

THE UNIVERSITIES PROJECT OF THE SALZBURG SEMINAR
VISITING ADVISORS' REPORT

UNIVERSITY OF LATVIA
RIGA, LATVIA

APRIL 23-27, 2001

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The University of Latvia is the only classical university in Latvia, thus the main center for higher education, research, and culture for the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences. It was founded in 1919, building upon the Riga Polytechnic (founded in 1862) and currently comprises thirteen faculties and more than thirty research institutions, some having independent status, several museums, and other academic and cultural facilities. The University enrolls nearly 34,000 students (2000), more than two-thirds in undergraduate study. The academic staff numbers just over 800 engaged in teaching and research.

The members of the Team of Advisors appreciate the privilege of visiting the University of Latvia, and are grateful to Rector Ivars Lacis and his colleagues for their extraordinary candor in our discussions, and their exceptional hospitality.

The Advisors commend the Rector for the comprehensive preparation for the visit. It was very helpful to have extensive documentation in advance of the visits. The schedule (Appendix IV) was thorough and complete. The Advisors especially appreciate the responsiveness of the Rector to our requests regarding the make-up of the sessions with the students, and with the University Senate. The presentations in each element of the schedule were thorough, informative, and professional.

The University of Latvia considers its mission to be:

1. To provide opportunities for study and research to all citizens who desire them;

2. To serve the economic, social, scientific, and cultural interests of the Latvian people and state; and

3. To maintain a competitive position among Universities in Europe.

The Advisors are impressed with the serious purpose of the University staff, their sense of mission and public responsibility, and the high level of professionalism exhibited by the University leadership. There is a thorough and workable strategic plan and an obvious commitment to take the practical steps necessary to carry forward with the implementation of the strategic plan.

It could be very useful to develop and employ "sensing systems" (Appendix III, Reflexive Model) that help strengthen the University's relationships with the corporate sector of the economy through applied and basic research, and which are compatible with the traditions of the Latvian political and social system.

It is in light of these characteristics (plan, professionalism, pragmatism, and commitment) that we, the Advisors, have formulated the following observations and recommendations, which we offer for the consideration of the Rector, his colleagues, and the University community. The observations and recommendations respond to four general areas of interest and challenge to the University of Latvia:

- Organization
- Fiscal and Budget Management
- Academic Curriculum and Research
- Community Relations and Outreach.

Organization

Forms of organization and processes of management of universities reflect the mission and, often, the traditions of such institutions. Perceptions of these phenomena differ within the university community. A professor, an administrator, a student, a client, a general citizen—each looking at the same patterns of resources and programs—will likely "see the same things differently," that is, will develop different perspectives. For example, the

professor might desire the university as a place for research and a program of teaching leading to a prescribed level of competence in various subject areas. The administrator may well see the institution as a network of specialists needing support and leadership in pursuit of university goals, with relationships defined by legal documents and formal "charts." The student sees an array of opportunities and challenges of self-discipline and prescribed performance standards. None of these perceptions is wrong, nor is any one of them complete.

The University has a complicated structure (both academic and administrative) as a heritage of the higher education and research systems in the Soviet Union. This structure is not suitable for the new mission and the role of the University of Latvia and hence is a deterrent to achieving strategic goals of the University. The academic structure of the University lacks flexibility in programs of studies on the one hand and on the other preserves an "historical" form, as evidenced by duplications or anomalies such as Faculty of Economics and Management and Centre of Environmental Science and Management Studies, Faculty of Education and Psychology and Institute of Education and Psychology, Faculty of Law and Department of Basics of Law.

The challenge to the current leadership of the University of Latvia is to establish an organization and governance structure, which is consonant with the strategic plan for development. Furthermore, the organization and governance structure for the University must be compatible with the post-1992 policies of the nation, including close inter-relations with the European community.

The proposed changes of the University administration and management structure are fairly revolutionary. Simultaneously, the University leaders have a very clear vision of what they want to achieve through the changes, but how to implement them remains unsettled. This is a crucial issue, since a support of the University staff for changes in general can (to a great extent) depend on the style of their implementation.

In this context, changes of the academic structure of the University should be rather more evolutional. The necessary condition for a success in restructuring the University is formulating clear and convincing vision and concept of the changes together with widespread explanations of the rationale of these changes. This is important especially for the process of integration of the independent research institutes into the University; from the discussions during the visit one can conclude that the Institutes' staff do not have any interest in being a "regular" part of the University.

University leaders are prepared to define the structure of destination and ways of approach it but, from the beginning, they should convince and create a group of devoted people who would strongly support their ideas within the University and would be "carriers" of these ideas. Students, as the most progressive component of the University, should be much more involved in this process.

Also, the academic community of the University should be openly informed about consequences and opportunities connected with restructuring policy—to increase the group of supporters of the Rectorate's decisions in this respect.

The literature of higher education is filled with various schemes and patterns of organization, and in a sense, each higher education institution develops a unique pattern consistent with its public law, its traditions, and even the institutional idiosyncrasies.

Three generic organizational models seem appropriate for consideration by the University of Latvia:

- Collegial
- Hierarchic
- Reflexive

Three charts provide graphic illustration of the concepts of authority, policy, demand, and response, which underlie each model.

In view of its strategic plan for the future, the University may see tactical reasons to incorporate elements of each model, and form a uniquely Latvian mechanism for organizing and managing the University for the future.

The Rector and his staff clearly recognize the importance of collegial consensus (see Appendix I), but need as well the time efficiency and strategic focus, at least for the foreseeable future, provided by the hierarchic pattern (see Appendix II) of authoritative decision-making.

Considering the philosophic and political emphasis on democratic processes in the Republic, and the need to increase the level of resource support for the University, the leadership might give careful consideration to incorporating elements of the Reflexive Model into the organization and governance of the University. It could be very useful to develop and employ "sensing systems" (see Appendix III) that are compatible with the traditions of the Latvian political and social system.

Challenges

The Advisors are impressed with the agenda of the leadership of the University of Latvia; which comprises:

1. The implementation of the educational programs and policies of the European Community.

2. The commitment to maintain quality in the academic performance of professors and students.

3. The provision of access to high quality curricula for the rapidly growing number of students in Latvia.

4. The development of a strategic plan to guide the University decisions on structure and programs, a plan which is national, proactive, creative and "transparent" in its formulation. The Advisors question whether the proportion of students engaged in the scientific disciplines is optimal. Social sciences and teacher training seem in oversupply compared with natural sciences and medicine, at least in terms of current national needs.

5. The multiplicity of curricular programs, faculties, and institutes calls for diligent effort to reduce unnecessary duplication, and also to increase interdisciplinary approaches to study and research.

6. The present arrangement for independent research institutes (inherited from the past) creates awkward relationships and impedes coordination of program. Efforts to integrate such Institutes more completely into the University are important and need to be continued.

7. One of the main strategic goals of the University of Latvia consists in developing scientific research as a constituent part of higher education. The Advisors emphatically support this. Each professor should qualify as academic teacher and researcher as well. Each bachelor and master thesis should be the result of pursuing in-depth research. The Advisors suggest that interweaving both components of higher education will increase the quality of the student's experience.

   The objectives of enhancing the amount and the quality of research activity will be more likely of achievement with the creation of a pro-rectorship specifically charged with that area of University research activity. Likewise, graduate student matters should be assigned as a specific function of a different pro-rector level position.

   The University should consider establishing an office for quality assurance issues within the University, which should, inter alia, develop a comprehensive system of permanent evaluation of research and teaching and a system for rewarding and promoting the best of the academic staff.

8. We commend the intention to increase availability to students of opportunities for interdisciplinary approaches to study in professional fields such as law, business, and environmental issues, and opening humanities to students of science. We note a marked interest on the part of students to increase the breadth of this interdisciplinarity, and at the same time we detect a degree of faculty uncertainty—even opposition. The Rector must keep the momentum of academic innovation moving.

The main emphasis for academic study should be shifted from exclusively an extensive knowledge of facts to encouragement of creativity and the ability to solve problems by new ideas and efficient management.

The Advisors strongly recommend a stronger integration of the Institutes into the Faculties. This integration has not only structural advantages. It also opens the very remarkable scientific competences of the Institutes to a modern education where teaching and research are combined. Professors and qualified scientific staff of the Institutes should be fully available for teaching activities (lectures, seminars, practice work, mentoring bachelor and master thesis).

The Advisors suggest that study programs offered be reviewed. Where they are found to be too narrowly defined, too traditional, and insufficiently interdisciplinary, they require change. The Advisors support the two-cycled programs whereby a student may study in one Faculty for the first cycle and continue in another one in the second cycle. Of course, this “hybridization” must lead to a reasonable profile, which is found valid on the labor market. A combination of law and business, of chemistry and molecular biology, of chemistry or biology with environmental law, of philosophy with natural sciences, of language programs with business serve as examples. A combination of programs could lead to new profiles of graduates appearing more flexible and innovative.

The question arises whether the combination of study programs between different Universities in Riga should be fostered. Thus, environmental aspects of geosciences (being a small Faculty at the University of Latvia) could be enhanced and extended by combination with technological programs (c.f. civil engineering, forestry, agriculture, water engineering or land using activities). The Advisors were pleased with the receptivity of University leadership to such possibilities.

In addition to the flexible arrangement of study programs, of course, the students need basic knowledge in alternative “worlds of knowledge.” Students of study programs in humanities should understand basic problems of natural sciences and vice versa. Faculties with a small number of enrolled students (e.g. theology, environmental geosciences etc.) could play a decisive role. The University of Latvia is encouraged to continue to develop this very important aspect of the modern Western university.

One of the preconditions to organize inter-faculty programs among the several Faculties is the definition of teaching modules to make the programs transparent for students and give them the possibility of “tailored” individual study programs

Higher quality teaching performance requires upgraded equipment with network computers, instruments, and scientific literature.

To serve the economic development policies of the country the University of Latvia should consider offering study modules of entrepreneurship that could be made a part of general core studies.

Fiscal and Budget Management

The resources provided by the state are inadequate both for high quality academic programs for a rapidly increasing volume of students, and for the development of a research capacity comparable to the European Union institutions with which Latvia wishes to compete. The budget processes are complicated and much benefit would result from attention to improving them.

The level of state funding for providing undergraduate education is based on a fixed quota of students for whom the University receives full academic grants. This quota now approximates twenty-nine percent of total enrollment. The balance of the enrollment is comprised of tuition paying students.

This sets up a potentially harmful contradiction between the University goal to establish high quality performance, and its mission to provide access to all citizens. A high tuition level itself introduces an element of "rationing," and possibly erects a barrier to serving some prospective students.

Further complicating matters is the fact that inflation in the 90's has reduced the "real" value of the state subsidy by 40%.

The Advisors recommend that renewed efforts be made to modernize the fiscal practices that characterize the regulations and relationships between University budget administration and the state finance authorities. Among the factors needing to be changed are:

1. The year-end reversion of un-obligated funds. This inevitably encourages ill-considered expenditures and uneven support of departmental needs.

2. Present use of "line-item" rather than "lump-sum" appropriation of funds. This denies the University staff the flexibility to maximize economical and effective use of funds as needs and priorities shift.

The difficult financial situation raises the issue of a consortium of universities in Latvia to negotiate with publishing houses to achieve more favorable conditions for scientific books and journals.

An important "budget" issue is the apparent inadequacy of student loan funds. Presently, the enrollment increases and the rising tuition levels create inadequacies in the amount of loan funds available to students.

The proportion of state budget to be allocated to higher education is, of course, a wholly national decision. However, immediate, serious consideration is warranted to the severe inadequacy of funding for the University, thus the increasing difficulty of meeting both access and quality objectives.

A similar situation exists regarding state support for basic and applied research. The Advisors note the success of University leadership in building corporate support for research activity. Much more needs to be done.

The institute concept is well understood in Latvia, having roots in the past higher education experience. Properly structured, the use of institutes to focus on specific research efforts related to cognate Faculties can advance funding support of research and improve chances for successful listing, application, and marketing of results.

Academic Curriculum and Research

1. The Advisors recommend increased attention by the University Rector and leadership to the relevance and responsiveness of University research activity to the national needs as determined by the entities of state and society. The mission and charter of the University require this relevance and response. It is strategically important to efforts to increase funding for research. This is an area to which the Reflexive Organization Model can help to respond. There must be genuine alertness to ways the University can contribute to broad national economic goals, and quick response to short-range needs of the various sectors of the economy.

2. The Advisors believe that currently existing Research Institutes need to be more closely coordinated by the University leadership so that they are integrated with the University Strategic Plan. Administrative overview and coordination is essential to make the most effective use of funds, space, and equipment, as well as to assure the most effective response to business, corporate, and government requirements.

   Academic integration of this kind is required to make available to students as well as professors the experience of research. Also, such closer integration should stimulate graduate education and help prepare for the academic personnel needs of the future.

3. In our meeting with students, we observed a high level of student awareness of general University issues and a good level of morale. Our contacts were with student leaders, and they seemed satisfied with the student organs of representation. However, more attention is desirable to:

   a. Demonstration of interest in improving methodological capacities of professors; and

   b. Manifesting interest in financial pressures on students and their ultimate interest in professional employment.

4. The quality of lectures and seminars can be improved by evaluation and dialogue with the students. The verdict of “consumers” might be a very useful feedback to the lecturers and can also be a source of improvements by analyzing and examining the didactic quality of the modules. It has nothing to do with hurting the authority of the docents. Similarly the docent has in the dialogue the opportunity to evaluate the study activities of the students and make recommendations.

The students informed the Advisors that no activities of this kind took place at the University of Latvia. The students seemed interested in practices elsewhere in which students design a questionnaire and organize the anonymous response by students in order to evaluate teaching and classroom experience.

5. The Advisors commend the efforts to strengthen the international education of students. The number of outgoing and incoming students in the framework of European programs is of the same order of magnitude as in Universities in other European countries. The ECTS system is fully established. The University has designed international study programs whereby students following study programs both in Latvia and a foreign institution qualify for a degree from one or both universities; in addition, by offering courses at UL taught in English, Russian, and German, valuable contacts with institutions and students are established with the result that increasing numbers of international students will study at the University.

   The Advisors appreciate very much the intention of the University of Latvia to develop possibilities of life-long learning. Programs should be coordinated with both the companies and the requests of the paying participants. The programs should be highly orientated to the needs of the country.

   There are many educated teachers that should make it possible to offer language training and thus qualify Latvians for a common labor market in Europe.

   We repeat, here, our support for current efforts to review baccalaureate curricula to open to students more “room” i.e. opportunity, to be exposed to Faculties other than their “major” field, and to expand the availability of elective courses both in the “major’ Faculty and other academic areas.

6. The Advisors were made aware of a serious demographic threat posed by the aging professorate and inability of the University, at present levels of Ph.D. production, to replenish the professorial ranks as retirements increase in the near future.

   More than half of the academic personnel are now over age fifty. Replacement personnel will be needed on a steady basis each year for the foreseeable future. It is not only a Latvian problem, but is a worldwide problem with varying intensity. Thus, Latvia cannot look to other countries as a source of professorial talent, but rather must develop solutions within the University.

   The Advisors suggest:

   a. Continue efforts to increase Ph.D. enrollments along with increased emphasis on quality measures.

b. Develop and intensify doctoral programs. This should be done with the clear intention to increase on a continuing basis the number of Ph.D. students. This is only possible by a strong integration of all centers of competence as carriers of scientific research (Institutes and Faculties). Doctoral students are the main scientific staff in maintaining research projects.

c. Continue efforts to improve incentives to recent Ph.D. graduates to enter University academic ranks. This will require improved salary and benefits, improved conditions for teaching and research, and upgrading the organization and management processes with which the academicians must deal.

d. Establish additional opportunities for Ph.D. study and post-doctoral work in Europe and North America. This assumes, of course that strategies will be developed that result in a net flow back into Latvia, not a "brain-drain." Further, increasing the number of foreign scholars teaching and doing research in Latvia may help to increase the study abroad opportunities for Latvians. Language barriers create some limitations on this strategy but are not prohibitive.

Community Relations and Outreach

1. The Advisors are much impressed with the establishment of the University of Latvia Foundation, and its early successes in raising endowment-type funding for the needs and programs of the University. We urge continued emphasis on the Foundation and the Alumni Fund, which it plans to set up. The Board of the Foundation and the executive officers are highly motivated and identify closely with the strategic plans and policies of the University leadership. It is imperative that such integration of vision and effort continue and all organizational and operating arrangements need to be carefully considered so as to preserve a unity of purpose but a separation of structure.

2. We recommend continued emphasis on increasing the "outreach" efforts and impact of the University. The modern University of Latvia must see itself and be seen by the people as the center of knowledge and expertise responding to the economic and social needs of the diverse elements of the Republic in relevant, "state of the art" ways.

3. The Advisors are impressed with the Council of Advisors to the University, their deep familiarity with the traditions and future objectives of the University. The Council members with whom we met stated that the Council should be expanded so as to include national and internationally known leaders of corporations and professional groups. We recommend that the augmentation occur, with all due speed, thus assuring the consequent increase of general public understanding and support for the University.

Postscript

The University of Latvia is an exciting academic institution with strong, vigorous leadership. The Visiting Advisors greatly appreciate the opportunity to see first-hand the advances already achieved in a University which, by European standards, is very young.

Both the nation and its only classical University have challenges to the development of an economically strong, democratic society. We offer our recommendations in the belief that the Rector, his colleagues and the University community are competent, motivated, and serious, and that Latvia will respond successfully to today's challenges. Of course, resources are finite, and priorities must be decided. The University of Latvia is so close to achieving the high quality levels comparable to European Union peer institutions that the Advisors urge that current pressing needs for increased state funding and modernized state budgetary and fiscal relationships receive immediate priority consideration. With these expressions of appreciation and confidence, we submit this report.

APPENDIX

I. Organization Model - Collegial

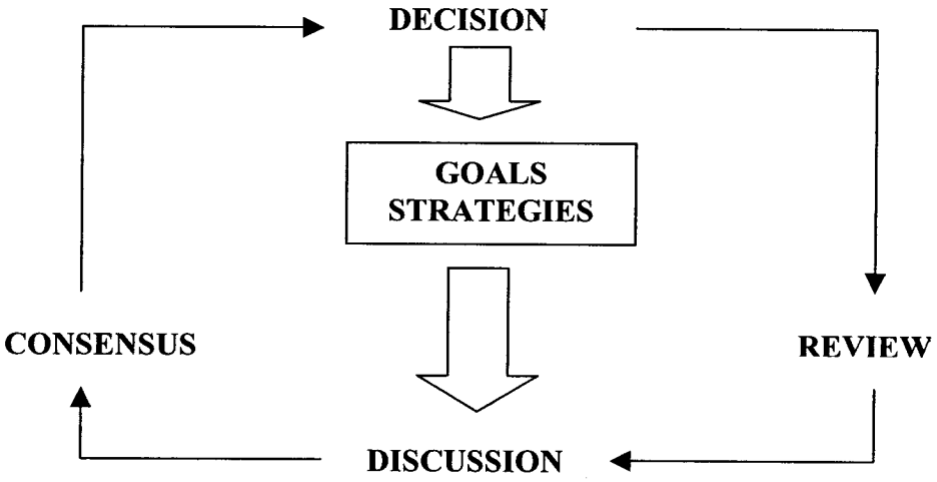
II. Organization Model - Hierarchic

III. Organization Model - Reflexive

IV. Visiting Advisors Program

Appendix I

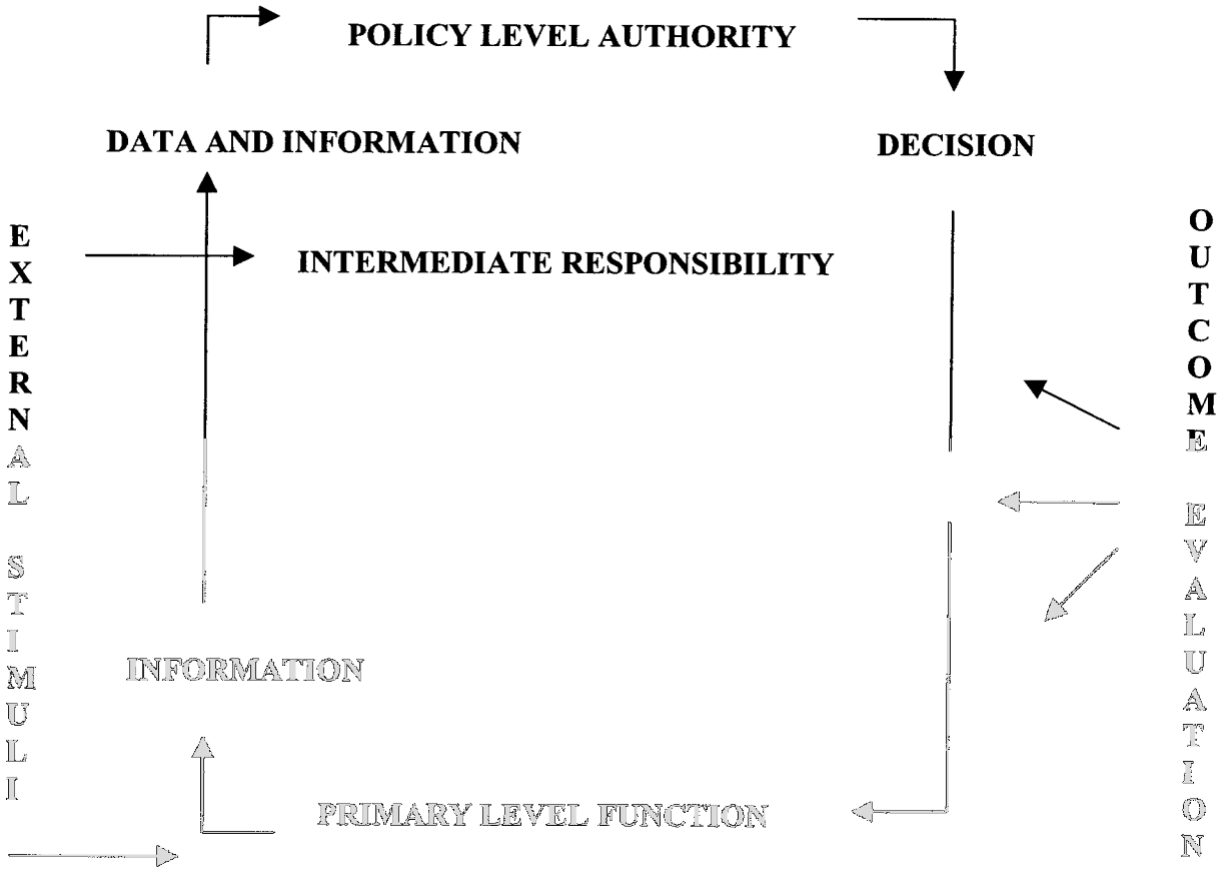
COLLEGIAL MODEL



The Collegial Model anticipates proposals for goals and strategies from institutional leadership (Rector, Committees, Senate, etc.), which are submitted to broad institutional community discussion and consent. Time consuming, but maximizes internal support for decisions.

Appendix II

HIERARCHIC MODEL

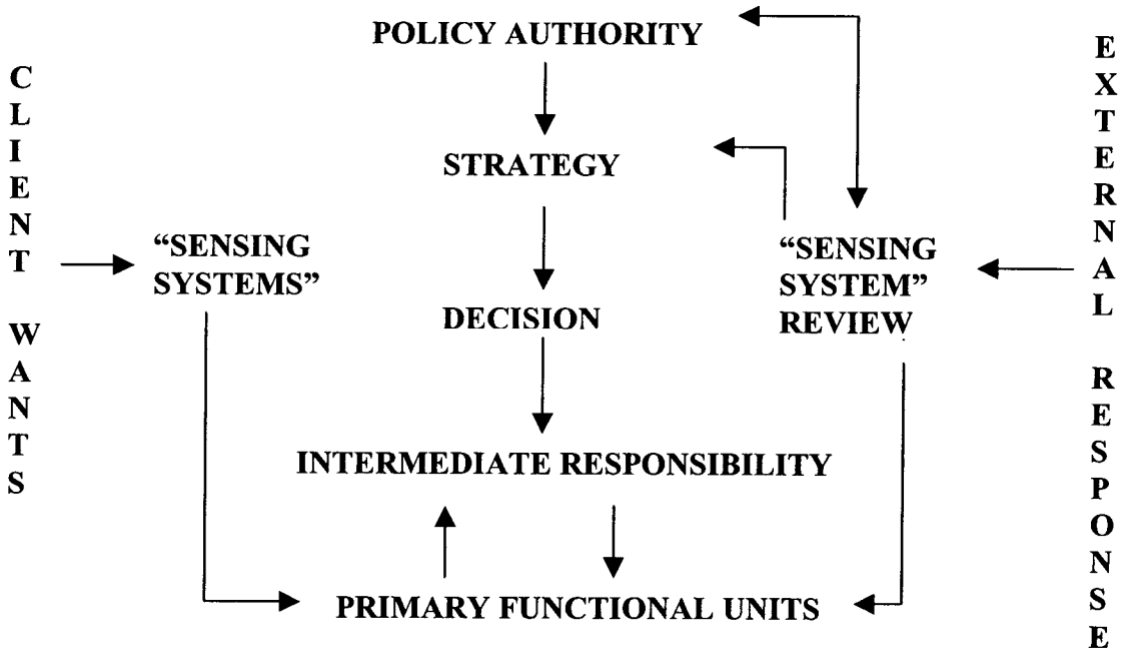


The Hierarchic Model establishes source for decision (rather than proposal). Relevant information and data flow throughout the structure to the authority, and post-decision evaluation flows to primary functional units and also policy authority location.

Time efficiency, but risk of limited communication and/or consensus regarding decisions.

Appendix III

REFLEXIVE MODEL



The Reflexive Model establishes sources for decision, but integrates "sensing systems" into the processes whereby clients (students, corporations, government agencies, etc.) feed into the University their expectations and provide their evaluations of University responsiveness and effectiveness.

Clarity of authority source, but intricate pattern of influence on authority source. One consequence of the Reflexive Model is that primary functional unities (Faculties, research institutes, etc.) are drawn into the strategic plans for program development and research which respond to external community interests.

Visiting Advisors Team

Janina Jozwiak Poland

Janina Jozwiak served as Rector of the Warsaw School of Economics from 1993 to 1999. Since 1999 she has served as Director of the Institute of Statistics and Demography at the Warsaw School of Economics. In 2000 she was nominated Vice-chairman of the State Committee for Scientific Research. Dr. Jozwiak has been Vice President of the European Association for Population Studies (since 1999) and member of the Board of the CRE-Association of European Universities (since 1998). She earned her Ph.D. in economics in 1976, Doctor Habilitata in demography in 1986 and became ordinary professor at the Warsaw School of Economics in 1993.

Achim Mehlhorn Germany

Achim Mehlhorn has served as Rector of the Dresden Technical University since 1994. A professor of chemistry and former Dean of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, he has published more than seventy works, focusng on the fields of organic chemistry, theoretical chemistry and molecular spectroscopy. Dr. Mehlhorn received his degrees of M.S. and Ph.D. in 1967, both in chemistry from Dresden Technical University.

John Ryan USA

John Ryan is former Chancellor, State University of New York (SUNY) System, where he served from 1996 to 1999. Dr. Ryan previously served as president of Indiana University from 1971-1987. During 1991-1992, he served as senior consultant to the administrator of Management Training in Central and Eastern Europe at the Agency for International Development. Dr. Ryan has also served as interim president of Florida Atlantic University in 1989 and the University of Maryland at Baltimore in 1994. His M.A. and Ph.D. degrees are from Indiana University.

Martha Gecek USA

Martha Gecek is Administrative Director of the Salzburg Seminar's American Studies Center, in addition to serving as Coordinator for the Visiting Advisors Program (VAP) of the Universities Project. Her responsibilities with the VAP include developing and coordinating consulting visits of educators who travel to universities in Central and Eastern Europe to assist colleagues and institutions in the process of institutional self-assessment and change. She received her degree in sociology from Hollins University, USA.

The Visiting Advisors Program of the Salzburg Seminar's Universities Project, including the visit to the University of Latvia, has been made possible by a generous grant from the Kellogg Foundation.

THE UNIVERSITIES PROJECT OF THE SALZBURG SEMINAR

Universities throughout the world are undergoing systemic changes in their governance, academic design, structure, and mission. The Salzburg Seminar's Universities Project focuses on higher education reform in Central and East Europe, Russia, and the Newly Independent States as universities in these regions redefine their relationships with governments and try to become more integrated into the global intellectual community.

The Universities Project is a multi-year series of conferences and symposia convening senior representatives of higher education from the designated regions with their counterparts from North America and West Europe. Discussion in the Project's programs focuses on the following themes:

- University Administration and Finance
- Academic Structure and Governance within the University
- Meeting Students' Needs, and the Role of Students in Institutional Affairs
- Technology in Higher Education
- The University and Civil Society

OBJECTIVES

Universities and other institutions of higher learning are seeking to reshape themselves in ways that will prepare them more fully for the twenty-first century. Even as these institutions are considering extensive systemic changes in their academic design, structure, and mission, all desire autonomy in governance and in ther intellectual life. Accordingly, the Universities Project aims to promote the higher education reform process by inviting senior administrators to participate in conferences and symposia concerning issues of university management, administration, finance, and governance.

THE VISITING ADVISORS PROGRAM (VAP)

The Salzburg Seminar launched this enhanced aspect of the Universities Project in the autumn of 1998. Under this program, teams of university presidents and higher education experts visit universities in Central and East Europe and Russia at the host institutions' request to assist in the process of institutional self-assessment and change. By mid 2001, twenty-eight VAP visits will have taken place to universities in East and Central Europe and Russia. A full schedule of visits is planned for 2001 and beyond. The addition of the Visiting Advisors Program brings to the Universities Project an applied aspect and serves to enhance institutional and personal relationships begun in Salzburg.

The Salzburg Seminar acknowledges with gratitude the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, which are funding the Universities Project and the Visiting Advisors Program respectively.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information regarding the Salzburg Seminar's Visiting Advisors program, the Universities Project, and Salzburg Seminar programs, please contact one of the Seminar's offices below.

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