

"Creating a Mission Statement for a Top Ranking Japanese Engineering University and Suggestions for its Realization"

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ABSTRACT. Many Universities in Europe and Japan "outsource" much of their management and some of their most important decisions to government authorities. As a consequence there is too little coherence in decision making, Universities get pushed around and cannot focus efforts and decision making on their mission. Some Universities may even not have felt the need to spend the effort to decide in detail what their mission should be, and how achievement of this mission can be measured.

These problems are now universally recognized and governments are withdrawing from University management, and at the same time Universities are faced with increasing competitive pressures from many directions.

Once an organization or a University takes it's management into it's own hands, many decisions need to be taken inside the University, which were previously imposed from outside: How should the President be selected? What measures should be taken against in-breeding, i.e. how should the influx of new dimensions of thinking be assured? How should new faculty and students be selected to ensure excellence? What is excellence? How should the University compete? How should good performance of faculty be monitored and how should it be rewarded? Should research "superstars" be hired and how? How can the needs of research staff in their most creative phase, i.e. usually in the 25-35 year age bracket be empowered to fulfill their research potential, and how can their interests be balanced with the interests of more "powerful" and more experienced faculty?

From my work as research scientist, Manager and faculty member at several of the worlds most outstanding research institutions (Cambridge University, Ecole Normale Superieure, Max-Planck-Institut, RIKEN, University of Tokyo, and Japan Science & Technology Corporation, and leader of a Sakigake (=Pioneer) research project of the Japanese government), I will share some of my conclusions about the common characteristics of excellent research and educational organizations, and discuss how such excellence can be achieved.

I will argue that for an institution to achieve excellence a broad consensus of the aims and mission of the organisation is needed. This consensus could be called the "mission statement". All excellent organisations have such a mission statement, either implicitly embedded in the "DNA" of the organization, in some cases grown through centuries, or explicitly stated.

Once the mission of the organization has been understood, this understanding can become a guideline to solve many difficult and very practical issues: For example, some top ranking Universities found it necessary recently to change the way the President is selected. A well thought out mission statement makes it much easier to develop improved selection procedures for the President: a mission statement can become a measuring tool to judge different proposals - the best proposal will be the one, which helps the University best to achieve it's mission. A good mission statement can be used to empower faculty in very practical questions - as a real life example: should the research project of a researcher be delayed by three months so that the University can take three months time to approve an already decided research grant? It sounds trivial, but such questions accumulate and contribute to the differences between an attractive and truly excellent organization and one which still has some way to go to achieve excellence.

In my talk I will attempt to address several important fundamental as well as practical issues, and present some case studies based on my work in several top ranking institutions in Germany, UK, France and Japan as Faculty Member, Staff Scientist, and Manager.

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