Autonomy and Accountability

Antonio Camara

New University of Lisbon and YDreams

Autonomy

- Governance
  - Vision and values
  - Role of professional management
  - Role of non-University members

- Human resources management
  - Students
  - Faculty
  - Staff

- Financial management
  - Endowment
  - Other revenue management
  - Investment management

Accountability

- There are pre-requisites to autonomy (i.e., agreement on the governance system, human resources and financial management)

- But autonomous Universities have to be accountable to the different stakeholders

Accountability

- "No" accountablity: just a perception of quality

    "If you want to build a factory, or fix a motorcycle, or set a
    nation right without getting stuck, then classical, structured
    dualistic subject-object knowledge, although necessary, is
    not enough. You have to have some feeling for the quality of
    the work. You have to have a sense of what's good. That is
    what carries you forward"

    Robert Pirsig
    Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, 1984

Accountability

- "Soft" accountability
  - "Science and the Endless Frontier" from Vannevar Bush in 1945 (http://www.nsf.gov/od/lpa/nsf50/vbush1945.htm)
  - Trust and laissez faire with "soft" evaluations

Accountability

- "Hard" accountability
  - Indices related to students (success rates in application, graduation and professional life)
  - Indices related to professors (publications, citations, awards, students, projects, broader impacts on the society)
  - Indices related to University management (endowment, short term revenue generation and long term wealth creation)

Accountability

- Data never dies and rankings are loved by the media so "hard" accountability is here to stay
- But current "hard" accountability has two main problems:
  - It has been leading to excelent mediocrity in research (not to mention mediocre teaching)
  - It has been leading to minimal entrepreneurship

Accountability

- Excellent mediocrity
  - A term coined by Huszagh and Infante in a Nature article published in 1989 to describe most biological research
  - It leads to a high number of publications and citations in fashionable (often irrelevant) areas
  - It does not encourage boldness and exploration

Accountability

- Excellent mediocrity
  - As a result, University research tends to attract conventional people that only have conventional ideas
  - Most of these ideas are irrelevant for existing companies and will never generate successful companies
  - High level peer evaluation of top publications only is more relevant than h-indices and the like

Accountability

- Entrepreneurship
    - Universities are attempting to manage intellectual property and even starting companies to generate revenues
    - They can certainly help creating an associated infrastructure
    - But compare the 3000* companies generated by the then "anarchic" Cambridge with the 80+ companies generated by "managing" Oxford...

    http://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/~rja14/expropriation.html

Conclusions

- It is certainly time to end with the "napoleonic-stalinistic" management model coupled with "pseudo democratic contentment" of some European Universities

- Autonomy will certainly require accountability

- "Hard" accountability leading to excellent mediocrity in research and minimal wealth generation is not welcome

- It is worth reading Pirsig's Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance