Assessing Organizational Resilience: change and stability in the academic core of the university

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Speaker:

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Abstract

Resilient organizations are characterized by their ability to overcome disruptive external events whilst retaining a sense of continuity or identity. Universities have historically been characterized as rather resilience organizations, yet the technical and institutional environments in which contemporary universities operate have changed rather dramatically in the last two decades. This paper assesses the extent to which research-intensive universities retain the ability to absorb external disturbances whilst maintaining a sense of internal balance or stability.

The question we ask in this chapter is whether these changes are pushing the university over a threshold? Over their history universities have changed and adapted with the times, they have proven to be some of the most resilient organizations in western society. Perhaps only the church can be said to be comparable in this regard. Is that about to change? A difficulty in attempting to study the resilience of universities is that these organizations have rarely failed outright, and we do not expect that major flagship institutions will meet that fate. Rather, we choose to look inside the university at what is happening between the various branches of the academic core (humanities, social sciences, and the natural science) to better understand university resilience. Our analysis is inspired by earlier studies showing significant variations across knowledge domains or disciplines (Frank and Gabler 2006), around which communities of scholars converge, and formal and informal structures develop and evolve (Clark 1983). Empirically, we investigate shifts in the strategic postures and the academic core of two, comprehensive ‘flagship’ universities in the Nordic countries.