in Sandvika. During the '90s BI has also developed (part-time) Master degree programs for the life-long learning market and MBA programs and post-graduate courses specially designed for the international educational market. For instance, at the MBA-study all teaching is in English and the share of foreign students is significant.

Informants claim that central features of BI's institutional identity consist of its ´capability for innovation´ and its ´strong market orientation´. In the '90s, a third dimension appears to have been added, namely that of international orientation. The development of study programs taught in English indicates a development at BI where the international dimension and international relations gain increasing importance. Whereas an international evaluation committee commented in the early '90s *´that BI appears to be suffering from a sort of Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration (NHH) complex by always comparing itself to this competing institution in Bergen´* (Lundin *et al.* 1993:10), interviews with academic staff at the end of the '90s indicated that there was a predominant wish to portray BI as an international institution. Comparisons were now made to leading European and American ´business schools´.

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11.2 Central quality initiatives in the '90s

In an account of central quality initiatives at the Norwegian School of Management BI it is necessary to point out the apparent importance of the 10-point program drawn up for the institution by the then rector in 1990. Despite the fact that this program during interviews with a number of informants was described by some informants as overly ambitious, it nevertheless functioned as a guide-line for much of the work on quality carried out in the '90s.

First and foremost the program emphasised the responsibility of BI centrally, and especially the institutional leadership, for initiating and stimulating institutional development processes on the department and educational level. The identification of pro-active forces within the organisation, identification of critical success factors and the overarching strategy of the institution were emphasised as central elements (Handelshøyskolen BI, Selvevalueringsrapport 1993:64). Among the goals drawn up by the 10-point program were the development of an internationally adapted ´Master of Science´ study, the establishment of ´Master of Management´ studies for the life-long learning and the post-graduate market, a doctorate program for BI, and also the development of various schemes of co-operation with trade and industry. The portrayal of BI as an international institution was important by its emphasis on The Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration in Bergen (NHH) no longer representing the ´standard´ of activities, and that instead competition with the best of Europe was to be prioritised (see also Amdam 1993:213-214).

Many informants emphasise the fact that BI was awarded the right to confer doctoral degrees in 1998 as a very important aspect of the development of quality also in relation to teaching at the institution. The argument furthered is that during the '90s academic staff realised that that their own academic development and research is important in order to make a career related to the goals drawn up by BI of being a ´bona fide advanced business school´. Also it was argued that the students would benefit teaching-wise from the increasing academic qualifications of the staff. Therefore the ambitions of BI to get its own doctorate program were an important and central motive power of the development work carried out at the institution. However, several informants admit that it is difficult to point out the direct importance of this for educational activities.

Still, a number of specific quality initiatives saw the light in the wake of the new goals drawn up in the early '90s. A special ´quality barometer´ was started for the regional institutions belonging to the BI-system (see e.g. Selnes *et al* 1991, Nygaard

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et al 1992). The Barometer, consisting of a survey among students at the regional institutions, was run by a particular unit within the BI-system, the Norwegian Institute for Market Research (Norsk Institutt for Markedsforskning), commissioned by the institutional leadership of BI. The purpose of the Barometer was to investigate the degree of satisfaction with BI among the students, including to what degree they expressed loyalty towards the educational product they were purchasers of (see e.g. Lanseng & Rønquist 1994:4-5). In other words, focus was set on the economical side of regional activities. First and foremost the Barometer was meant as a ´early warning´ device in relation to student recruitment and consequent economic risk. Among the conclusions drawn from the surveys conducted it was recommended that BI to an even larger extent ought to make efforts to improve the academic and pedagogical quality. This was expected to have a positive effect on student satisfaction and consequently on ´customer loyalty´ (Lanseng & Rønquist 1994:26).

However, the Quality Barometer, started in 1990, was put into cold storage in 1995. According to one informant an important reason was that the information from the surveys needed for subsequent decision-making was not procured, as the methodological basis of the surveys was not solid. Also little ´new´ was uncovered over time.

Early in the '90s a certain interest also was taken at BI in the concept of ´Total Quality Management´. At the same time efforts were made to obtain accreditation from the American Accreditation Organization for Business Education (AACSB). This interest, however, did not manifest itself in the form of concrete measures (Handelshøyskolen BI, Selvevalueringsrapport 1993:63).

In the wake of the Quality Barometer, BI centrally made attempts to introduce into the regional colleges a Norwegian version of the American quality system – The Malcolm Baldridge Awards. Despite the fact that many at the regional colleges were positively inclined towards the idea of a quality system like that, the possible administrative strain of such a system led to the entire concept being rejected as too extensive and ´bureaucratic´. Thus, from the mid-'90s, efforts were made regionally to develop local systems of student assessment of teaching.

At BI centrally, however, the activities of the local institutions are also evaluated, but in a more administrative and spot test-like manner. At the end of the decade this system was very formal and based on standardised routines. Various subjects and schools were selected for evaluation, and the selection was carried out according to four criteria: 1) whether a certain course was newly developed and

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therefore needs evaluation, 2) high failure rates during examinations and tests, 3) low grades compared to the average of the regional colleges, 4) and complaints from the students. Because the system was constructed in a way that opens for observing changes over time, negative results related to these criteria often led to an evaluation initiated by BI centrally. Reports on the results of these evaluations were submitted to the colleges regionally and BI centrally. In order to cut expenses related to these evaluation processes, priority was given to make more of these evaluations to be carried out electronically and via the internet.

Since the 1980s, the main study offered at BI Sandvika, the four and a half year study in business administration (siviløkonomstudiet) has had its own system of student assessment of courses and teaching. This has been run by the student's own interest organisation. The students publish the results of these assessments at the end of each semester, and the target group consists of students, teachers and the institutional leadership at BI. In addition to the more summarising evaluations of various courses and lecturers, the student organisation also organises individual talks with lecturers relatively early in the semester in order that possible adjustments of the course may be carried out. Meant as an emphasis on the importance of good teaching, the student organisation each year awards a prize for the best lecturer. At the more internationally adapted studies (Master of Science and Master of Business Administration), however, the evaluation of the teaching is administered by the central administration at BI. Consequently the graduate studies at BI centrally are subjected to very varied schemes of assessment of teaching.

First and foremost, next to the assessment of teaching activities, most informants mention, as the most important quality initiative of the '90s, the changes in content of one of BI's most highly profiled studies, namely that of the four year study in business administration (siviløkonomstudiet). During the '90s, three committees have evaluated this study and contributed to putting it on the agenda along with the question of quality as such. However, the background to the appointment of these committees does not stem from any particular ´crises´ at this study, but rather that it is:

> *…important when a product is offered in a market that its quality and relevance is evaluated regularly, and that processes of continuous change and improvement is organised* (Handelshøyskolen BI, Utvikling av siviløkonomstudiet ved Handelshøyskolen BI. Høringsutkast 1998:4).

Among central initiatives following various recommendations it may be mentioned that the Larsen-committee (Handelshøyskolen BI, reform av

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siviløkonomstudiet, 1990) voiced the opinion that teaching ought to be done to smaller groups and that more use of student assistants ought to be present during teaching. Moreover, it was recommended that the study in business administration got tightened up because, according to one informant, the experience was that the *´study was too lax compared to that at the Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration in Bergen´.* In addition, the business administration study was re-arranged from two to three terms in order to reduce the number of courses taught parallel to each other and to liberate more time for the academic staff for research.

In 1995, the so-called Gjems Onstad-committee was appointed (Handelshøyskolen BI, Innstilling til evalueringsutvalget for siviløkonomstudiet 1995). This contained a new evaluation of the study in business administration paying closer attention to the flow of students and to various measures that might be implemented in order to secure completion of studies in time. Due to the fact that quite many students started their working career before delivering their final thesis, it was experienced at the time that the formal percentage of completion was relatively low. Among concrete measures taken, following the recommendation from the committee was the establishment of a pre-project phase in order to make the students able to get started with their thesis at an earlier stage.

The hitherto last of these more extensive evaluation processes was carried out in 1998 in the form of the so-called Spilling-committee (Handelshøyskolen BI. Utvikling av siviløkonomstudiet ved Handelshøyskolen BI. Høringsutkast 1998). This process was even more comprehensive than the previous processes by carrying out and including more evaluations of various sub-themes important for developing the study further. For example, several student assessments of teaching were carried out, a special group established by the Organisation of graduated students in business administration (Norske siviløkonomers forening) offered suggestions, BI's partners within trade and industry made statements, and academic staff within BI itself worked out its own evaluation report. The suggestions included a repitition of the formerly expressed wish at BI that the study ought to be changed from a four year study into a five year one (the 3 + 2 model). Furthermore it was suggested to develop more varied forms of exams and that more information and communication technology should be integrated in the study in order to, among other things, strengthen contact between academic staff and the individual student.

Nevertheless, seen in the light of what appears to be the contours of a bachelor/master-model for business administration studies internationally, a 3 + 2

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model was not implemented at BI in the '90s, even though the question has been reported on and debated for almost 10 years. In the last report about further development of the study in business administration, however, a suggestion was forwarded about dropping the three-term arrangement and re-introducing the two-semester structure within each year of study (Handelshøyskolen BI, utvikling av siviløkonomstudiet ved Handelshøyskolen BI, revidert innstilling 1998:12).

Despite the fact that many of the suggestions and changes that have occurred in the wake of the revisions of the study in business administration point in the direction of a turn of the curriculum towards what may be termed collectively as ´problem-based learning´, BI as an institution, however, did not profess any explicit ´philosophy of teaching´. Alternatively it may be claimed that the institution lacked a concrete definition of what constitutes quality in an educational context. Being asked about this, an informant answers that an important reason for this is the institution's many, and to some extent very varied studies some of which are results of the merger activities in the early '90s. During this period studies ´somewhat accidentally´ became part of BI's educational portfolio. This has made the development of a common ´norm´ for teaching and curricula difficult.

One important occurrence at BI by the end of the '90s was that the entire institution obtained international accreditation. This process was initiated in 1996 through BI's membership of ´The European Foundation for Management Development´ (EFMD) and the consequent access to the system of quality development of higher education institutions within the field of business administration of this organisation (the EQUIS system). The system was also considered favourable by the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs which preferred that the institution had an accreditation to refer to, considering the economic support it receives from the state, and in relation to granting the institution a somewhat freer position regarding approval of curricula etc. (Handelshøgskolen BI, Self-assessment report 1999:1-3). In addition, other external partners supported this initiative (NSF, Høringsuttalelse vedrørende siviløkonomstudiet ved Handelshøgskolen BI 1998). The final result of this process was that a formal accreditation was given in the autumn of 1999.

In 1998 BI also carried out changes of its internal organisational structure at BI Sandvika. Five former departments were re-organised into 12 new departments, each with its own department head and administration. The organisational change may be seen in the light of a comment put forth by an international evaluation committee earlier in the '90s:

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> *As we have ascertained before, the division of departments appear to have been led more by administrative rather than academic or strategic considerations. This has led to some of the departments behaving more as a conglomerate of various more or less loosely connected persons, projects and programs... The departmental structure may thus be perceived as a hybrid between an administration motivated by teaching and a research based division into subject fields* (Lundin et al 1993:12).

On a long view this reorganisation may become of great importance to the work on quality at graduate level. Not least, the new departmental structure may be perceived as a re-organisation departing from a discipline-oriented tradition into a model more oriented towards inter-disciplinary and market-oriented relevance. The revisions of the study in business administration in the '90s all demonstrate a clear concern with ´problem-based learning´, even though it may be claimed that historically this has always been a part of BI's emphasis that knowledge acquired here has to be relevant in relation to tasks that candidates will encounter in future employment. However, with the new organisational structure in place, it may be claimed that now the formal framework for this perspective has also been established. This fact ought to affect positively any further work on quality improvement. Still, a de-centralisation like this one may also dissolve responsibility for work on quality on the institutional level.

11.3 An analysis of the quality initiatives

11.3.1 External inspiration and influence

As a privately owned college, BI has traditionally been highly dependent on its environment. This fact is clearly reflected in the institution's work on quality during the '90s. Due to the fact that the institution owes its existence to ´selling´ study programs on the open market, much of the work on quality is centred round the securing of quality and the renewal of these ´products´. Within this context, two considerations are important. Firstly, BI reacts if failure in market response to study programs offered is experienced. That is, if recruitment of students for a particular study program fails. According to one informant, this was one of the most important reasons for the establishment early in the '90s of a new ´portfolio of products´. The development of new study programs contributed to a diversification. No longer was a study program just delivered for an educational market; instead the institution offered ´tailored´ study programs for several markets:

> *We were forced to renew ourselves around 1990 because parts of our sources of income, the part-time students, were in the process of disappearing. Because of failing recruitment of students, we had to innovate! The result was the ´Master of Management´ programs.*

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Thus, from just being ´part-time studies incarnate´, study programs tailor-made to suit the needs of trade and industry for life-long learning and post-graduate courses were developed by the institution, followed by the introduction of a new (master) degree. This pursuit of status leads to the second important consideration given priority by BI concerning the renewal of its educational products: namely, the need for external legitimacy and recognition. The revisions of the study of business administration may be viewed in this perspective. Hence, these studies were revised on the background of the level of quality that was perceived as prevailing with the competitor, the Norwegian School of Economic and Business Administration in Bergen (NHH). However, the need for recognition was important not only for the revisions of the contents of the study but for activities in general. Towards the end of the '90s the on-going process of accreditation also can be seen as a product of this rationale:

> *It is evident that much of the motive power that drives our work on quality is the need for recognition. This is important both on an individual level regarding, for instance, the efforts people invest in research and teaching, and also, however, on the organisational level where the on-going process of accreditation is supposed to prove that we belong in the ´Premier League´.*

Both these considerations clearly indicate that BI exists and functions in a market where maintaining a permanent external focus directed towards ´customers´ and ´surroundings´ has become a part of a well-established tradition of the institution. In connection with the process of accreditation this is underlined even further by the fact that the question of BI's accreditation was raised directly due to its membership of an international organisation (EFMD). The view of the Ministry (KUF) was that accreditation would be valuable for BI, and that view was strongly emphasised by the institution too (Handelshøyskolen BI, self-assessment report 1999:1-3). As a matter of fact, on being asked what constitutes the most important work on quality at BI, a majority of informants answered that what matters most is the general orientation towards customers and surroundings rather than fixed routines on securing evaluation and quality. This orientation contributed to a tireless search for the latest on the quality front. For instance, during the '90s BI has flirted with systems like Total Quality Management; early in the '90s efforts were made to obtain accreditation from an American accreditation organisation (AACSB); attempts have been made to employ various forms of quality barometers; an implementation of The Malcolm Baldridge Award was considered; and at the end of the '90s an international accreditation was obtained. Apart from this accreditation, of which it is yet too early to say anything about possible effects, none of the other systems mentioned left memorable traces at the institution (see also point 11.3.3).

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In practice, however, the almost constant search for new systems and routines made the work on quality fragmented. With the exception of the study of business administration, accumulation of knowledge and improvement of activities have, over time, only been achieved to a small extent. In fact many informants realise that this kind of external orientation may easily have caused a sort of short-sightedness and more ad hoc-like measures rather than investment in consistent and long-term efforts. They also claim, however, that this is the price one has to pay for being so sensitive towards what students and others might think about teaching and curricula:

> *Our customer orientation is our most important mechanism for securing quality. We live on our students, and in fact we react swiftly if changes occur – especially on matters of recruitment. In addition, the fact that the students pay for being taught gives them an interest in the quality of the teaching.*

Nevertheless, informants claimed that it has been possible to maintain the ´greater lines´ of the development of BI because there already was a ´set course´ defined by the goals drawn up by the 10-point program from the early '90s. For instance, informants point to the fact that the right to confer doctorates in 1998 was an example of a goal drawn up then and reached due to systematic, long-term and painstaking efforts by BI centrally.

Among external forces having exerted and which still exert influence on the work on quality at the Norwegian School of Management BI, the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs also has to be mentioned. This because the Ministry demands that examination routines are relatively meticulously documented. In the early '90s an external evaluation committee described this as *´censor turf´* where:

> *Examination routines – with its rules about censors, possibilities for complaint, inspectors etc. – is experienced in reality as one of the most conservative factors of the educational system* (Lundin et al 1993:5)

The Ministry also worked as a conservative force within the field of development of new curricula and study programs. The latter had to be approved by the Ministry before they are allowed to be offered to students. The role of the Ministery was of particular importance when BI attempted to change the study of business administration and introduce the 3 + 2 year study model. This model was for a long time discussed as an alternative to the four year study period that led to the title of *´siviløkonom´*. But since the title was protected by Norwegian Law, any changes of contents and curricula were difficult to carry through. BI was, in other

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words, ´too far ahead´ of the development earlier in the '90s, in times when society was not yet ripe for changes of that kind.

11.3.2 Institutional identity and tradition

The orientation towards customers and surroundings mentioned previously, is a distinguishing characteristic of BI and almost integrated into the identity of the institution. Thus, external influences and institutional identity make up two aspects of the same matter, a fact which is emphasised by rector in an annual report at the end of the decade:

> *The discussion about closer interplay between research, education and business has never been a controversial issue at The Norwegian School of Management BI. Flexibility, innovation and market orientation are three of the pillars of the organisation...* (Reve 1998:1)

Nevertheless, other features of BI as an institution also have exerted influence on the work on quality in the '90s. The first of these features is made up of the tendency to think about quality predominantly in quantitative terms in the form of ´measures´, ´quality barometers´ and as ´standards´ consisting of a measurable level of quality. This quantitative approach to work on quality, however, is undoubtedly the result of the many regional institutions belonging to the BI-system and the desire of BI centrally to control and steer the activities going on. Quantification of work on quality may also be found at the graduate studies at Sandvika where quality measured as student flow has been given high priority within work on improvement of, not least within the study of business administration (see e.g. Handelshøyskolen BI, Innstilling fra evalueringsutvalget for siviløkonomstudiet 1995).

However, the ´quantification´ of the work on quality also refers to what some informants call the ´American research tradition´ at BI, characterised by extensive use of quantitative research techniques and great emphasis on mathematics and statistics in educational contexts (see also Lundin *et al* 1993:7). Following some of the merger processes that BI was part of during the '90s this was a problematic legacy:

> *The mergers probably have created quite a few cultural clashes. Especially between the Norwegian School of Marketing and BI Sandvika, problems apparently arose. We were rumoured to be ´hard´ and ´business administration-like´, whereas the marketing school was supposed to be ´soft´ and ´humanistic´. Today we probably realise that the fusion created a dynamics that we both have profited from.*

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Even though some informants claim that the quantitative profile of BI was more of a myth than reality also before the merger with the marketing school, it can be claimed that the mergers BI was part of in the '90s contributed to a more open academic profile. Changes occurred with regard to academic focus within research and education. Even though these changes may not be solely ascribed to the fusion processes, a majority of informants is of the opinion that the academic perspectives are far wider than earlier in the '90s.

The other of the more institutional characteristics of BI is what informants refer to as the ´entrepreneurial spirit´. This is related to the desire to reflect developments in the market and the demand for education and competence. The latter characteristic is made visible by the many and varied quality systems BI experimented with in the '90s. In addition it influenced the work on quality at the institution towards greater emphasis on relevancy:

> *Probably we have preserved the entrepreneurial spirit even though we have grown during the '90s. Of course we are anarchic, but all of us understand that we need an income, and that we must offer relevant products.*

In this connection, the establishment of particular partnerships with various businesses and public organisations have functioned as measures that exemplify the thinking on relevancy. Students have also benefited from this kind of co-operation by being offered opportunities to write theses and work with projects related to real business projects. The importance of relevance is also reflected in the revisions of the study program in business administration, where comments and part-evaluations were gathered from different professional organisations in business and BI's own committee for partnership with business and industry (BIs næringslivskomité), consisting of representatives of businesses and organisations with which the institution has agreements of co-operation. Much importance was attached to these comments and evaluations (see Handelshøyskolen BI, utvikling av siviløkonomstudiet ved Handelshøyskolen BI 1998). Moreover, the 10-point program established early in the '90s strongly recommended ´entrepreneurship´ of this kind. For BI it was important to improve its relations and contacts with the surroundings.

11.3.3 Effects of the measures

What have been the effects of the many and to some extent varied initiatives related to quality at BI? As indicated in the previous sections, the work on quality has to a large extent focused on a strong orientation towards customers rather than on formal quality systems and evaluation routines. An effect, therefore, has been that institutional systems for the accumulation of knowledge have not been

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established. The student assessments of teaching may be said to provide a tool for this, but the way it worked was rather as a ´warning mechanism´ than as a continual instrument for improvement. For example, follow-up and communication between various actors has been great problem when it comes to student assessments of teaching. The processes involving most cumulative improvement are the revisions carried out at the study program in business administration. In this case revisions have been based systematically on the many committees appointed. Also later revisions have to be regarded as building on the previous revisions. Still, the greatest effects of the revisions of the study program in business administration have been that they created attention and functioned as stimuli for debates.

This being said, work on quality, and for instance the student assessments of teaching did provide tangible outcomes. Interviews with informants in various positions clearly indicate that these measures are reacted upon, and that measures are taken in the wake of ´poor reports´. The point is, rather, that the system of student assessment of teaching has been more focused on maintaining ´minimum standards´ than on stimulating development. Some informants admit that this is caused by a focus on costs and resources:

> *The fact that the students themselves carry out assessments of teaching may refer to our concern with ´customers´, and the fact that the customers themselves must be able to decide how they want to assess a product. At the same time we also realised that it was a cheap system to run.*

Much of the blame for this system not having been changed is put, however, on the Educational Authorities, and particular the Ministry of Education (cf. also Lundin *et al* 1993:5), who, according to informants, almost hamper pedagogical development through restrictions put on, for instance, curricula and exam systems:

> *The system for carrying through exams demands too many resources spent on evaluation and exam routines. Instead we should have spent even more money on the contents of the studies.*

In addition, the concern with carrying through exams according to the directives of the authorities, combined with the academic standards and academic interests that BI itself has, contributed to the responsibility for work on quality becoming obscure. Members of academic staff have not been made responsible to any large extent. Nevertheless, the tendency in the course of the '90s is that academic staff has become more involved over time:

> *Traditionally the Administration has probably possessed a lot of power in connection with our routines of quality and evaluation. Now we are probably*

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witnessing a tendency towards academic personnel taking over these activities more and more.

This development is caused, not only, by the fact that number of academic staff has grown, something which has contributed to an increase in the academic capacity for evaluating and discussing the studies, but also by the fact that interest in these questions have increased among academic staff. The result is that focus has moved somewhat from a strong emphasis on steering, control and evaluation to one attaching more weight to the contents of the education offered. Since 1996 a particular research program has had as its purpose to develop new forms of pedagogics to be used both at BI internally and at external organisations in relation to life-long learning and post-graduate courses (Prosjekt ´lederutvikling – et norsk initiativ´ ved Institutt for kompetanseledelse). In addition, in the wake of the general raising of competence that has taken place among academic staff in the '90s, they have also wanted to develop new courses and studies that reflect their own research interests. Indirectly this contributes to an increased interest in communication, curricula and work on quality.

11.4 Quality as a means for change

Despite the fact that BI has experimented with various quality systems and methods, the concept of quality only to a limited extent affected the organisational identity. An important reason is that a strategy for the development of the institution had already been drawn up on the threshold of the 1990s. Here concrete goals for the '90s were made known and accepted by the staff at BI. Also goals which, to begin with, were considered overly ambitious by the staff turned, little by little, into realistic processes. In this way, BI defined its own ´work on quality´, and no external concepts of quality became important.

To the extent that external quality concepts have exerted any influence, it has been in relation to the ´customer orientation´ of the institution. These concepts have mainly been sought implemented by administration and management, and with the purpose of being ´early warning´ tools in order to generate information on the flow of students and on customer satisfaction. Also, they function as signs to the customers that BI takes them seriously. In this connection not only students, but also other external partners are considered as customers. The present rector, for instance, underlined this fact in the annual report from 1998:

Without satisfied students and business customers the Norwegian School of Management BI will not succeed; and those who create the satisfied customers are outstanding academic and administrative staff. BI is concerned with the creation of this good circle of quality (Reve 1998:1).

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The experimentation attached to the many and varied concepts that have been tried out may be viewed as an expression of frequent shifts in ´customer preferences´ for what is ´the best´ concept at any given time. The development of the ´Master of Management´ programs early in the 1990s is one example. These study programs were introduced exactly as a consequence of a decrease in part-time students, but with an expanding market for life-long learning and post-graduate courses.

To conclude, in the 1990s quality has at BI been perceived and defined in relation to ideas about customer satisfaction. Relating to the fact that work on quality at the institution has focused on the customer's experience of quality, where informants claim that no student complaints is a sign of quality, and that an important goal for BI is to minimise student complaints on teaching and curricula, it is possible to claim that the recent process of accreditation is just a continuation of this thinking. Accreditation is about checking minimum standards, where quality is assessed against a threshold level rather than as continuous improvement. Therefore, the focus on ´securing quality´ rather than on ´developing quality´ may gradually have an even stronger impact at the institution, even though some of the ambitions of the leadership were related to the further development of the institution.

If BI is viewed as a whole, it may be possible to discern a tendency of work on quality being split. In the 1990s the central level appears to have prioritised profitability, standards and efficiency, while academic staff had their emphasis on student-centred and problem-based learning and on developing the practical and professional skills of the students.

However, a common denominator for the work on quality does seem to exist. This is attached to the aspect of relevance which is emphasised very strongly by both BI centrally and academic staff:

> *In the 1990s relevance has become more important to society in general, and thus has also influenced the thinking on quality at BI.*

That relevance is so important to BI can also be perceived as a matter of utmost necessity. The institution suffered from a tight economy in the period after the many mergers earlier in the '90s. Therefore increased relevance both within research and education had to be given priority. According to one informant, the fact that BI has reached many of its goals lined up in the 10-point program from the early 1990s is only due to the fact that ´business has been made to run´. For this

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reason BI itself does not experience a contradiction between the central level with its emphasis on profitability and efficiency, and the increasing concern of the academic staff with learning and pedagogical development. A large majority of the informants agree that it is only because the running has become profitable that it has become possible to hire more academic staff, enhance their qualifications and to reap the results in the form of academic development within research and education.

In an evaluation early in the 1990s, it was claimed that BI had a problem because the ´image´ it tried to build did not correspond to the ´identity´ of the institution at the time (Lundin *et al* 1993:16). It was claimed that the formulations of goals worked out in the so-called 10-point program were not anchored further down within the organisation, and that the organisational structure in those days was more discipline-oriented than inter-disciplinary. In particular, the evaluation committee lacked a precise definition of what it meant to be ´one of the best business schools in Europe´ (Lundin et al 1993:15).

Despite the fact that there still is some distance between image and identity in that the institution yet has not managed to work out a joint profile of its work and thoughts on quality, and that work related to quality of teaching and learning consequently has not affected the organisational identity to any extent, it may be claimed that BI towards the end of the 1990s had managed to close much of the gap between the managerial and the academic interpretations of quality. The challenge for the institution can be related to find a way to combine the ambitions of a student centred focus, project based teaching and problem-based learning on the one hand, and the desire for profitability and efficiency on the other.

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12 Creating meaning to organisational change

12.1 Introduction

The main research problem in this study was how organisational identities of Norwegian universities and colleges were affected by governmental policies concerning the quality of teaching and learning during the 1990s. To be able to address this question, a theoretical framework was developed on the basis of old and new institutional theory. By combining these two versions of institutional theory, the concept of organisational identity was constructed as symbolic, normative and cognitive expressions of what an organisation is. Based on the assumption that symbols, myths and social constructions are important determinants for organisational behaviour, a study of changes in organisational identity was seen as vital for uncovering whether Norwegian higher education has been going through a fundamental reorientation about its tasks, role and responsibilities when it comes to teaching and learning in the 1990s.

The theoretical argument developed in chapter two was that changes in organisational identity take place through the interaction between the individual organisation and its environment. It was further postulated that identity change would occur when the environment produced organisational ideals that diverged from the identity of the individual organisation. However, a pure imitation process was questioned, and instead a process of identity change was singled out emphasising reinterpretations of institutionalised ´identity´ labels, translations of new organisational ideals to fit with the history and tradition of the given institution, resulting in a new organisational identity where important identity labels were kept, but where the meaning attached to them changed.

In chapter three, Norwegian higher education policy concerning the quality of teaching and learning in the 1990s was discussed. On this basis, dominating policy ideas were identified in chapter four, and some governance arrangements and three organisational ideals derived from these ideas conceptualised (the bureaucratic, the entrepreneurial and the professional organisation). The conclusion reached was that all three ideals could be found in Norwegian higher education during these years. Even if the ideal of the bureaucratic organisation had been highlighted most, images of the entrepreneurial and the professional organisation spread during the decade. Thus, for the individual organisation trying to navigate through the many reforms and developments in higher

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education in the 1990s, it was not clear which of the prevailing organisational ideals was the ´right´ one to adapt to.

By investigating how six different higher education institutions in Norway have worked to improve the quality of their teaching and learning during the 1990s (see chapter six to eleven), and by the triangulation of data (including the use of other relevant studies - see chapter five), the study will in this chapter be summed up in three sections. First, a comparison of the six institutions is made on the three dimensions sketched in table 4.1 (how the institutions interpreted and defined work to improve quality, the implementation process, and the effects of their efforts). Second, the research proposals are revisited, discussing whether the adaptation process took place according to the theoretical framework developed for the study. Third, the link between governmental policies for teaching and learning and organisational identity change is discussed on the basis of the results from the study, and some policy implications are considered.

12.2 Organisational ideals and institutional adaptations

In chapter four, conceptual organisational ideals related to a bureaucratic, an entrepreneurial and a professional organisation were developed. It was argued that these ideals could be recognised in three different ways. First, through how work focused quality was interpreted and defined in the six institutions. Second, through the practical measures implemented within the institutions. Third, through the effects that materialised after implementation. By combining these three characteristics of institutional adaptation a more solid foundation for suggesting any changes in organisational identities should appear. Thus, in this section, the institutional adaptations to these characteristics are analysed more closely.

12.2.1 Institutional interpretations and definitions concerning quality

In the case-studies a description was made concerning the characteristics of the organisational identity of the six selected institutions in 1990. Based on historical evidence and on attempts to identify important myths, symbols, values and norms in the six institutions, central keywords and labels describing the organisational identity of the institutions were put forward indicating that all six had strong links to various elements of the entrepreneurial and/or the professional organisational ideal, while very few related to that of the bureaucratic ideal.

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On the other hand, as discussed in chapter four, the organisational ideal of the bureaucratic organisation was strongest emphasised if one takes into account the many structural, managerial and judicial reforms in Norwegian higher education during the 1990s. This ideal also seems to be strongly reflected in how all six institutions interpreted and defined quality in teaching and learning. Quality of teaching and learning was often given a prominent place in central documents and strategic plans in the early 1990s, often directly coupled with both national policy initiatives, and managerial and administrative needs of building up a more systematic institutional commitment in this area.

The only institution with scarcely any references to national policy documents was BI. The managerial and administrative need for focusing on quality was, however, very prominent in numerous documents, especially in the 10-point program launched by the rector in 1990. Quality was in this document seen as an institutional responsibility, advocating the need for ´institutional checks´ on the quality of teaching and learning. The interpretation emphasised, in other words, a managerial and administrative perspective on the need to control the quality of the teaching and learning activities. Compared to the organisational ideals sketched in chapter three, such interpretations come closest to that of the bureaucratic organisation.

Similar tendencies can be found in the other institutions as well. At MF, quality of teaching and learning was linked to a strategic vision of how the institution should look when celebrating its century in 2008. In HIL, quality of teaching and learning was related to the need for a ´institution building´ activity. At HIS, the board wanted to build a ´common model for evaluation´ throughout the organisation. In UITØ, quality of teaching and learning was by the institutional leadership directly coupled with the Network Norway idea. It was argued that there was a need for an institution that took a special responsibility for testing out new models of teaching and learning. UITØ proposed, in other words, that the institution should be recognised as an institution with ´special´ competence in these areas within Network Norway. In the newly constructed NTNU, quality of teaching and learning was also seen as a potential tool for building an integrated institution in 1996. In statements by institutional leadership, it was argued that administrative systems were needed to enhance institutional learning, and that there was a need for a common system for how students were received, how tutoring and supervision should be conducted, etc.

Even if there are considerable differences between *when* the quality of teaching and learning came on the institutional agenda (due to, for example, the mergers in

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the college sector or the establishment of NTNU, some institutional initiatives came as late as in 1996), the common trend in the case-studies is that the institutional interpretations and definitions of quality were directly related to national policy initiatives and/or to managerial and administrative needs. The need for ´control´, ´institutional checks´, and ´quality systems´ are recognisable in all six case-studies, and indicate a general orientation toward the *bureaucratic* organisational ideal.

However, three of the institutions also emphasised other dimensions of how work concerning quality should be organised. In HIL, UITØ and MF, institutional leadership seemed to be quite critical concerning the potential effects of a more ´bureaucratic´ approach to quality. The interesting aspect of the reflections carried out by these institutions is that they seem to highlight and develop central elements of their own identity in responding to the need to focus on quality. They ´translated´ external definitions of quality to fit their own needs. For example, in MF quality was defined in religious terms and seen as a way to develop a learning environment where academic and religious interests were combined. In HIL, quality was related to the reform pedagogic identity of the institution, and seen as a way to modernise this ideal. At UITØ, quality was used to embrace the identity labels of being ´modern´, ´different´ and ´innovative´, and seen as a tool that could profile the institution since there were fears that the institution had become too similar to other universities in Norway. Thus, even if these institutions basically argued for an adaptation of a more institutional (bureaucratic) responsibility for quality, the reasons for the adaptation were all related to developing the existing organisational identity further.

12.2.2 Institutional implementation

During implementation, this ability to translate work on quality into organisational identity was quite remarkable at MF, HIL and UITØ. For example, at HIL, an institutional student survey addressing all departments and study programs at the institution was implemented. Such a standardised survey resembles measures characterising a bureaucratic organisational ideal. However, the institutional leadership at HIL argued that the survey would be important as a means to discuss what ´reform pedagogics´ actually meant in various disciplines. In MF, a vital characteristic of the work to improve the quality of teaching and learning is seen in the many strategic and action plans that were developed during the whole decade, and the development of systematic evaluation routines throughout the institution. These visible signs of a bureaucratic organisational ideal were, however, mostly used as input to a much needed process of

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modernising the curriculum change and renew the traditional forms of teaching and learning at the institution, not least by introducing problem-based learning schemes. At UITØ, the fear that the institution had become too similar to other universities in Norway seemed to have triggered a number of centrally supported projects emphasising the ´alternative´ and ´innovative´ institution, and a need to signal this to its environment. The most visible sign coming out of this process is perhaps that the institution launched a unified ´educational profile´ in 1995 in which problem-based learning and more project-based student work were significant characteristics.

For the other three institutions in the study, the picture is more mixed. At HIS, it seems that most efforts of the 1990s were focused on trying to find ´a good way of carrying out assessments of studies´ as the leadership of the institution formulated it at the end of the decade. Institutional leadership took several initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning, but the measures seem not to have found a common platform creating a quite fragmented implementation process. For example, creating a common system of student evaluation of teaching failed during the decade. The organisational identity of HIS based on the university ambition and the intention to create a dynamic, entrepreneurial institution, survived the merger in 1994. However, this university ambition was not used in relation to institutional attempts to secure/improve the quality of teaching and learning. Organisational problems related to the establishment of the ´new´ institution in 1994 seem to have overshadowed other issues on the institutional agenda.

Also for NTNU, the establishment of the new institution in 1996 had huge implications for how work on quality was prioritised and organised. The CRE-evaluation in 1997 suggested that more central initiatives with respect to curriculum development were needed along with other ´institution building´ activities such as the establishment of a committee (SEUT) intended to diffuse innovations in teaching and learning throughout the institution. At the same time several ´bottom-up´ initiatives for improving the quality of teaching and learning were implemented. The promising results from these initiatives were, however, not spread throughout the institution. As such there seems to have been a long tradition in Trondheim not to learn from prior experiences. In addition, the managerial/administrative structure responsible for work related to quality has not been linked to academic initiatives.

In BI, there has also been a strong managerial/administrative interest in the quality of teaching and learning during the 1990s, especially related to the

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prestigious four year study in business administration (*siviløkonomstudiet*). Several internal committees evaluated this study during the decade, and numerous changes were made, for example, by increasing the use of problem-based learning. However, the experiences from these rather successful processes were not transferred to other studies in BI. No overarching teaching and learning strategy for the whole institution was developed. Instead, what characterises the institutional focus concerning the quality of teaching and learning is a continuous search for ´quality systems´: The quality barometer which was stopped in 1995, experiments with TQM-systems, attempts to be accredited by AACSB, and the EQUIS-accreditation in 1999. None of these systems seems to have affected teaching and learning strategies. For the institutional leadership, it seems that student enrolment has been the most important indicator for ´quality´. The implementation of work related to quality has as a consequence been rather fragmented and ad-hoc based during implementation. The continuous growth of BI during the 1990s, where several other institutions were merged with the BI-Consortium, seems, as in HIS and NTNU to have played a major role affecting the implementation process.

For the six institutions, one can detect that there has been a strong tendency for implementing measures that were intended to be linked with the formal hierarchical structure at the institution (the *bureaucratic* ideal). Attempts to implement institution-wide evaluation systems with ´institution building´ intentions are also common among the institutions. In parallel, a number of ´bottom-up´ processes and measures have been implemented (often including measures that are related to the characteristics of an entrepreneurial or a professional organisation). The striking difference between HIL, UITØ and MF on one side, and HIS, NTNU and BI on the other is that while ´top-down´ and ´bottom-up´ initiatives in the first group have been linked to the organisational identity, a more fragmented implementation process has characterised the second group, lacking continuity, direction and an objective linked to the efforts.

12.2.3 Effects of the work concerning quality

To what extent has this difference during implementation affected the outcome of the work concerning the quality of teaching and learning at the six institutions? ´Measuring´ the direct effects of work related to the quality of teaching and learning is, of course, a very difficult task, especially since it is so difficult to control for other factors that may affect a given outcome. However, some indications of possible effects can be detected, effects that seem to be strongly linked to differences in institutional interpretation and implementation processes.

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In all the institutions studied, there are clear signs of an increased bureaucratisation of the work related to quality. This is visible both in the HIL, UITØ and MF group, and in the HIS, NTNU and BI group. Work to improve quality has been formalised, systematised and linked to the hierarchical structure. In all the institutions, there are critical voices heard related to this development. However, at HIL, UITØ and MF, the increased bureaucratisation seems to be much more tolerated than in the other institutions due to functioning institutional follow-up systems, what is experienced as a genuine interest by the institutional leadership in quality issues, and the link to further develop what is perceived as the organisational identity of the institution. The work concerning quality in teaching and learning has in this group often contributed to a renewed interest in the central values and vital characteristics of the institutions. In HIL, the work to improve quality seems to have vitalised a reform pedagogic identity that many informants saw as an ´organisational myth´. At UITØ, work concerning quality in teaching and learning was used to distinguish the institution from other universities, profiling the institution externally while at the same time re-building its ´modern´ and ´innovative´ organisational identity. At MF, work related to quality was used to modernise the institution (´creeping professionalism´), and to transform it from a religious to an academically-oriented institution. In all these three institutions, the ´identity labels´ were kept, but *new meanings more related to the entrepreneurial and professional ideal* were attached to them through an incremental but continuous process during the whole decade.

In all the institutions, effects of work to improve teaching and learning can also be traced in a number of other areas. For example, it seems that all the institutions have built up systems to monitor changes in *student preferences and student needs*. Improving the chances for students on the labour market after graduating, adapting the way in which new students are received at campus, and attempting to improve the learning environment at the institution are indications of an increased institutional awareness of such issues.

Furthermore, in almost all the institutions, there is a remarkable tendency to perceive *problem-based learning* as perhaps the most important tool related to the quality of teaching and learning. This is very visible in HIL, UITØ and MF, but also highlighted in NTNU and BI. In five out of six institutions, there have, in other words, been attempts to fundamentally change the teaching and learning traditions. Thus, problem-based learning is perhaps the single most visible result coming out of the institutional work concerning the quality of teaching and learning.

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A third result is a strong *external orientation* in the institutions to find out how issues of quality are dealt with in other higher education institutions.
The problem-based learning concept is perhaps the idea most frequently imitated, but numerous other examples can also be found. For example, HIL ´borrowed´ their student survey from a draft developed at NTNU. In NTNU, they frequently read the strategic plans of Stanford University to find out what is ´going on´. MF looked to the University of Oslo for inspiration for the process of establishing a vision for the institution. HIS has during the 1990s continuously looked both inside and outside Norway for adequate models of evaluation which could be used as a source of inspiration for its own work. BI used to have the Norwegian School of Economic and Business Administration in Bergen as a benchmark, but turned to European and US business schools as role models later in the 1990s. All in all, there is a strong tendency among the institutions to seek concrete, but different, frames of reference for their own development initiatives. As such, one may argue that the institutions studied have quite extensively been searching for suitable ´identities´ also at other higher education institutions, and not just in the political arena.

12.2.4 Summing up

As illustrated by the great variety in the institutional frames of reference listed above, inspiration is sought in many places. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that it is difficult to link the institutional development of the six institutions to one of the three conceptual organisational ideals described in chapter four. It seems that all the six institutions have implemented elements recognisable from all three organisational ideals during the 1990s. Tendencies to adapt characteristics of a bureaucratic organisation (central planning, standardised evaluation schemes, establishment of hierarchical command structures) seem to have been balanced by attempts to introduce elements closer to the entrepreneurial (student satisfaction focus, market orientation, relevance) and the professional organisational ideal (problem-based learning, curriculum revisions, experimental pedagogical development projects).

Claims that Norwegian higher education during the 1990s, for example, became more ´bureaucratic´ as a result of work concerning the quality of teaching and learning are on this background correct. The latter claim is, however, only correct if one adds that the ´entrepreneurial orientation´ and the ´professional orientation´ also seemed to be strengthened in the same period. Hybrid governance

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approaches in Norway during the 1990s (Gornitzka & Maassen 2000: 281), have produced hybrid outcomes.

Does this mean that the institutions studied also became more similar during the 1990s? Yes and no. There are some similarities in how the institutions have responded to and implemented measures related to their teaching and learning. However, how these measures have been mixed and combined in the institutions varies considerable, not least in three of the institutions where work concerning the quality of teaching and learning seems to have contributed to both a strengthening and a renewal of the existing organisational identity. How this can be explained theoretically is discussed in the next section.

12.3 The research propositions revisited

In chapter two, three research proposals were put forward suggesting how old and new institutionalism could be linked together in explaining how organisational identity change takes place. This section discusses whether the research proposals could be seen as a promising way forward for those interested in combining old and new institutionalism in further studies.

12.3.1 Voluntarism vs. determinism

The first research proposal suggested that:

> *When an institution of higher education changes its organisational identity, it will select among available (elements of) organisational ideals and adopt those amongst them closest to its own identity.*

The underlying argument leading to this proposal was that the environment sets the conditions for the adaptation process by defining the acceptable organisational ideals. Given relative stable internal power structures in the adapting institution this would lead to an adaptation process characterised by selection (enactment) i.e., an active search among external ideals and ideas that could be related to the existing identity. Radical shifts in organisational identities will, as a consequence, seldom occur.

In HIL, MF and UITØ, the selection processes that took place fit this explanation rather well. In HIL, with an organisational identity characterised by ´scepticism to anything that tastes of aims, controls and plans´, the adaptation of a student survey linked to the institutional leadership with aims related to comparisons, more centrally based control, etc., could be seen as a break with this identity. However, there are other elements in the HIL identity that relate rather well with

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the idea of establishing a quantitative institutional student survey. The former ODH had, for example, a national responsibility for evaluation research, methodology and practise emphasising large scale quantitative approaches. Combined with the reform pedagogic identity of HIL – the student survey in many ways just underlined the *institutional* responsibility for sustaining this tradition.

At MF, several new measures were introduced, with the two most noticeable being the emphasis on problem-based learning, and the establishment of a good learning environment for the students. Again, one could question why a rather conservative religious institution would see these measures as promising tools for the future. Not least, such measures seem to break with the authority structures that characterised MF. On the other hand, problem-based learning fitted with an old ideal at MF – the wish to be close to and interact with the local congregations – the field of practice. Still, the old wish to be near and serve the ´grassroots´ was conditioned by having the skills to do so – skills that problem-based learning promised to deliver. Emphasis on the learning environment for students, and not only knowledge reproduction, fits well with another old ambition of MF – the wish to develop ´entire human beings´ - including the social and cultural dimensions.

For UITØ the picture is slightly different since the policies related to the quality of teaching and learning could be said to be ´tailor-made´ for the institution. Selecting elements that fitted the organisational identity of UITØ was, in other words, not particularly difficult. The interesting twist in the UITØ case is that internal developments had led to beliefs that the institution during the 1990s had become too similar to other universities in Norway, and that there was a need to profile the institution according to its traditional identity as being ´entrepreneurial´ and ´different´. How the institution used the Network Norway idea is in this respect illustrative. While the Network Norway idea maintained the need to develop disciplinary specialisations within the institutions, the UITØ argued (in ´Better Learning for New Times´) that this perspective was too narrow and that there was a need for developing professional specialisations i.e, expertise in teaching and learning, as well.

The examples above are good illustrations of an enactment process (see point 2.3.8) i.e., an active search procedure where the environment is constructed when an organisation collects and analyses information. A common trend in the enactment process that took place at the three institutions is the definition of the Ministry of Education as a very important player in the environment. This is

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understandable. For UITØ, the whole establishment of the institution rested on support from the Ministry, since other universities in Norway were against the idea of developing a new university in Tromsø. Also for establishing new study programs and new academic specialisations in Tromsø, the Ministry has been an important actor. For MF, a private institution, the orientation towards the signals from the Ministry could be seen as more surprising. However, knowing that seventy percent of the funding of MF in the late 1990s stemmed from the Ministry of Education makes this orientation more understandable. For HIL too, the Ministry was important. The development of the institution, scheduled after the Olympic Games in 1994, was highly dependent upon support from the Ministry. Here, it seems that the three institutions enacted upon the technical (the Ministry) rather than the institutional (the field) environment. This is an adaptation process close to that described by Selznick (1957).

If one also acknowledges that ´institutions´ as such do not enact, but actors do, the importance of the institutional leadership as stated by Selznick also comes to the fore. In MF and HIL, this enactment was done by the institutional leadership, while at UITØ the initial enactment was done by the centre for lifelong learning and distance education (UNIKOM) together with the central administration. The initiatives of these actors and groups can be said to support the statement by Stinchcombe (1997: 17) that the virtue of the old institutionalism is that someone ´really cares´ about their institution and that they are often ´paid to do that´ (see also point 2.3.1). However, the enactment processes in HIL, MF and UITØ also match the suggestions under point 2.3.2, where it is argued that existing mental models are used as a starting point for any adaptation attempts, but also that those with vested interests are most likely to advocate for an organisational identity that serves their interests i.e., arguing for an organisational identity that is close to the existing (cf Selznick 1957). The process that is disclosed in these three institutions is, in other words, of institutions with a rather stable internal ´power balance´. An interesting implication of this finding is that stability in the internal power balance actually seems to trigger adaptation. Incremental adaptation could in this way be seen as a process in which those with power manage to remain powerful.

12.3.2 Real vs. symbolic change process

The second research proposal suggested that:

> *When an institution of higher education changes its organisational identity it will undertake activities of ´re-interpretation´ in order to replace an existing identity with a new one.*

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This research proposal addresses the issue of what actually changes during an adaptation process. In the new institutionalism is has been argued that it is structure that changes, while the core of the organisation remains the same. In chapter two, it was proposed that organisations are constantly changing, while sticking to existing organisational identity labels. Furthermore, it was also proposed that the organisation, over time, would try to build coherence in the organisation and close any gaps in the identity – image relationship.

In the case of HIL, MF and UITØ, it could be argued that the latter proposition has much to offer. In HIL, the student surveys were debated and protested against the first years. There are indications that they did not have much impact in the organisation. The leadership of HIL tackled the disagreement by referring to the student surveys as a way to find out what ´reform pedagogy´ actually meant in the 1990s. This strategy seems to have paid off in the sense that the protests were gradually silenced by a growing agreement within HIL that external developments and issues, such as lifelong learning, the use of new technology in higher education, and the need to be seen as an attractive institution for maximising student recruitment, could be linked to the reform pedagogic identity. Various issues and challenges were, put under the same umbrella through discussions resulting in a coherent organisational identity that could be used as a basis for adaptation.

In MF, the institutional leadership seemed to have one central issue on the agenda. The institution needed to ´torpedo the myths about MF´ providing the environment with a picture of a religious but modern academic institution. The work concerning quality was used as a means to accomplish democratisation and modernisation of the institution. Several translation activities can be identified in this process. The vicar for the students was, for example, no longer solely defined as a spiritual guide, but also as an activist for improving the student learning environment. Also arguments were launched saying that if MF was to be taken seriously in religious matters due to the competition that the institution experienced from the more liberal Faculty of Theology at the University of Oslo, academic quality concerning both teaching and research activities needed to be more highlighted and emphasised. In other words, the religious identity label was the integrating device used to embrace various modernisation attempts.

At UITØ, the situation was different from that at HIL and MF. UITØ perceived that because the university had become more similar to other universities in Norway, and because these universities could be serious competitors for the innovative teaching and learning profile of UITØ, something had to be done. The

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solution to this challenge, to further innovate in order to keep the lead as ´entrepreneurial´ within teaching and learning was soon picked up by the institutional leadership. That work concerning the quality of teaching and learning was defined as involving not only academic, but also social and welfare aspects of the student's learning experience, was a novelty in Norwegian higher education in the early 1990s. All the institutional measures used to translate the visions into practise in the 1990s, including VISAM, FUS and the strategic initiative ´Better Learning for New Times´ embraced this focus. Thus, not only was the ´entrepreneurial´ label kept, but it was also strengthened as a way to profile the university during the decade.

The examples above provide several insights into how new activities are related and translated to fit the established organisational identity in the three institutions. First, there are indications that normative and cognitive dimensions interact during the adaptation process. As mentioned under point 2.3.5, the division between normative and cognitive behaviour has often been used as a way to separate between old and new institutionalism. In the translation process, normative elements are quite easily detected in HIL, MF and UITØ. These relate to the extreme loyalty to the established organisational identity at the three institutions, an emphasis that fits the description of the normative rationality found in the old institutionalism (see Oliver 1997). This normative rationality – references to an organisation's norm and values - were used to obtain legitimacy in the institution for any changes made. However, during translation cognitive processes were at play to build organisational coherence and integration – to bridge the gap between internal norms and external expectations and realities.

Second, the three case-studies also provide insights into the characteristics of ´adaptable´ organisational identities. HIL, MF and UITØ all had distinctive identities according to those that work at these institutions. When asked to characterise their institution, a common mental frame of reference existed, pointing to their institution as ´entrepreneurial´, ´alternative´ or with an emphasis on ´reform pedagogy´. Referring to Gioia & Thomas (1996: 373) and Gioia et al (2000: 75) it can be argued that it were these identity labels that had been institutionalised, and that made up the enduring and distinctive characteristics of these organisations. However, it is worth noting that these ´umbrella ideas´ (Clark 2000: 11) all are generic labels. It is difficult to provide them with a specific content just by referring to the labels alone. Thus, to provide meaning they must be interpreted.

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The emphasis on interpretation brings us to a third insight of the adaptation process, that the ´chain of translators´ that ´edit´ and modify an innovation (Sahlin-Andersson 1996: 82), not only consists of human beings, but also of technical and organisational measures that often develop into being new elements of the organisational identity. For example, in HIL the student survey was after some years seen as a necessary construct to keep the reform pedagogic identity alive in the organisation. That the survey also contributed to what some claim was an increased bureaucratisation at HIL, and a measure that also restrained creativity and rethinking about quality improvement is a paradoxical outcome of this process that perhaps will serve as a source for continuous discussions on what ´reform pedagogy´ really is.

12.3.3 Divergent vs. convergent organisational effects

The third research proposal was:

> *In seeking to adopt a new organisational identity, an institution of higher education will undergo changes in values, norms and behaviour which set it apart from other institutions of higher education engaged in similar processes.*

As illustrated under point 12.2.3, there are some tendencies towards convergence in the effects of the institutional work concerning the quality of teaching and learning. Most noticeable is perhaps the emphasis on problem-based learning. This was not recommended or requested by the Ministry, and is a measure that seems to have emerged in the sector during the 1990s – not least by imitation – where institutions also have looked to other institutions for inspiration. In HIL, MF and UITØ, problem-based learning is a recognisable element in the new practises that were established during the 1990s.

However, problem-based learning was not understood and implemented in the same way at the three institutions. In HIL problem-based learning was not seen as an independent innovation, but was linked to the reform pedagogy identity through an increased use of group work, project organisation and new technology. As such, problem-based learning was only one of several instruments that should revitalise the new reform pedagogic portfolio. At MF, problem-based learning was perceived as a tool that could provide the bridge between the theoretical training (and perceived academic drift) and the new challenges that vicars and teachers meet during practice i.e., during sermons, in classrooms, etc.. The close relations and openness to the needs of the ´grass roots´ i.e., local Christian communities outside the churches, was one of the traditional characteristics of MF, and problem-based learning was seen as a tool that could renew this relationship. In UITØ, problem-based learning has been used as a label to unite a number of

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activities that could give the institution the external ´entrepreneurial´ profile it wanted. Not only academic activities, but also social and welfare dimensions were linked to problem-based learning through various projects.

As presented in chapter six to eleven, problem-based learning seems to have been just one amongst numerous other initiatives related to the quality of teaching and learning at the institutions. This mix between, for example, institutional student surveys, large scale pedagogical development projects, curriculum revisions, and problem-based learning is quite unique for each institution. Furthermore, the link between these measures and the established organisational identity of each of the institutions point in the direction of organisational divergence.

A paradox is that while there was during the 1990s a general tendency in all the six institutions for adapting an organisational structure close to that of a bureaucratic organisational ideal, and by that, opening up for more convergence, when it comes to work concerning the quality of teaching and learning the institutions ended up with rather divergent solutions. In other words, while the Ministry was implementing broad reforms with the aim of streamlining the higher education system according to a bureaucratic organisational ideal, unclear political rhetoric associated with quality seems to have inspired institutional adaptation processes also related to the professional and the entrepreneurial organisational ideal.

The ways in which problem-based learning were implemented and mixed with other measures and elements of the organisational identities of HIL, MF and UITØ suggest clearly that adaptation processes are not only about imitation as proposed in the new institutionalism, but also about differentiation (Røvik 1998: 139). This differentiation seems to take place at least in two different ways. First, how the institutions mix various elements in their efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning supports the claims by Sevón (1996: 51) that imitation, for example, of problem-based learning, is a process in which something new is created. Second, adaptation can also be about distancing oneself from others. The case of UITØ is perhaps the most visible illustration of such an attempt to differentiate itself from other universities in Norway.

The arguments that frame adaptation attempts seem also to be of importance. In the case of HIL, MF and UITØ, adaptation processes were closely linked to inspirational future ends. For MF, various scenarios have been sketched about its future destiny, and the 100th anniversary of MF in 2008 was picked as the year during which a modernised institution was to appear. In HIL, the Olympic Games

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in 1994 were seen as a great opportunity for the institution to expand and perhaps establish itself as a university in the future. At UITØ, the idea about academic specialisation in the Network Norway was seen as an opportunity for strengthening the ´entrepreneurial´ identity of the institution, but also for establishing a competitive advantage in comparison to the other universities in Norway. Inspirational future ends rather than defensive-oriented interpretations characterised the adaptation processes at all three institutions. This is a result that is very much in line with research by Gioia et al (1994: 380) and Gioia and Thomas (1996: 397).

In the three institutions, the goals that were set also seemed to serve both the external and internal needs. Most noticeable is evidence of the goals creating new sources of energy in the institutions. As such, the goals created legitimacy for the adaptation processes internally in HIL, MF and UITØ (cf. Selznick 1957: 18). Discussions were started, pilot projects initiated, and the general engagement of the staff in work concerning the quality of teaching and learning increased. That the goals related to the 2008 anniversary, the Olympic Games and the Network Norway were not specified and served more as general visions, also is in line with claims by Gioia and Thomas (1996: 398) that goals could be perceived as input to sense-making rather than as the output of an organisational discussion. The goals were set first and were later filled with content.

12.3.4 Exploring some alternative explanations

That the organisational identity has been adapted at HIL, MF and UITØ as part of the work concerning the quality of teaching and learning at these institutions is a result that is not matched by the adaptation processes taking place at HIS, NTNU and BI. This suggests that the process of organisational identity change as discussed and conceptualised in chapter two is a process conditioned by other factors. The design of the study and the selection of cases allow us to ´control´ for some of these factors. As described in chapter five, the selection of cases varies according to reform history, size and ownership. To what extent can these three factors explain the variation in adaptation between HIL, MF and UITØ on the one hand, and HIS, NTNU and BI on the other?

As mentioned before the organisational *reform history* of the six institutions is rather different. The amalgamation of the college sector in 1994 affected HIL to a very little extent since it was the old ODH that became the new institution. Also in MF the 1990s could be described as a rather quiet decade with few state initiatives that directly affected the organisational structure of the institution. For the other

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four institutions in the sample the situation was somewhat different. At both HIS and NTNU, the 1990s were rather turbulent. HIS was the result of an amalgamation between six institutions in 1994. NTNU was established in 1996 after four different institutions merged. For BI and UITØ, the ´reform history´ is not so much about external state initiatives, but internal change processes. BI expanded tremendously in the early 1990s after strategic takeovers of several smaller institutions within the field of business administration. UITØ initiated an internal reorganisation in the period 1992-97, changing into an organisational structure more similar to other universities. Did these different ´reform´ contexts play a role in the process?

The case-studies show that the process of making the new institutional constructions of HIS and NTNU work smoothly took a lot of time and effort, and that work related to the quality of teaching and learning was not on top of the organisational agenda in the first years after the establishment. This may suggest a lack of institutional capacity, ability or interest to handle other tasks parallel to the mergers, at least by the institutional leadership. In NTNU, it is only at the end of the decade that work concerning quality was included in the institutional agenda as part of the establishment of the USU-committee. In HIS, but also to some extent in BI, the lack of involvement by the institutional leadership seemed to result in a search for external concepts and models that could easily be ´imitated´. Since it was difficult to find such concepts and models, the ´quick fix solutions´ were never implemented. The fact that the institutional leadership at UITØ managed to lift the work concerning quality parallel to the extensive internal re-organisation taking place in the organisation does, however, indicate that abilities and interests of the institutional leadership can play a role in explaining the differences between HIL, MF and UITØ, and HIS, BI and NTNU. That UITØ had an internal reorganisation process going, while HIS, NTNU and BI merged with other institutions may also be of importance. Research has suggested that mergers create numerous administrative problems that tend to be handled first, and that it may take almost a decade to launch overarching and integrating academic activities (Skodvin 1999:74).

The six institutions studied are also of different *size*. While NTNU and BI are quite large institutions with over 15.000 students, UITØ and HIS are medium-sized (6.000-8.000 students), and MF and HIL are small institutions (less than 3.000 students). One could imagine that the larger the institution, the more difficult it is to instigate overarching and coherent changes. A complicating factor is also that increasing size also tends to correlate with organisational complexity as measured

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by, for example, the number of disciplines and fields of study covered by a given institution.

At first sight, the result from the study seems to point in the direction that smaller institutions have greater adaptability. The two small institutions in the sample, HIL and MF both transformed their organisational identity in relation to the work concerning the quality of teaching and learning. In the two medium size institutions of HIS and UITØ, the result is ambiguous, while at NTNU, the organisational identity was not affected by the work to improve quality.

In the sample of cases, BI is a special one due to its decentralised organisational structure with undergraduate study centres scattered all over Norway, but with its headquarters and all the graduate studies located in Sandvika just outside Oslo. If one looks at the whole institution, about 17.000 students studied in the BI-system in 2000, but only 1.700 in Sandvika. According to size, one could thus expect that BI as an institution would experience problems when implementing work concerning the quality of teaching and learning, but that adaptation would be easier in Sandvika, not least since the most prestigious study programmes and the heart of the academic activity are located there. Thus, the organisational identity of BI is mostly ´constructed´ in Sandvika. However, the analysis indicates that even if a number of projects to improve quality have been initiated in Sandvika these have not affected the organisational identity of BI. Thus, if one regards Sandvika as being a rather independent but very important part of BI, this questions the importance of size. Since BI in general, and Sandvika in particular also could be characterised as a rather specialised institution (or unit), with the overwhelming majority of study programmes within the field of business administration – this result also indicates that academic specialisation is not necessarily an advantage for instigating organisational identity change. If one looks at the six institutions altogether, the results are, in other words, inconclusive when it comes to size.

The final factor that can be checked as a result of the design of the study is the *public/private* dimension. As suggested in chapter four, one could imagine that adaptation and thus a change in the organisational identity would be easier in private higher education institutions than in public due to their reliance on quick market responses and their need to establish ´enterprise cultures´ (cf. Clark 1970). However, only one of the two private higher education institutions in the sample, MF, adapted its organisational identity. The other private higher education institution, BI, initiated several projects concerning the quality of teaching and learning without any of them leaving significant traces on the identity of the

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institution. That two of the public higher education institutions in the sample did adapt their identity as a result of their efforts, suggests that whether an institution is publicly or privately owned is not decisive its adaptive capacity. It should, however, be noted that the public/private dimension may be of less importance in the Norwegian higher education system. Both MF and BI receive a considerable amount of state funding, and are perhaps tighter regulated than private higher education institutions in other countries.

To sum up, it seems that some characteristics of the six institutions i.e., size and whether they are public or private, contribute little to explain the variations in adaptation and consequently, the changes in the organisational identity experienced in HIL, MF and UITØ. Concerning organisational reform history, there are rather strong indications that institutional mergers took attention away from other developmental processes at the involved institutions. Work concerning quality has been fragmented and ad-hoc based at HIS, BI and NTNU, and their organisational identity has not been adapted as a result of the efforts undertaken.

This result is perhaps not surprising. It may seem obvious that an organisational restructuring takes time and draws attention away from other items on the agenda. However, one could also claim that a merger could open up for creative processes, academic re-thinking and new perspectives on how the institution should look like in the future, processes that would have implications for the organisational identity of the ´new´ institution. Even if this undoubtedly has happened at HIS (their university ambitions), at NTNU (the leading national university in science and technology), and at BI (becoming an international business school), work concerning the quality of teaching and learning has not affected these identities to any extent. Thus, the main difference that seems to appear between HIL, MF and UITØ on the one hand, and HIS, NTNU and BI on the other, is the presence of an active ´agency´ in the former institutions, and a lack of such ´agency´ in the latter cases. The implications this might have for future research and for neo-institutional theory is discussed below.

12.3.5 Research implications

The process of organisational identity change that was discussed in chapter two, was a theoretical construction using elements from both old and new institutionalism. Even though a more *active agency* was proposed as vital in changing an organisational identity, this agency was still considered as restricted and embedded in taken-for-granted assumptions as stated in the new institutionalism. The active agency proposed was not independent of structural

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constraints (cf. Scott 2001: 194). A number of such constraints were identified: tradition, history and not least the established identity labels of a given organisation - constraints usually linked to the old institutionalism. In addition, it was also suggested that the environment produced the organisational ideals that legitimated organisational identity change. This factor, legitimacy, is in the new institutionalism considered as being a driving force behind attempts to imitate other, and successful organisations (Selznick 1996:273). On the basis of this study one could, however, argue that legitimacy is a factor that may link old and new institutionalism. As the processes in HIL, MF and UITØ illustrate, to initiate organisational identity change, the institutional leadership seems to depend on both external and internal legitimacy. External organisational ideals are translated by the leadership to fit established organisational identity labels – legitimacy is in other words obtained by references to familiar cues (cf. also Dacin et al 2002:47).

This result has two interesting implications. First, both normative and cognitive processes are at play when an organisation changes its identity. Normative processes can be identified when the institutional leadership tries to maintain the integrity and distinctiveness of the institution, while cognitive processes are playing a more important role when the leadership try to merge institutional norms and values to external demands and expectations. In other words, to sharply separate between normative and cognitive pillars of institutions in empirical analysis appears to be a problem even though it has been advocated as a fruitful way forward for identifying their ´different underlying assumptions, mechanisms and indicators´ (Scott 2001:51). This calls for research approaches where not only potential drivers of change and their respective mechanisms are identified, but also the processes involved.

A second implication is also that what Oliver (1997) calls normative rationality i.e., a fidelity to self-defined values, not necessarily restricts organisational adaptation and acquisition of resources. On the contrary, the curriculum revisions and the new study programmes in MF opened up the institution for new groups of students. Moreover, the funding from the Ministry of Education received by UITØ as part of its effort to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and the close relations HIL had with the Ministry of Education when discussing the take-over of the infrastructure after the Olympic Games, indicate that these institutions were adaptive and quite clever in acquiring public funding. That they managed to do this even if they had quite distinct organisational identities suggests that strong and established organisational identities can be regarded as an advantage in an adaptation process and not solely as a disadvantage (rigidity) as often conceived (cf. Clark 1970:259, Selznick 1996:271). Indeed, it can be argued that the lack of

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change in the organisational identities of HIS, BI and NTNU was related to ongoing internal discussions and negotiations on the future identities of these organisations after the mergers, and that due to a lack of agreement, other adaptation processes were delayed as a consequence.

Based on the argument above it seems that an active agency is dependent on power. As the case-studies illustrate, it was the established power structures at HIL, MF and UITØ that responded to and translated governmental policies for improving the quality of teaching and learning to fit their own needs. Whether these needs are related to their own wish to stay in power, or a moral and normative commitment to the institution they are part of, or both, can be debated. The interesting twist is, however, that they in this situation initiated a process of organisational transformation. The established organisational identity labels were used as a means to create new meanings to these labels. In this process *symbolic and real change* fuse together. As such, this finding supports Scott (2001:173) in that de-coupling of structure from action as suggested by the new institutionalism often is an incorrect interpretation of adaptation processes. Maintaining and developing the organisational identity should not be conceived as ´impression management´ but an important process of organisational change (Røvik 1998:142). This result has several implications.

First, it opts for research designs combining quantitative and qualitatie techniques when studying and analysing institutional change. For example, in a pure quantitative design looking at formal measures and structures only, this study could easily have drawn conclusions that HIL, MF and UITØ just had been ´bureaucratised´ as a result of the work concerning quality. The new meanings and the cognitive reorientation that were taking place at the three institutions would not have been captured. As Dacin et al (2002:48) have stated, there is a need to use methods that can identify processes that would have gone unnoticed by approaches that focus on the macro level and structures and practices alone. Second, that symbolic and real change seem so interrelated could be seen as a consequence of the double pressure facing many higher education institutions at present where they are asked to be innovative with a specific organisational mission while at the same time being an integrated part of a growing, and highly interconnected, internationalised and standardised higher education ´industry´ (Stensaker & Norgård 2001:473). To make only symbolic adjustments as a response to external demands may convince the environment to some degree, but can on the other hand hardly be a tool that is convincing for those who work at the institution. To create, for example, ´entrepreneurial´ institutions requires that those who constitute these entities also trust and believe in the organisation they

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belong to (Stensaker & Norgård 2001:490). Third, if institutionalisation is about balancing external and internal needs, some of the insights of the old institutionalism need to be brought back into the spotlight for developing neo-institutional theory further. For Selznick (1957) this balancing act was what differentiated ´statesmen´ from leaders - a topic he pursued throughout his career. As late as in the early 1990s, the tension between maintaining organisational integrity and develop organisational responsiveness was commented upon by Selznick (1992:326) in the following way:

> *The challenge is to maintain organisational integrity while taking into account new problems, new forces in the environment, new demands and expectations. A responsive institution avoids insularity without embracing opportunism.*

In higher education, Burton Clark has made similar claims, suggesting that an active agency could be the factor that establishes an organisational saga, hence form the basis for his statement that all higher education institutions might have roles, ´but only some have missions´ (Clark 1970:234). Dill comes close to this line of thinking when he stresses the ´management of meaning´ for sustaining the social integration of higher education institutions (Dill 1982:304).

The latter statement can also be used to shed some light on another interesting debate within institutional theory, whether organisational change is *convergent or divergent*. This chapter has argued that even if some convergent practices have appeared among the six institutions (for example, when it comes to problem-based learning), the result is that through a mix of measures – including the management of meaning - the institutions have developed their distinctive identity, at least HIL, MF and UITØ. In the three other institutions the result is more inconclusive. Work concerning quality seems fragmented, more ad-hoc based, and with an openness for pure imitative behaviour (for example at HIS and in BI).

However, one should be careful in drawing a too sharp distinction between HIL, MF and UITØ, and HIS, BI and NTNU. Whether changes appear as convergent or divergent is a matter of interpretation, and should not be conceived as a dichotomy. The point is illustrated in figure 12.1, where the six institutions are plotted according to their adaptive and interpretative capacity, and where the placement is an indication not only of the role the agency plays in the adaptation process, but also of vital characteristics in their organisational identities.

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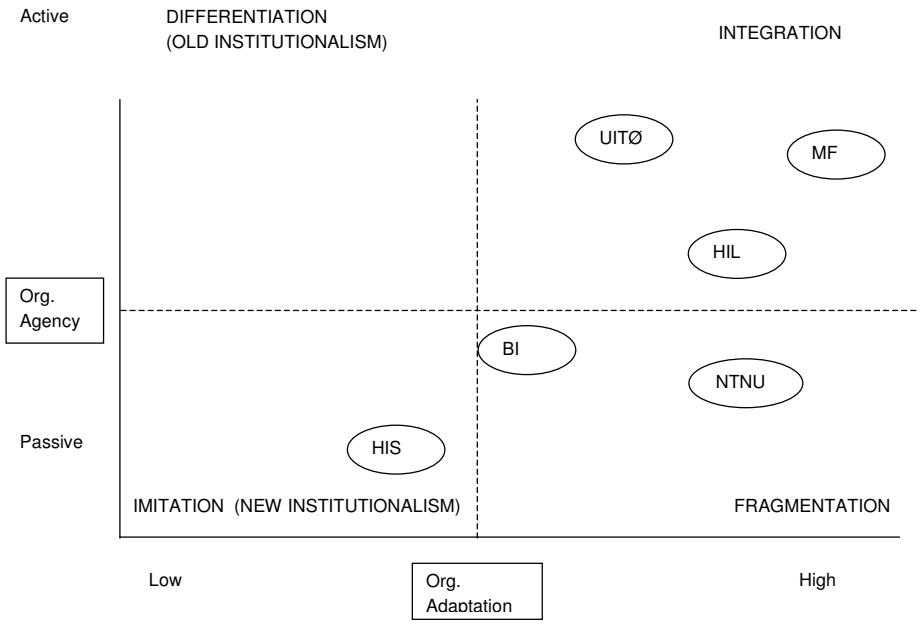
Figure 12.1 *Images of the organisational identities of UITØ, HIL, MF, BI, HIS and NTNU in 2000. Plots according to adaptive and interpretative capacity.*



An important point to remember when discussing tendencies towards convergence or divergence is that the six institutions had established identities closer to that of the entrepreneurial and professional organisational ideal than the bureaucratic. Openness towards elements of the bureaucratic ideal have, as indicated before, not reduced other identity elements of the institutions. The result is, as indicated in chapters six to eleven, that the institutions develop more *complex* identities over time where different identity elements sometimes are sought integrated (HIL, MF and UITØ), and sometimes co-exist (HIS, BI and NTNU) in the institutions (see figure 12.1). One could argue that this tendency towards complexity would make convergence even more difficult.

There are several implications of questioning the dichotomy between convergent and divergent organisational change. The most obvious, and closely related to the need for more methodologically sophisticated studies as advocated above, is that there is a need to study processes of institutionalisation, and not only the outcome

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of institutionalisation – traditionally the trademark of the new institutionalism. Institutionalisation as an outcome, measured through, for example, formal structure, hides many of the dynamic processes that should interest a student of institutional theory. For example, the present study could be seen not only as a study of organisational identity change (institutionalisation), but also as a study of de-institutionalisation processes. When HIL, MF and UITØ gave their established identity labels a new meaning, existing beliefs and practises were weakened in favour of new beliefs and practises. The reform pedagogical identity of HIL which traditionally was linked to the establishment of the institution and the uniqueness of HIL, was at the end of the 1990s translated into a competitive advantage for better serving the needs of the knowledge society. Since de-institutionalisation is not exclusively related to organisational identity labels we need more studies on how such processes occur (cf. Scott 2001:183).

However, the most important implication of the present study is that organisational identity, as a way to combine the insights of old and new institutionalism, offers a fruitful link between the normative and the cognitive ´pillar´ of neo-institutional theory. As Scott states in assessing the contributions made by Albert and Whetten (1985) and Whetten and Godfrey (1998): ´Organisational identity provides participants with a core set of normative and cultural-cognitive elements around which to craft their narratives and sense-making activities´ (2001:106). Warnings have been uttered that integrating various pillars of neo-institutionalism in empirical analysis would lead to overdetermined explanations, where ´pressure for conformity, plus intrinsic direct rewards, plus values, all are likely to act together to give a particular meaning system its directive force´ (D´Andrade 1984:98). As this study illustrates, one could also argue for the opposite view – that it are tensions and dynamism that appear when normative and cognitive elements are combined in the analysis. We are all hostages to powerful norms and values, but use cognition to challenge and develop the institutions we are part of. As such, it seems more promising to study the interplay of various institutional pillars and ´drivers´ than to follow a reductionistic approach.

12.4 The relationship between governmental policy and organisational responses

The current study was based on the assumption that governmental policies play an important role in providing the institutions with the organisational ideals to which they relate. At the same time, as discussed chapter three, Norwegian policies concerning the quality of teaching and learning could also be

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characterised as rather ´soft´, experimental and communicative, and as such providing the institutions with somewhat ambiguous signals as to how they should adapt and interpret the Ministry´s ´ideals´ with respect to the organisational identities in higher education. What does this mean for the relationship between governmental policy and organisational responses in the Norwegian context?

12.4.1 Organisational response to governmental policies?

As discussed in chapter three, the policies of Norwegian authorities during the 1990s can be linked to several organisational ideals – what was labelled as the bureaucratic, the entrepreneurial and the professional ideal. These ideals can be linked to different logics and ideas inherent in the policies analysed and governance arrangements conceptualised – and to broader governmental ambitions than those related to the quality of teaching and learning. As such, the bureaucratic ideal can be closely linked to policy objectives of system efficiency and effectiveness. The entrepreneurial ideal was more coupled to characteristics of the knowledge society and the institutional responses to the emergence of a higher education ´market´. The professional ideal was on the other hand the one most closely associated with the governmental rhetoric about the need to improve the quality of teaching and learning (see St.meld.nr. 40 1990-91: 55). In chapter four the conclusion was that the objectives related to system efficiency and effectiveness, hence the bureaucratic organisational ideal prevailed and dominated the political agenda during the decade. The study has, in other words, also been an analysis of how institutions respond to governmental policies of ´less importance´ and with few sanctions attached. One could imagine that this would not yield much institutional interest in response. Hence, that the institutions actually initiated and implemented numerous measures concerning the quality of teaching and learning could be seen as surprising (see point 12.1). The result indicates that the policies had some characteristics that matched institutional needs and were perceived as attractive from an institutional point of view. Below, some of these characteristics are sketched and possible implications for future policy-making are suggested.

12.4.2 Policy implications

A first characteristic relates to the fact that Norwegian policies for higher education in the 1990s opened up a space for a more dynamic institutional response. For example, the idea of the Norway Network and the notion that there was a need for increased academic and institutional specialisation within this network triggered UITØ to launch its strategic initiative ´Better Learning for New

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Times´. In this case, and also in the HIL and MF cases, there are indications that policies that provide institutions with opportunities were responded to in a positive way. This characteristic matches suggestions from among others, Sporn (1999) that it is not only threats that trigger organisational adaptation, but also opportunities.

A second characteristic, closely related to the first, indicates that higher education institutions relate more to policies than adapting to them. In several of the cases in this study there are examples that institutions select elements of the policies that fit their own development needs or processes. These elements are picked not only for increasing internal legitimacy, but also to release public funding. A consequence is that policies should be framed in a language that stimulates creative interpretations or that is ´relevant´ for those adapting. In UITØ, one such creative interpretation was launched when the institution argued for ´professional´ and not just academic specialisation within the Norway Network. HIS, on the other hand, seemed to have taken the governmental rhetoric about the need for institutions to develop systematic routines for student evaluation of teaching literally, resulting in a long (and never ending) search for assessment models that fitted the government's descriptions. Political rhetoric associated with improving the quality of teaching and learning could also be seen as very ´relevant´ for the institutions because it was closely linked to a professional organisational ideal. If one looks at the institutions, it is presicely the practises associated with this ideal that seem to have had most impact (problem-based learning, curriculum revisions, experimental pedagogy, etc.). One could argue that since the policies were framed in a familiar way, close to what many institutions saw as the core of their academic activity, institutional ´translation´ and adaptation became easier. There were a normative ´match´ between policy-makers and policy-implementers.

Third, as chapter one and four have shown, ´quality´ could be conceived as an independent institution of the 1990s. Quality was not only on the agenda of the Ministry of Education in Norway, but was the ever present topic internationally, in the business world, in research and elsewhere (cf. Mickletwait & Wooldridge 1996; Cameron & Whetten 1996). To link policies to this general trend may have reinforced the pressure the institutions felt for instigating change. There is considerable evidence that a ´weak state´ may strengthen its position considerably by linking policy to popular ideas and concepts (Czarniawska 2000:275; Scott 2001:117; Dacin et al 2002:48). For example, some of the most powerful policy-making in public education in the USA has not evolved from reforming organisational structures, but by normative and symbolic definitions of

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´important´ nation-wide problems (Meyer & Scott 1992:256-257). An implication is that is could be an advantage to launch policies that are conceived by the adapters as fashionable and modern (Stensaker 1998:136), an indication of how important the symbolic dimension is in modern policy-making (Maassen & Stensaker 2003:85).

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Nederlandse samenvatting

VERANDERINGEN IN ORGANISATIE IDENTITEIT

INTERPRETATIES VAN BELEID MET BETREKKING TOT DE KWALITEIT VAN DOCEREN EN LEREN IN HET NOORSE HOGER ONDERWIJS

De probleemstelling die in deze studie centraal staat is als volgt geformuleerd: "Hoe is de organisitie identiteit van Noorse universiteiten en hogescholen gedurende de jaren '90 beïnvloed door overheidsbeleid met betrekking tot de kwaliteit van doceren en leren?" Om deze vraag te kunnen beantwoorden is een theoretisch kader ontwikkeld op basis van oude en nieuwe institutionele theorie. Door middel van het combineren van deze twee versies van de institutionele theorie, is het concept 'organisatie identeit' geconstrueerd als symbolische, normatieve en cognitieve expressies van wat een organisatie is. Gebaseerd op de assumptie dat symbolen, mythes en sociale constructies belangrijke determinanten zijn voor organisatie gedrag, kan een studie naar veranderingen in organisatie identiteit worden gezien als uiterst belangrijk voor het zicht krijgen op de vraag of het Noorse hoger onderwijs in de periode 1990 – 2000 een fundamentele herorientatie heeft doorgemaakt van zijn taken, rollen en verantwoordelijkheden betreffende doceren en leren.

Het theoretisch argument ontwikkeld in hoofdstuk 2 stelt dat veranderingen in organisatie identiteit plaatsvinden als gevolg van de interactie tussen de individuele organisatie en zijn omgeving. Een verdere assumptie is dat de identiteit van een bepaalde organisatie zal veranderen wanneer de omgeving ideaalbeelden van organisaties produceert die afwijken van de identiteit van de organisatie in kwestie. Echter, de studie gaat er niet van uit dat identiteitverandering het resultaat is van een puur imitatie proces. In plaats daarvan wordt verondersteld dat een proces van identiteitverandering bestaat uit herinterpretaties van geinstitutionaliseerde identiteit labels, en vertalingen van nieuwe organisatie idealen die passen bij de geschiedenis en tradities van een bepaalde instelling. Het resultaat van deze herinterpretaties en vertalingen is het tot stand komen van een nieuwe organisatie identiteit waarbij belangrijke identiteit labels behouden blijven, terwijl hun betekenis is veranderd.

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In hoofdstuk drie wordt de Noorse hoger-onderwijspolitiek ten aanzien van de kwaliteit van doceren en leren in de jaren '90 bediscussieerd. Op basis hiervan zijn dominante beleidsideeën geidentificeerd in hoofdstuk vier, en is een aantal bestuursarrangementen en drie organisatie idealen die zijn afgeleid van deze ideeën geconceptualiseerd, te weten de bureaucratische, de ondernemende, en de professionele organisatie. De conclusie is dat alle drie de idealen kunnen worden geobserveerd in het Noorse hoger onderwijs gedurende deze periode. Zelfs al werd het ideaal van de bureaucratische organisatie het meest benadrukt, ook de beelden van de ondernemende en de professionele organisatie werden verspreid gedurende het decennium. Bijgevolg, voor de individuele organisatie die probeerde te navigeren door de vele hervormingen en ontwikkelingen in het hoger onderwijs in de jaren '90 was het niet duidelijk welke van de drie organisatie idealen de 'juiste' was, vooral ook omdat het Noorse beleid ten aanzien van de kwaliteit van doceren en leren nogal bescheiden en experimenteel was, en was gebaseerd op communicatieve in plaats van juridische maatregelen.

Het empirische deel van de studie bestaat uit een onderzoek naar de manier waarop zes verschillende Noorse hoger-onderwijsinstellingen hebben geprobeerd de kwaliteit van hun onderwijs te verbeteren gedurende de jaren '90 (gepresenteerd in hoofdstukken zes tot en met elf). Twee publieke hogescholen, twee publieke universiteiten en twee private hoger-onderwijsinstellingen dienden als de cases voor het onderzoek.

Het idee van een aanpassingsproces gekenmerkt door vertalingen en herinterpretaties is slechts gedeeltelijk bevestigd door de studie. In drie van de case instellingen, dat wil zeggen één van de publieke universiteiten, één van de publieke hogescholen, en één van de private hoger-onderwijsinstellingen, komen de resultaten overeen met het theoretisch kader ontwikkeld voor deze studie. In deze instellingen zijn er vele voorbeelden van vertalingen van organisatie idealen die passen bij de bestaande identiteit: de instellingen selecteerden actief uit beschikbare idealen in de omgeving, ze probeerden de afstand te overbruggen tussen het nieuwe identiteit element dat ze wilden adopteren en de bestaande identiteit, en ze communiceerden over de nieuwe identiteit op een manier die het unieke en distinctieve karakter van de organisatie benadrukte.

In de overige drie instellingen komen de resultaten niet overeen met het theoretisch kader. In een discussie over mogelijke oorzaken, kunnen factoren als publiek versus privaat karakter van de instelling en grootte de resultaten niet verklaren. Echter, het feit dat alle drie de instellingen een nogal turbulente hervormingsgeschiedenis hebben kan mogelijkerwijs een effect hebben gehad op

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hun vermogen zich aan te passen, bijvoorbeeld aan nieuwe organisatie idealen in de omgeving. Dit resultaat geeft ook indirect aan dat de leidinggevende personen in een instelling een belangrijke rol spelen in aanpassingsprocessen als 'vertalers' en als degenen die betekenis geven aan veranderingsprocessen.

Er kunnen verschillende theoretische conclusies worden getrokken naar aanleiding van de studie. Ten eerste, er is behoefte aan studies die kwalitatieve en kwantitatieve technieken combineren bij het bestuderen van organisatie-veranderingsprocessen. Het belangrijkste argument hiervoor is dat kwalitatieve dimensies nodig zijn om de micro-processen van de-institutionalisering en re-institutionalisering te achterhalen. Ten tweede, stabiele machtsstructuren in een sterke organisatie vormen een goed startpunt voor het initiëren van aanpassingsprocessen. Het argument hiervoor is dat een sterke organisatie identiteit vertalingsprocessen gemakkelijker kan maken en dat het doel van elke willekeurige aanpassing gemakkelijker kan worden geïdentificeerd. Echter, als gevolg hiervan worden veranderingen in organisatie identiteit wel incrementeler. Ten derde, er kunnen vraagtekens worden geplaatst bij het maken van een strict onderscheid tussen symbolische en daadwerkelijke verandering. Het argument hiervoor is dat als een nieuwe betekenis wordt gegeven aan bestaande identiteit labels, symbolische en daadwerkelijke verandering in elkaar overgaan. Ten vierde, in aanpassingsprocessen zijn normatieve en cognitieve dimensies nauw met elkaar verweven, met als gevolg dat kan worden getwijfeld aan het nut van het maken van een onderscheid tussen beiden als aparte analyse factoren in organisatie-veranderingsprocessen. Het argument hiervoor is dat normatieve en cognitieve elementen worden vermengd als 'vertalers' betrokken zijn bij zingevende activiteiten. Ten vijfde, organisatie identiteit is een vruchtbare weg naar voren in het overbruggen van het 'oude' en 'nieuwe' institutionalisme. Het argument hiervoor is dat een focus op organisatie identiteit issues naar voren brengt als macht en distinctiviteit op een manier die kan worden gerelateerd aan een aantal benaderingen binnen het nieuwe institutionalisme.

Er zijn ook drie politieke conclusies van de studie geïdentificeerd. Ten eerste, 'bescheiden' overheidsbeleid ten aanzien van de kwaliteit van doceren en leren kan een effect hebben als het geformuleerd is op een manier die creatieve interpretaties van de instellingen mogelijk maakt. In Noorwegen werd beleid op het onderhavige gebied vooral gezien als beleid dat mogelijkheden biedt, en niet als beleid dat een bedreiging vormt voor de instellingen. Ten tweede, in het proces van aanpassing aan het beleid, lijkt het erop dat de hoger-onderwijsinstellingen elementen van het beleid selecteren die passen bij hun eigen doelstellingen. Dit selectieproces was mede mogelijk omdat het beleid zo was geformuleerd dat de

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instellingen het gemakkelijk 'herkenden'. Ten derde, hoe meer beleid is gerelateerd aan dominante en breed gesteunde ideeën in de maatschappij des te effectiever is het beleid. 'Kwaliteit' was zo'n idee dat als voordeel had dat het door de instellingen als modern en modieus werd beschouwd. Dit is een duidelijke indicatie van het belang van de symbolische dimensie in het hedendaagse beleidsproces.

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Interview guide

HISTORICAL IDENTITY AND CENTRAL CHARACTERISTICS

- Are there any special characteristics related to how this institution conducts its teaching and research?
- Does this institution have a distinct profile or a special culture?
- Has this profile or culture affected your interpretations of how the quality of teaching and learning should be improved or assured?
- Does this institution differ from other institutions in interpreting and implementing the work concerning the quality in teaching and learning?
- What academic ambitions and objectives would you say is, or have been, important to this institution?
- How has the institution worked to reach these objectives?
- Does this institution perceive other academic institutions as a model?
- Would you say that the institutional management, in general, have had much influence on strategies, change and development processes related to the quality of teaching and learning? (To a large extent/to some extent/to a little extent/not at all)
- How does organisational change take place at this institution?

INSTITUTIONAL WORK TO IMPROVE/ASSURE QUALITY

- How do you think the ´average´ academic employee at this institution would define quality?
- Has this institution formally, or informally, interpreted or defined the concept of quality?
- Are there any particular persons or groups at this institution that in the period 1990-2000 contributed to put quality on the institutional agenda?
- What would you say is the most important events, processes, actions or decisions that during the period from 1990-2000 contributed to improve/assure quality at your institution?
- To what extent have external processes, events and forces, including those of the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs, affected how this institution has worked to improve/assure quality?
- What would you say characterise the way work on quality improvement/assurance have been organised and managed at your institution?
- How has work to improve/assure quality been prioritised compared to other processes at your institution, for example, in relation to research activities?
- To what extent has work to improve/assure quality been supported economically, by staff allocations, project support etc?
- To what extent has academic staff supported the attempt to improve/assure quality at your institution?

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- Can you describe the attitude of the ´average´ academic staff member towards the work to improve/assure quality?
- Do you think that the current way your institution is working to improve/assure quality is the most appropriate way?
- Have the way the work to improve/assure quality changed during the period 1990-2000?

EFFECTS OF THE WORK TO IMPROVE/ASSURE QUALITY

- How do you know that the work you are undertaking to improve/assure quality has had any effects?
- What are you doing/have you done to make the way you work to improve/assure quality more relevant?
- What are the results of the work to improve/assure quality (for example, lowered student drop-out, increase in the number of degrees awarded, attitudes, communication, cooperation, administrative affairs, management and governance, student feed-back and engagement)?
- Work to improve/assure quality is dependent on a number of factors to succeed (personnel, resources, organisation, leadership, motivation etc). What would you say has been the major obstacles related to work to improve/assure quality at your institution?
- Have work to improve/assure quality been related to other activities/developmental projects at your institution?
- If you look back at the period 1990-2000, has work to improve/secure quality affected the ´identity´ of your institution, i.e., central characteristics or distinguished features?

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Promotoren/overige leden van de promotiecommissie

Promotoren

Prof. dr. G. Neave
Dr. P.A.M. Maassen

Overige leden van de promotiecommissie

Prof.dr. J. Enders
Prof.dr. S.A.H. Denters
Prof.dr. B. Askling
Prof.dr. M. Henkel
Prof.dr. V.L. Meek

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