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# The clash between traditional academic values and strategic management

- A case study of the merged NTNU in the context of structural change in higher education

## Sammenstøtet mellom tradisjonelle akademiske verdier og strategisk ledelse

- En casestudie av det fusjonerte NTNU innenfor rammen av strukturelle endringer i høyere utdanning

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## PREFACE

This thesis represents the completion of the master's program in Business Administration at Trondheim Business School/NTNU, within the main profile of strategy, organization and management.

The road towards finalizing this thesis can at best be described as a roller coaster ride. I was excited and highly motivated in the beginning of the ride. Then I got frustrated and uncertain. What had I gotten myself into? The downturn was challenging methodologically and theoretically. To make choices and stay focused is not always an easy task. At times it seemed like a great test of endurance. But when the highs came I almost got a bit ecstatic. The downs suddenly went away. Finally I had the necessary overview. The roller coaster ride ended up providing me with the sense of achievement and accomplishment. I gained a lot of new knowledge about a field of research that cannot be said to be anything other than highly complex and ambiguous. In this regard, there are several people I wish to thank.

First and foremost I would like to show gratitude towards my informants, for putting some of their time at my disposal, as well as contributing with commitment and good reflections. To my valuable supervisor, Knut Arne Hovdal, thank you for making sure that I came out of that roller coaster ride safely. Thank you for good communication, engagement, sage advice and constructive criticism. Thanks to family and friends for sharing both my joys and frustrations. Thanks for proofreading and encouraging words along the way. I am forever grateful to you.

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*The content of the thesis is ascribed on the author's account*

## ABSTRACT

Higher education is currently facing major challenges related to efficiency and legitimacy and new solutions are often obtained from the private sector. In Norway, the landscapes of higher education are being re-structured with focus on increased strategic management and subsequent increased competitiveness. These changes have implications for the interpretation of the meaning with the university today and in the future. Since higher education have been characterized by ambiguity, conflicting objectives and competing logics this thesis have been focused upon the possible conflict that emerges from the encounter between traditional academic values and strategic management:

*How can this conflict be understood, and what seems to be at stake?*

To answer the problem statement, I conducted a qualitative research study of the merged institution: Norwegian University of Science and Technology [NTNU], in light of structural changes in higher education, based on an intensive and explanatory research design with an abductive approach. The empirical data was generated through a preparatory document analysis of higher education in an international perspective combined with four in-depth interviews of two professors and two leaders at NTNU. The problem statement was considered both in conjunction with the empirical material and the international analysis, and by using different institutional perspectives it was discussed on the basis of organizational theory for public organizations. The theoretical foundation had a transformative approach.

My findings documented how the entrance of strategic management challenged new methods for carrying out the university's core activities: research and education. The professors' expressed values which was summarized as: (1) *independence*, (2) *professional integrity*, (3) *relevance*, (4) *humanism and respect*, and (5) *tolerance for diversity* are under pressure by the more modern cornerstones of accountability, efficiency and responsiveness. The professors experienced a pronounced shift from prioritizing activities on a professional basis to prioritizing activities at a strategic basis. Which was highlighted as a conflict between the logic of appropriate behaviour and logic of consequences. What seemed to be at stake in the eyes of the professors were among other things the attractiveness to work in the higher education sector and the quality of work being under pressure by statistical quality indicators.

The thesis main contribution has thus been to stress that when values and the creation of meaning is overshadowed by too much focus on formal structures, it may quickly end up in a paradox where the structures break down the quality they were intended to build.

## SAMMENDRAG

Høyere utdanning står overfor store utfordringer knyttet til effektivitet og legitimitet, og nye løsninger blir ofte hentet fra privat sektor. I Norge blir landskapene av høyere utdanning restrukturert med fokus på økt strategisk ledelse og påfølgende økt konkurransevne. Disse endringene har betydning for tolkningen av meningen med universitetet i dag og i fremtiden. Siden høyere utdanning har vært preget av tvetydighet, målkonflikter og konkurrerende logikker har denne avhandlingen vært fokusert på den mulige konflikten som vokser frem fra møtet mellom tradisjonelle akademiske verdier og strategisk ledelse:

*Hvordan kan denne konflikten forstås og hva er det som står på spill?*

For å svare på problemstillingen gjennomførte jeg en kvalitativ studie av det fusjonerte Norsk Teknisk-Naturvitenskapelige Universitet [NTNU] i lys av strukturelle endringer i høyere utdanning. Studien var basert på et intensivt og forklarende forskningsdesign med en abduktiv tilnærming. Empirien ble generert gjennom en forberedende dokumentanalyse av høyere utdanning i et internasjonalt perspektiv, kombinert med fire dybdeintervjuer av to professorer og to ledere ved NTNU. Problemstillingen ble både vurdert i sammenheng med det empiriske materialet og den internasjonale analysen, og ved hjelp av ulike institusjonelle perspektiver ble den drøftet på grunnlag av organisasjonsteori for offentlige organisasjoner. Det teoretiske grunnlaget hadde en transformerende tilnærming.

Mine funn dokumenterte hvordan økt fokus på strategisk ledelse utfordret nye metoder for gjennomføringen av universitetets kjerneaktiviteter: forskning og utdanning. Oppsummert var professorenes uttrykte verdier: (1) *uavhengighet*, (2) *faglig integritet*, (3) *relevans*, (4) *humanisme og respekt*, og (5) *toleranse for mangfold*, under press av de mer moderne hjørnesteinene slik som ansvarlighet, effektivitet og reaksjonsevne. Professorene opplevde en markant dreining fra å prioritere aktiviteter på et faglig grunnlag til å prioritere aktiviteter på et strategisk grunnlag. Dette ble fremhevet som en konflikt mellom logikken for passende atferd og logikken for konsekvenser. Det som så ut til å være på spill sett fra øynene til professorene var blant annet attraktiviteten til å jobbe i universitets- og høyskolesektoren og at kvaliteten på arbeidet var under press fra statistiske kvalitetsindikatorer.

Masteravhandlingens viktigste bidrag har dermed vært å understreke at når verdier og meningsskaping blir overskygget av for mye fokus på formelle strukturer kan det fort ende

opp i et paradoks der strukturene bryter ned den kvaliteten de var i utgangspunktet ment å bygge.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The thesis theme and purpose is presented first, followed by the overarching problem statement and three research questions. Structure and content are explained in the end.

## 1.1 The thesis theme and purpose

The rising importance of higher education institutions in the context of a global competitive knowledge-centred society has driven the sector into becoming target of an increasing number of external stakeholders (Jongbloed, Enders, & Salerno, 2008). Gornitzka (2009) have called this development the search for a new social pact between higher education and society. Kyvik and Ødegård (1990) summarized society's demands for educational institutions in three key words; improved quality, greater relevance and greater efficiency. According to Busch and Ramstad (2004) universities are also facing major challenges related to legitimacy.

Decline of legitimacy have been associated with higher education institutions not being responsive enough to the needs of society (R. Pinheiro, Geschwind, & Aarrevaara, 2014). According to R. Pinheiro et al. (2014) the traditional governance within Norwegian universities has been based on considerable authority allocated to sub-unit levels, such as faculties and institutes. Which have resembled a rather bottom-heavy and loosely coupled organization (R. Pinheiro et al., 2014). Consequently, the new requirements of higher education have placed new demands on both government management of higher education and internal management of institutions in most countries in Western Europe (Smeby, 1990). Universities are using solutions obtained from the private sector to meet the demands related to efficiency and legitimacy (Busch & Ramstad, 2004). The business world has also been put forward as an appropriate instrument to increase quality at Norwegian universities (Gulbrandsen & Larsen, 2000). Resulting among other things in increased rationalisation and a tighter coupling between internal units and activities (R. m. Pinheiro, Benneworth, & Jones, 2012). However, previous research has also shown that in the meeting between new structural conditions and organizational behaviour loose connections may still occur (Busch & Ramstad, 2004).

The relationship between higher education institutions and business industry in Norway has been a political hot topic for a long time, such as the debate on lifelong learning and the

competence reform (Gulbrandsen & Larsen, 2000). Higher education institutions and universities in particular, are under constant pressure to be more open to the surrounding environment (Gulbrandsen & Larsen, 2000). They have in fact been accused of being isolated from society at large, and therefore, many have appeared to believe that the cooperation between sectors should have a wider scope (Gulbrandsen & Larsen, 2000). Behind such a desire is an assumption that increased contact with subsequent exchange of knowledge will strengthen both parties (Gulbrandsen & Larsen, 2000). Consequently research and teaching are seen as a tools for economic and technological development (Smeby, 1990). On March 27, 2015 the Ministry of Education and Research put forward a white paper to re-structure the landscapes of higher education: *“Norway must adapt to meet social changes and to ensure jobs and prosperity in the future. An important key is quality in higher education and research. Therefore, we are changing higher education sector and concentrating our resources on fewer, but stronger institutions. We place a structure for tomorrow's knowledge society [...] The structural reform will have a number of consequences for the institutions. Good implementation requires good management and leadership. The Government will advocate that external chairman and appointed rector shall be the main model for governance and management of institutions”* (St. meld nr. 18, 2014-2015, p. 4).

Despite the ministry's argument for re-structuring Norwegian higher education, these new strategic initiatives are not necessarily aligned with local norms, traditions and academic aspirations (R. Pinheiro et al., 2014). Smeby (1990) have argued that new forms of governance and evaluation could potentially meet strong resistance internally at universities partly due to the strong positions of professors (Smeby, 1990). Similarly, R. Pinheiro et al. (2014, p. 241) argued that the *“focus on external priorities has contributed to a loss of internal legitimacy, as well as an erosion of authority, manifested in the resistance of the academic community at heartland towards strategic initiatives emanating from the top-down, aimed at transforming universities into more efficient responsive, accountable and coherent (tightly-coupled) organizations.”* This development seems to have indicated a shift from trust and loyalty to the more modern cornerstones of accountability, efficiency and responsiveness (R. Pinheiro et al., 2014). Which begs the following question, how are these changed values reshaping the meaning and content of the university? What is it exactly that happens in the meeting between strategic initiatives and traditional academic values? Reflecting upon those questions is the purpose of this thesis. In the next chapter the thesis context, problem statement and research questions are further formulated.

## 1.2 Problem statement and research questions

As elaborated through the introduction, the landscapes of higher education in Norway are currently undergoing significant structural change with among other things a stronger focus on strategic management. How higher education systems develop and function in different ways can be understood through exploring their social, historical and spatial contexts (Bornat, 2004). I have chosen to study the merged Norwegian University of Science and Technology [NTNU] in the context of the current structural change. The purpose is to discuss and reflect upon how the changes described in the introduction are reshaping the content and meaning of the university. The overarching problem statement is focused upon the possible conflict that emerges from the encounter between traditional academic values and strategic management:

*How can this conflict be understood, and what seems to be at stake?*

Norwegian higher education seems to be influenced by international development. Therefore it is important to view the problem statement through an international lens as well as a national lens. To understand these changes and to provide a possible explanation to the problem statement, I have chosen to study four critical stories (perspectives), given by two professors and two leaders from the merged NTNU. The research questions are as followed:

*1) NTNU is a part of a greater national and international development of higher education, what is that the professors and the leaders emphasize in their local context and understanding of this development?*

*2) How is the meaning of the university interpreted differently through the perspectives of the professors and the leaders?*

*3) In light of these different perspectives, how does strategic management inspire and at the same time challenge the idea and development of the university?*

I have now introduced the thesis theme and purpose, as well as introducing the overall problem statement and three research questions. The rest of the thesis structure and content is presented briefly in the following chapter.

### 1.3 The thesis structure and content

**Chapter 2:** This chapter is divided into four sub-chapters. The two first chapters are concerned with the thesis larger context. It provides a background analysis of the latest trends, development and governmental reforms within higher education. The case study of the merged NTNU is presented in the second chapter. The third chapter presents two different ways of understanding the purpose of the university – traditional vs. modern. Which is important for the understanding of the empirical presentation in chapter 4 as well as the discussion and analysis in chapter 6.

**Chapter 3:** The methodological choices are argued in this chapter. The thesis epistemological foundation, research design, ethical considerations, and research method is accounted for. The researchers' challenges and reflections of the research process are discussed and made transparent. The quality of research is discussed at the end.

**Chapter 4:** In this chapter the empirical presentation is presented. The purpose of keeping the empirical disclosure in a separate chapter from the analysis is to give the reader the opportunity to make their own interpretations.

**Chapter 5:** This chapter explains the thesis theoretical basis. Selecting theory became evident throughout the process of preparing, analysing and writing the empirical presentation. It builds on institutional perspectives derived from organization theory for public organizations.

**Chapter 6:** This chapter analyses the findings of the empirical presentation against relevant theory from Chapter 5 and what appears of relevant connections from Chapter 2 (literature review and case description) as well as the introduction. The chapter opens with a conceptual framework and is organized by the thesis three different research questions. These are discussed systematically in separate chapters, while seen in context with each other. In the last chapter the threads from the previous discussions are gathered, and the overarching problem statement is discussed and answered.

**Chapter 7:** In this last chapter the thesis conclusion, research contribution, and suggestions for further research is presented and discussed.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND CASE DESCRIPTION

### 2.1 Changes in higher education: taking the temperature of Europe

In order to make Europe one of the strongest education and economic leaders in the world a common agenda towards transparency, quality, growth, efficiency and excellence have emerged as a prerequisite (Esmu, 2009). The European Commission has emphasized the important role of universities in contributing to the knowledge society and economy through the strengthening of education, research and innovation ('knowledge triangle'). *"Since the late 1990s though the rate of change has accelerated to unprecedented levels, largely on the shoulders of two key developments: the Bologna Declaration (1999), whose objective is to make the European higher education systems more competitive and attractive and the EU's Lisbon Strategy (2000), which seeks to reform the continent's still fragmented higher education systems into a more powerful and more integrated, knowledge-based economy"* (Esmu, 2009, p. 8).

Governments have increasing difficulties to match the rising costs of science and to provide quality education and excellent research (Esmu, 2009). *"Contemporary higher education systems have become too large and complex for the state to sustain its position as sole funder"* (Barnett, 2007, p. 28). Increased use of performance funding and management principles derived from the private sector to monitor, measure, compare and judge professional activities have been applied as a way of enhancing the functioning of higher education (Barnett, 2007; Maassen, Moen, & Stensaker, 2011). Related performance funding, however, is not only meant as a tool for monitoring university performance but also as a way to incentivize universities to make strategic choices in line with government's goals (Enders, de Boer, & Weyer, 2013). Consequently, universities have been encouraged to take on a wider range of new responsibilities with regard to social inclusion, community outreach, knowledge transfer (P. Scott, 2003; R. A. Scott, 2003), mass education of young students, closer engagement with employers and the delivery of work-based learning for mature students, as well as producing cutting-edge international research (Bolden, Petrov, Gosling, & Bryman, 2009). The demands for greater efficiency, higher quality and reductions in public budgets have led almost all of the European countries to restructure their landscape of higher education the last decades (Davies, Hides, & Casey, 2001; Maassen et al., 2011). Different policies have caused an objective of creating larger units (Skodvin, 1999), resulting in a wave of mergers, often across the binary system sectors of universities and university colleges

(Clarke, Hough, & Ron, 1984). Barnett (2007) among several other researchers, have documented how market competition within and between universities are believed to generate more efficient and effective institutions. According to Gornitzka (2009) the common agenda for reforming university autonomy and funding the last 20-25 years seem to have partly desectorized universities as objects of public governance, thus making them less special and more uniform (R. Pinheiro & Stensaker, 2014). It could be questioned whether we are getting closer to what McCully (1973) called a 'multiversity' – the American one-size fits all university? Lee (2004) however argued in contrary to McCully that there are varied responses to global forces depending on the political economy, national culture and the structural features of the particular education system.

Regardless of outcomes, behind the policy initiatives considerable attention has been given to the adoption of more market-type mechanisms and modern types of governance emerging from various 'New Public Management templates' (NPM) (Maassen et al., 2011). New managerialism can be highlighted as an example (Deem, 1998, 2001). In the perspective of new public governance, the cornerstones in effective steering of higher education institutions are emphasised by less state, more market, more hierarchy (Schneider & Sadowski, 2010) and a more focused organizational vision that includes an outward-facing, customer-centric element (Davies et al., 2001), such as more general marketization of higher education (ie increasing international mobility of students) (Howells, Karataş-Özkan, Yavuz, & Atiq, 2014). Scholars, including R. Pinheiro et al. (2014), stressed that European universities are currently struggling to find an adequate balance between: global academic excellence and direct contributions to local and national economic development and innovation or relevance; traditional academic norms and values such as curiosity driven research and the needs and expectations of various external constituencies; collegial forms of governance based on a 'community of equals' with managerialist tendencies resulting from increasing rationalisation and strategic decision making.

As a result, the university community is increasingly expected to deliver on a fast-growing range of often conflicting goals and priorities (Bolden et al., 2009). Universities have traditionally been different from other organizations with respect to an in-ward looking culture, loose coupling between administration and academic core, high professional leadership and management (Davies et al., 2001). Therefore, the introduction of new conflicting regimes of increased organisational autonomy and growth of internal managerial



control and surveillance are problematic (Enders et al., 2013; Musselin, 2013; Whitley, 2011, 2012). Clarke et al. (1984) argued that university administrators and academic staff are worried that public policies based mainly on economic consideration instead of educational principles will eventually erode the traditional role and functions of the university system. Shattock (2006) stressed that the model in the commercial world was simply not appropriate given that universities need to preserve their academic identity from too close an identification with private sector corporate governance. Universities remain people-intensive businesses and do not respond well to an imposed hierarchy that elevates structure (Shattock, 2006). It could be argued that university reformers are going to risk an implementation gap when imposing changes that seem to undermine the legitimacy and trust in the university as an institutionalized form (Enders et al., 2013; Pietilä, 2014). Hoff (2009) raised important questions in this regard; maybe it is time to revisit our thinking about what higher education is about, what its true purposes are, and how we want our future universities to look like?

Against that background, Smeby (1990) argued the relevance of other countries reforms and subsequent experiences in relations to the development of higher education in Norway. By studying the latest higher education reforms, the following sub-chapter is concerned with how Norway seem to respond to what Gornitzka (2009) called a common (European) reform agenda.

## **2.2 Norwegian reforms: responses to the European agenda**

The ongoing structural changes in Norwegian higher education must be understood as the result of gradual social development (Grepperud & Toska, 2000). By the millennium a need for innovation and the strengthening of community citizens' qualifications were put on the agenda (Grepperud & Toska, 2000). Which is connected with the development that was documented in the international analysis in the previous chapter. Expectations of Norwegian universities and university colleges have manifested itself in various ways and are associated with various conditions. On the one side, expectations are expressed through the criticism of higher education (Grepperud & Toska, 2000). The criticism is partly related to the scope of higher education commitment and efforts in continuing education, and partly for the lack of relevance in the activities offered. On the other side, the expectations of higher education is expressed through the desire of universities and university colleges to undertake new tasks and roles (Grepperud & Toska, 2000). In order to meet these expectations it is assumed that higher education is capable of changing. According to Grepperud and Toska (2000) shifts in political

parties and ideological changes are important explanatory factors in understanding the role of the university in the context of social development. In the following I will present relevant changes in educational reforms, which helps to underpin the direction Norwegian higher education sector is headed today.

### **2.2.1 Educational reforms in Norway: a focus on quality**

*“National administrative institutions are being challenged by globalization, internationalization, Europeanization, rationalizations, communalization, devolution, marketization, privatization and deregulation”* (Christensen & Lægheid, 2004, p. 688).

According to Christensen and Lægheid (2004) this has not only raised questions about the democratic implications of these trends but also about whether there is going to be a development towards qualitatively new complex and hybrid public structures. Either way, this will challenge theories that have grown more complex over time. Gornitzka (2009) in line with Christensen and Lægheid (2004) emphasized that the image of Norway as an incremental reformer blending modernization ideas with the sector's management traditions was intact until the late 1990s. Subsequently there was a shift in political leadership (Bondevik government) followed by the creation of the special Mjøs Committee (NOU, 2000 14) that culminated in the ‘Quality Reform’ (St. meld nr. 27, 2000-2001). As funding and autonomy reform the Quality Reform also represented a shift in management ideology: new funding system with elements of a reward system for education and research quality that was supposed to stimulate competition between the institutions, greater freedom to the educational institutions, the establishment of an independent national quality assurance body and proposal for a steering and management reform. It had as a stated goal “to create a wider gap between the ministries and institutions” and underlined the “institutions' independent responsibility for shaping their own future” (St. meld nr. 27, 2000-2001, p. 55).

In 2006 the Government Commission for Higher Education, often referred to as the Stjernø Commission, was appointed by the Norwegian Government to present recommendations on the development of research and higher education in Norway over a 20-year perspective. The Commission presented its main report in 2008 and internationalization was a key priority (NOU, 2008 3). The report proposed, among other things, to reduce the number of universities and university colleges in Norway. There was agreement on the situational description of the sector in this report. However, there was large disagreement on the proposed reduction of institutions. At that time, the Ministry of Education and Research chose not to follow up on the Commission's recommendations for structural change.

In October 2014 the Ministry of Education and Research gave recommendations about a long-term plan providing the framework for how the government should strengthen research and higher education to meet the challenges and seize the opportunities of the knowledge society in the period from 2015 to 2024 (St. meld nr. 7, 2014-2015). In this white paper it was among other things revealed that the government would have a special focus on world-leading academic environments in order to encourage greater impact and greater international visibility for Norwegian research. Which was in line with the government's political platform formed by the Conservative Party and the Progress Party, at Sundvollen in October 2013, where knowledge and the competitiveness of Norwegian businesses was highlighted as important priority areas: “ *innovation, knowledge and technology are key priority areas in terms of keeping up with the competition in a globalised world. The Government will increase efforts in the field of research and establish more world-leading research centres at higher education institutions [...] a major investment in research by both the public and the private sector will help to secure jobs in a globalised world [...] training in vocational subjects must be strengthened*” (Regjeringen, 2013, p. 2-3).

As an extension of this long-term plan, the Government presented white paper 18 (St. meld nr. 18, 2014-2015): concentration for quality – structural reform in University and College sector on March 27, 2015. Which could be argued to be a final realization and further development of the Stjernø Commissions’ recommendations back in 2008. The reasons for restructuring were particularly related to small, vulnerable research environments and many scattered, small education programs with declining recruitment. Consequently, the Government found it necessary to change the structure of higher education sector and gather resources on fewer but stronger institutions. It was argued that the structural reform would enhance the quality of education and research. Access to higher education should continue to be good throughout the country, and that the institutions' regional role should be developed further. The merger goals presented in the white paper were as followed: (1) *education and research of high quality*, (2) *robust academic environments*, (3) *good access to education and competence across the country*, (4) *regional development*, (5) *world leading academic environments*, and (6) *effective use of resources* (St. meld nr. 18, 2014-2015, p. 3). The Government wanted institutions with distinct profiles and therefore the universities and university colleges had to develop academic and strategic profiles that were based upon their own advantages. Based on a critical assessment of quality the Government wanted to merge a

number of institutions. For those institutions that wanted to continue independently would have to take part in a dialogue with the Department to evaluate their future place and role in the new structure. The dialogue would be based on different [quantitative] criteria, such as for example number of publications, applicants and student's time spent on finishing their educations (St. meld nr. 18, 2014-2015, p. 3).

Several voices among scientific employees raised their voices in this regard. In a chronicle for the local University paper in Trondheim, Tjora (2015, March 24) argued, "the quality objectives have been completely mistaken by quantity goals" and research was mentioned as the foremost example "where the number of publications counts more than the content and significance of research", which could lead to academic weathering at Norwegian universities and university colleges. Collett (2015, March 25) wrote that NTNU Professor Sohlberg claimed that the ministry and the university followed an administrative logic that ran on control, standardization and predictability, something he believed was contrary to good academic logic. The question of whether the amount of published research is a good benchmark for quality in higher education manifests itself.

Not only that, but the question also arises as to which values the government seem to prioritize through the above mentioned merger objectives and whether these are consistent with what the various higher education institutions want and what is for the benefit of society as a whole (Grepperud & Toska, 2000). It seems to be fairly obvious that today's government is in line with previous reforms and the Stjernø Commission in particular, have pushed forward shifting goals in the same vein as expressed by R. Pinheiro et al. (2014) in the introduction - from trust and loyalty to the more modern cornerstones of accountability, efficiency and responsiveness. However, the challenge will be to find a way to strike a balance between international pressures on issues of changing Norwegian higher education towards more market orientation, competitive, professional management and more concentration of resources and talents, versus the desire to preserve and strengthening the best aspects of Norwegian higher education. There is much that seems to be at stake. Therefore, it is relevant to study how higher education institutions are experiencing and responding to this ongoing change. In this thesis, the merged NTNU is studied in closer scrutiny. Which was the first institution that merged after the ministry's presentation of the current white paper. In connection with international developments, NTNU seem to be facing a crossroad marked by various tensions. Examples, given by Grepperud and Toska (2000) among others, include:

tensions between the global and the local, the tension between the need for competition and equality, and the tension between tradition and modernity.

Local tensions and responses to the ongoing structural change will be discussed in chapter 6: *analysis and discussion*. A brief background of the local context under study is presented next.

### **2.3 The Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)**

In the following I will give a presentation of NTNU based upon strategy document: “*Strategy 2011-2020, Knowledge for a better world*” available from their official website (NTNU, 2011). A brief presentation of their vision is followed by what they have chosen as their core values and social mission. Lastly, a brief background of the NTNU merger is given and the reasons for merger are extracted from the working document, “*merger platform*” also available from NTNU’s official website (NTNU, 2015).

#### **2.3.1 Vision and values**

NTNU’s vision is “*knowledge for a better world*” (NTNU, 2011, p.5). The content of this vision is that NTNU aims to create the basis for the development of knowledge and to create economic, cultural and social value. They will do so by making the best possible use of their main profile in science and technology, their academic breadth, and their interdisciplinary expertise to tackle the large and complex challenges faced by Norway and the world community. Their core values are summarized as *creative, constructive, critical, respectful and considerate* (NTNU, 2011, p. 6).

#### **2.3.2 Mission in society**

In the Universities and University Colleges Act § 1-3 (2005) it has been explicitly stated that higher education institutions should provide higher education on the basis of the foremost within research, academic and artistic development work and empirical knowledge. NTNU have stated the following regarding their social mission: “*our mission in society encompasses the expectations placed on NTNU by the nation as well as the world community, and the challenges in society that the university wishes to address. This is a governing principle for our activities*” (NTNU, 2011, p. 8). Because of NTNU’s main profile in science and technology they view themselves as having a particular responsibility to develop the technological foundation for future society.

### 2.3.3 NTNU merger

On January 1st 2016 The Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) merged with Sør-Trøndelag University College (HiST), Gjøvik University College (HiG) and Aalesund University College (HiÅ). University colleges compared to universities are more responsive to input from their environment and they have a stronger orientation towards providing vocational courses, endeavouring to meet the needs of society and providing applied programmes in their curriculum development (Clarke et al., 1984). Which could be regarded as one of the main reasons for NTNU to merge with the aforementioned institutions.

#### **Background and purpose**

There is a growing need for people with expertise who can tackle complex challenges in society and NTNU aims to become an outstanding university by international standards. In this sense, internationalization is a prerequisite for development of high quality. It is believed that visibility at the national and international level makes NTNU attractive for collaboration with the best players and also in the [global] competition for students. This requires robust academic environments with distinct profiles, clear priorities, and disciplinary concentration. Academic environments must concentrate their activities and continue to collaborate closely with the private and public sectors to develop the expertise [innovative edge] that society needs. The purpose of the merger according to the merger platform is to improve quality throughout the breadth of the four institutions activities and together become an even better partner for the development of industry and society throughout Norway. The merger is supposed to offer more consistent and coherent programmes of study, with potential for higher quality and greater social relevance. It is also supposed to create greater opportunities to compete for research funding. The merger is supposed to put NTNU in a stronger position to develop their national role in research and education and in technology and science.

So far through chapter 2 I have highlighted the latest international developments in higher education and national responses to these. The thesis case study was presented in the end. Norwegian higher education has clearly been influenced by both international trends and governmental (reform) goals. Which has apparently created various tensions in the academic community (ie Tjora, 2015 and Collet, 2015). The arguments advocated by both the Lisbon strategy and the Bologna declaration as well as the Norwegian Ministry of Research and Education (St. meld nr. 18, 2014-2015) seem to be reflected through how NTNU have

described the cause and purpose for merging (Esmu, 2009, p. 8). The next chapter is concerned with forming a backdrop on different ways of understanding the university.

## **2.4 The purpose of a university: a collegiate model or an entrepreneurial model?**

The ongoing structural changes in Norwegian higher education are challenging different perceptions regarding the role and content of universities. A traditional interpretation of the university seems to be clashing with a more modern understanding of the university. The two different perspectives are presented in the following.

### **2.4.1 A traditional university: a collegiate model**

Historically, a university signified a community of scholars grouping together to educate the clergy (Clarke et al., 1984). Their mission was to enable a community of scholars to critically evaluate the intellectual standards and development of society. The fundamental role and functions of a university in teaching and research depended upon having a large degree of institutional autonomy (Clarke et al., 1984). Similarly, R. A. Scott (2003) explained that the university was known to constantly extend the boundaries of what was known, and in such a way, challenge societal rules describing desirable and undesirable states and behaviours. In this sense, the university would not only challenge societal norms through research, scholarship, and other creative endeavours, but it would also serve as the curator of the past and the archivist of heritage (R. A. Scott, 2003). In this interpretation the university is just as concerned about character and citizenship as with careers and commerce (R. A. Scott, 2003). This tradition has given rise to what is often referred as the collegiate university model.

The collegiate university model emphasized values such as academic freedom, critical reflection and local autonomy (Larsen, 2007). The collegium is egalitarian and democratic, and the collegium considers each other as equals with equal right and opportunity to discuss and influence the cases falling (Birnbaum, 1988). Although the traditional model is idealized among many academics, there are several who have pointed out that this model is not adequate for today's university management. Others have argued that the model is under pressure. It has been argued that the traditional model is slow and conservative and that it ignores external signals. However, conflicts of interest and competition among autonomous professionals and among professions is expected and is a part of the daily leadership (Larsen, 2007). The ideal of academic freedom limits opportunities for managers to maneuver in disciplinary matters (Angen & Kvalsund, 2013). In that sense, it seems to be uncertain whether it is possible for a leader to influence an institution and related institutionalization

processes in a desired direction. Mintzberg (1979) found that collegial based institutions are experiencing problems with coordination, control and change.

#### **2.4.2 A modern university: an entrepreneurial model**

The entrepreneurial university could be interpreted as the result of a more globalised higher education sector with an increased competition for students and where universities are increasingly expected to focus on brand-profiling (Deem, 2001; Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007). It can also be interpreted as the solution to the problems faced by the traditional model, highlighted above. However, the entrepreneurial model seems to symbolize a direction towards the commodification of educational services. Balarin (2014) called this a globally structured educational agenda. P. Scott (2003) pointed to a new emphasis on markets in both teaching and research together with exploiting the enhanced value of their intellectual property within a knowledge-based economy. Which requires greater innovation capability on the shoulders of the various higher education systems. Consequently, contemporary universities are increasingly conducting their activities in a more business-like manner (P. Scott, 2003). Within this development traditionally distinct goals and rationales of public and private sectors are being recombined (Balarin, 2014). Which could have some of its explanation in a belief that the university should be managed more professionally using rational organizational designs, represented by the mindset of NPM.

Professional management in this connection is based on the perception of the university as a manufacturing enterprise, an enterprise engaged in the production of research and candidates, where the central value is efficiency connected to the question of how fast and cheap the university can produce useful products for their clients (Bleiklie, 1993). Formal structure is given considerable weight in this perspective. It is believed that work descriptions, rules and regulations enforce normative behavior and could lead to increased organizational efficiency (Birnbaum, 1988). In the context of NTNU, unified leadership has already been introduced at all levels. According to Hope and Rykkja (2011) the need for stronger management of the organization in order to implement changes and prioritize more effectively has been a leading cause. Which have created a shift from collegial management to more top-down management and leadership (Hope & Rykkja, 2011).

This chapter have introduced competing understandings of how the university can be interpreted. The thesis methodological guidelines are presented next.



### 3 METHODOLOGICAL GUIDELINES

In the following I will start with providing the epistemological foundation for this thesis. Choice of method is presented afterwards, followed by a discussion of ethical considerations and an evaluation of quality.

#### 3.1 Epistemological foundation

Scientific theory facilitates a more comprehensive and critical understanding of research and what we do when we conduct examinations, seeking deeper when the chase after "facts" can reach superficial heights (Nyeng, 2004). Scientific theory is more about problematizing "knowledge" through reflection over the nature of knowledge and the value of knowledge, and less about seeking solutions to problems (Nyeng, 2004). This is an important reflection to bring into the various stages of doing research. Relevant to this discussion is the two different ontological and epistemological traditions, called positivism and hermeneutics.

#### **Key concepts and understandings: ontology and epistemology**

Ontology is the nature of reality (what things are), while epistemology can be defined as the relationship between the researcher and the reality or how this reality is captured or known (the way we know things) (Nyeng, 2004). A central ontological debate within social science is whether there are regularities or universal laws in social systems in the same way as in natural science, or if everything we study is unique (Jacobsen, 2005). Epistemology is concerned with whether it is possible to acquire knowledge about reality (Jacobsen, 2005) and what knowledge we can obtain about the reality we are investigating (Nyeng, 2004).

Ontology provides the guidelines for which knowledge, epistemology, we have and the choice of research method to generate this knowledge (Nyeng, 2004).

According to Goertz and Mahoney (2012) concept formation inevitably raises the issues of ontology because it involves what is inherent and important in the empirical phenomenon represented by a concept, for example, "what is academic freedom?" Qualitative researchers adopt a semantic approach and work hard to identify the intrinsic necessary defining attributes of a concept, while quantitative scholars adopt an indicator-latent variable approach and seek to identify good indicators that are caused by the latent variable (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012). Concepts and measurements also raise epistemological issues about the nature and quality of knowledge (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012). The challenges of knowledge generation in quantitative analyses are according to Goertz and Mahoney (2012) closely linked to 'error',

understood as the difference between an estimated value and a true value. By contrast, in qualitative analyses the challenges of knowledge generation are more closely linked to ‘fuzziness’, understood as partial membership in a conceptual set (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012).

### **The two main ontological and epistemological traditions: positivism and hermeneutics**

There exists broad disagreement about ontological and epistemological questions, but within human research it is mainly spoken about two different traditions, referred to as positivism and hermeneutics (Nyeng, 2004). In the perspective of a positivistic tradition, it is important to seek objectivity and use consistently rational and logical approaches to research. The goal of positivistic researchers is to make time and context free generalizations and therefore the positivist researcher will attempt to remain detached from the participants of the research by creating distance between themselves and the participants (Nyeng, 2004). In contrast, the hermeneutic researcher is essentially concerned with understanding motives, meanings, reasons and other subjective experiences which are time and context bound (Nyeng, 2004). In this perspective, “the new” is always seen and understood in light of what we already know (Nyeng, 2004). Consequently, a theory-independent God’s-eye-point is not likely to exist, because that would mean that we are able to look down on our own search for knowledge from an entirely neutral point of view (Nyeng, 2004). Everything we do is more likely to be bound in our culture, academic perspectives and in our specific research interests (Nyeng, 2004). Which explains why Nyeng (2004) stress that the researcher’s eye is always bound to a human standing point in the world. What we believe is true or not, is to some extent dependent upon our perspectives. However, our assumptions will always change or at least be modified through experience. In that sense, knowledge can never be a pure depiction.

### **Hard data about a hard world or soft data about a soft world?**

We are connected to the world in different ways through hard and soft data. Nyeng (2004) in line with Tjora (2012) emphasizes that it cannot be stated in general terms that one method is better than the other, that it represents reality more correctly, because it is dependent on the type of questions we are asking. Most importantly human science is dependent upon a broad interpretation of data and empirical evidence – and of reality. Nyeng (2004) stresses that even though research is expected to give answers, it is just as important that it aims to ask new questions. Because both in life and science habituated and stiffening perspectives can be a threat to [social] development (Nyeng, 2004).

### **Where do I go from here?**

I have now roughly outlined the main differences between the two different ontological and epistemological traditions, namely positivism and hermeneutics. In this particular thesis, I am essentially inspired by the hermeneutic tradition because I believe that knowledge arises from using multiple perspectives and that there are several ways of understanding and/or answering the same questions. If I focus upon having a reflective perspective towards the process with this thesis, I consider my educational, professional and personal background more as a reflexive strength than as a bias in the analysis. Instead of trying to explain the stories given by my informants (two professors and two leaders) in chapter 4, I will try to understand them in light of different theoretical perspectives. I also realize that my understanding will most likely be different from others. However, I aim to make my work as transparent as possible and to build an empirical framework that will be analyzed on the background of relevant theory. My hope is to provide an analysis focused upon a critical discussion and to challenge what Nyeng (2004) called “stiffened perspectives” in society.

### **3.2 Research design**

Research design, selection criteria and the role of theory are presented in the following.

#### **Intensive or extensive and descriptive or explanatory**

Jacobsen (2005) classify research design along two dimensions, intensive or extensive and descriptive or explanatory. My research design is intensive and explanatory as I am focused upon studying a few units in-depth rather than studying a few variables of several units (Jacobsen, 2005). The purpose of an intensive research design is, according to Jacobsen (2005), to get as complete picture as possible of a situation, a phenomenon or an event. The reason for choosing this approach can be argued in line with the epistemological foundation for this thesis. That studying multiple individual perspectives helps to provide a better understanding of the processual, ambiguous and conflicting aspects of the university represented in the four different stories of the merged NTNU in chapter four. In this sense, the research design is descriptive in character rather than explanatory. I describe empirical data that I have generated at one point in time, and therefore I do not have the opportunity to explore whether or not the informants would make different sense to what I have examined at a later point in time. Consequently, causal explanations are impossible, however, that was never a goal to begin with.

### **Case study or criteria selection**

One of the greatest challenges with research in general is how to delineate the empirical work, according to Tjora (2012). Delineation can be done through two different strategies, case study and criteria selection (Tjora, 2012). The research question for this dissertation is explorative and I avail myself of an already existing delineation of whom the research study includes (Tjora, 2012). The investigation may therefore resemble what qualitative research call case studies. The case study is the Norwegian University of Science and Technology [NTNU] in the context of structural changes in higher education. The overarching theme is institutional change driven by a broader structural change in higher education, which has to be considered as a process of complex and dynamic logics of action that must be studied in the context in which it is exercised (Røvik, Roness, Læg Reid, & Christensen, 2009). Røvik et al. (2009) argue that organizations over time establish institutional features, which involve the development of separate rules and identities that determines what is considered as proper and reasonable, what is relevant problems and acceptable solutions. These limit the leeway for reforms and changes in organizations [ie merger of NTNU]. I hope to unearth some of the institutional features of NTNU and thus contribute to a deeper understanding of institutional change within the context of the university (Røvik et al., 2009).

### **The role of theory: deductive, inductive or abductive approach**

The terms inductive, deductive and abductive reasoning says something about the role of theory in research work. According to Tjora (2012) qualitative studies are often concentrated on inductive reasoning. Inductive approach means to focus on developing general contexts from observation of individual cases (Tjora, 2012). This thesis, however, has an abductive approach, which means that it starts with the empirical data in the same way as induction, but where theories and perspectives are allowed to play a role both before and during the research process (Tjora, p. 26). Tjora (2012, p. 29) explains further that established theories or explanations within subjects and what the research community perceive as relevant questions within a topic, will affect the direction of the researcher's attention. Early in the process, starting in September 2015, I did a lot of research within higher education. My focus was interdisciplinary. However, I read about university governance, university politics, culture, reforms, management, institutional theory and mergers. This preparatory work has in different ways affected the further process, from development of research questions to choice of informants and questions for the interview guide. At the same time it became natural not to continue writing the theory chapter before after generating data, so that theories were allowed

to change during the process. Which is precisely how an abductive approach works in practice. In that sense, the thesis has been empirical driven.

### **3.3 Method for collecting data**

#### **3.3.1 Interview as method**

I have chosen to use interview as method because I wanted to study the meanings, opinions and experiences of my informants to see how they matched the broader social structure of higher education. In other words, I was interested to see how the world looked like from their perspectives, which is similar to Berger and Luckmann (1967) social construction of the world (Kvale, Anderssen, & Rygge, 1997). I had done a lot of research prior to the interviews and I felt that I was lacking a nuanced picture of the whole. Therefore, I wanted to talk to someone within the context I was studying to see how their first-hand experiences within the field could help to fill out these gaps. The goal with in-depth interviews is to create a situation where a relatively free conversation can grow around some specific themes that the researcher has chosen in advance (Tjora, 2012). My questions circulated roughly around the themes of: The university (meaning, values, content, different perspectives), The NTNU merger (how the merger changes the university) and the future of the university (what is at stake? What is changing?). Open questions are used to give the informants the possibility to go-in depth in places where they have a lot to say (Tjora, 2012). I brought an interview-guide to all of my interviews (ref appendix, attachment 2). The guide was semi-structured (Tjora, 2012). My questions were styled in an open-manner and I had developed a lot of follow-up questions.

The informants might have expected an even more formalistic situation with questions and answers as opposed to what I was hoping for. Tjora, (2012) call this situation asymmetrical formalism. This is when the informant answers in brief, while the interviewer wish for a more free conversation where the informants elaborate on their own experiences. Too some degree this situation will always be present, but since I interviewed academics that have experience with doing research themselves, I assume that we had somewhat similar expectations, as opposed to what someone with a different background might have. The informants might also had a vested interest in my research because it is relevant for their own practice, which made it easier for them to be engaged and speak their minds. On the basis that the informants have relatively much knowledge on the subject, both through own experience and from theory and research they might on some occasions have tried to answer my questions in a way they perceived as being “correct” (Tjora, 2012). One could ask whether they represent their own

true assessments or the prevailing opinions shared by a community of professors and leaders. In retrospect the interview guide became more as a tool for preparing myself in advance as opposed to something I read out loud from a to b. Even though I was to some extent in charge of the direction of the interview I let the informants speak freely and I asked follow-up questions spontaneously from their comments and not from the interview guide. Tjora (2012) emphasises that digressions from the informants are allowed and to some extent loved because it gives the researcher an opportunity to arrive at new themes or elements that the researcher had not thought about prior to the interview. In my experience the digressions helped me to understand where the shoe was pinching. Prior to the interviews I had asked the informants to make room for one hour. In practice the interviews varied in length from a little over 1 hour to around 40 minutes. Some of the informants were faster and more straightforward, while others got more carried away in their elaborations.

According to Tjora (2012) an important discussion when using in-depth interview as a method is how the researcher should relate to the data that comes out of this inter-subjective situation. Inter-subjectivity occurs when the researcher and the interviewee create a common understanding of the world (Tjora, 2012). Skjervheim (1996) speaks of the same problem in his article, "*Deltakar og Tilskodar [participant or Spectator]*." In Durkheim's terminology the researcher could avoid the problem with inter-subjectivity if he/she acts as a spectator. To the researcher that would mean to create a distance to the informant, thus objectifying the informant by no longer attending in his/hers evaluations, but rather treat their evaluations as facts. In real life that seems somewhat impossible and similar to a positivistic tradition. Approaching the informants as a participant, however, is similar to engaging in the informants world-views and be willing to take the informants opinions for contemplation and discussion (Skjervheim, 1996). Instead of over-problematizing inter-subjectivity, Rapley (2004 cited in Seal et.al p. 20) wrote in more practical terms: *Just get on with interacting with that specific person. Try and explore their thoughts, ideas and experiences for comparison. When it comes to analysing the interviews, you should analyse what actually happened – how your interaction produced that trajectory of talk and how specific versions of reality are co-constructed.*" In my interpretation, this explains the importance of having a reflexive relationship throughout the entire research process. That I am sensitive to the context in which the interviews have occurred and also sensitive to my own different standing points as a human being as well as the various standing points of my informants. Which is in line with the epistemological foundation for this dissertation.

### 3.3.2 Document study as additional data

Tjora (2012) describe document study as a non-intrusive method where data generation occur without the burdening of any participants. In my interpretation, I have used document study as a preparatory method to gain necessary supplementary and background data on a field in which I had little prior knowledge. The purpose was to be able to view my problem statement in an international perspective as well as in the more local context of NTNU. Which has to do with an assumption that NTNU is affected – either inspired or pressured, by international developments in higher education. The aim was to document (international) trends and governmental reforms in higher education and to compare these with how my informants would describe the developments at NTNU. Therefore, I have in the analysis both discussed the research questions against what previous researchers have found in the field, what various public documents has stated about the NTNU merger (ie white paper) and the interpretations my informants have provided. This is also the reason why I have an initial and relatively comprehensive literature review (chapter 2) in addition to a separate theoretical chapter (chapter 5). In my opinion, this adds both increased meaning and quality to the thesis.

### 3.3.3 Selection of informants

#### **Strategic selection**

I chose informants strategically on the basis of their various reflexive perspectives and knowledge within the field. In this sense, the informants could be viewed as experts. Their insights and experiences are meant to enrich this thesis by making it relevant and interesting. All of my informants have different roles and backgrounds in relations to NTNU. They have relatively long experience within higher education, some of them from other institutions as well. This was a conscious choice because I wanted different perspectives to highlight different aspects of the research statement. Thus, illustrating the complexity and ambiguous nature of the case complex. Which again increases the quality of my research (Tjora, 2012). What is interesting is that the informants represent first and foremost themselves, but at the same time they stand as representatives for certain views or positions (Tjora, 2012). When it comes to how I have structured the analysis it should be noted that certain quotations are repeated in several places. This simply indicates how an argument can be seen from various angles. In this way, the complexity of the case complex is emphasised, which is an important point in itself.

### **Invitation by email and using the Snowball method**

Since I am studying the merger of NTNU, which can be characterized as a change process, it is natural to interview people who for different reasons have been affected, such as with new work tasks, people who have had a certain responsibility related to the process, or people who have shown a particular engagement through statements in media or internally within the organization (Tjora, 2012, p. 146). I had two names in the beginning of this research process that I was eager to talk to because of their engagement in media and because I felt that they represented conflicting interpretations of the university. From what I had read in media the particular professor could stand for a more traditional view of the university, while the rector seemed to represent a more modern view. I discussed this with my supervisor and wrote an invitation to the professor and the rector by email. In the email I suggested specific dates for conducting the interviews. This might have been limiting, but the reason for this was due to the fact that I live in a different city and travelling to another city would cost a lot in time and money. I simply did not have the resources. Telephone interview was considered as a back-up plan. I was hoping to conduct the interviews within the timeframe of a week. Luckily this became reality. All of the interviews were conducted by the end of January 2016.

The only voice I did not gain in this process was the current rector at NTNU. That interview fell through because of too busy schedule and involvement in the merger process. However, I ended up with a satisfying and maybe an even better alternative. I received an email regarding another informant that could in many ways represent a lot of the same insights that I was initially hoping to gain from the rector. I accepted this invitation.

Further in the process I used the snowball method. I started with a small collection of first-contacts that gradually grew because every informant gave me names of people in which they believed could be relevant to my study. In this regard Tjora (2012) points to some ethical challenges, such as keeping control of a selection process characterized by randomness. However, in this case study this type of method seemed appropriate. All of my informants are affected and concerned with the current changes taking place in higher education. I felt assured that the informants' recommendations were good because of their involvement in the merger process, as well as having experience with research. I believe they were interested in contributing to my thesis in a good way because they have a special interest in the theme as well as they might have felt a responsibility towards me as a student. The informants are presented briefly in the following:



Young professor (YP):	Professor at the Department of Sociology and Political Science, NTNU. A clear voice in the merger-debate.
Older professor (OP):	Professor at the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies of Culture, Faculty of Humanities, NTNU. A clear voice in the merger-debate.
Pre-merged leader (PML):	Have been responsible for the merger process. Have experience as organizational director and advisor for top-management.
Merged leader (ML):	Director at one of the merged NTNU institutions. Experience as a director from other institutions as well. Public governance and private consultancy.

I will refer to PML as a leader both in the empirical presentation and analysis on the basis of previous experience as a manager, despite the fact that he has a more advisory/administrative position today. In the following I will explain the choices I have made when it comes to my responsibility as a researcher, especially with regards to protecting my informants.

### 3.3.4 Ethical considerations

#### **Name and anonymization**

Aspects such as trust, confidentiality, respect and reciprocity will characterize the contact we have with our informants (Tjora, 2012). *“Much of the ethics in connection with interviews is related to presentation of data, for example when it comes to anonymization”* (Tjora, 2012, p. 159). With reference to the Norwegian Personal Data Act, I have chosen to anonymize the informants in order to circumvent the notification and licensing obligation. This decision however, has been somewhat challenging because the research presented in this thesis does not have a sensitive character. Rather on the contrary, it is a part of a bigger on-going debate in local and to some extent national media. The notification about structural change, followed by a wave of different mergers ordered by the Ministry of Research and Education, has caused a lot of engagement in academia, where some people have been more oral in their engagement than others. A lot of the information can be publicly accessed through newspaper articles, chronicles, debates, white papers and so on. Two of my informants have been active in the merger debate by among other things attending public debates and written chronicles for the local newspaper. In this regard their stories do not have personal characteristics. The informants have already talked in public about a lot of the issues I have described in the empirical presentation. One of my informants explicitly stated that anonymization was not

necessary. On that basis, I considered anonymizing some of the informants while having the rest in full name, but that seemed uncluttered. I decided to anonymize all of the informants due to pragmatic reasons and to maintain an orderly process. I acknowledge that for those especially interested it is possible to find out who my informants are. For example, people that would take a special interest in my research could make the connection between statements in the empirical presentation with news articles they might have read. However, the informants' themselves are aware of this fact. Again, the information have a public character, it does not reveal anything personal about neither of the informants, and therefore it is considered harmless.

### 3.3.5 How the interviews were conducted

#### **The mundane interview process**

Performing an interview does not acquire an extraordinary skill, although it could be an advantage to be out-going and at least be comfortable in other peoples company (Tjora, 2012). However, interviewing in its essence is about trying to interact with that specific person and trying to understand his/her experience, opinion and ideas (Rapley, 2004). Johnson (2002, in Rapley 2004, p.25) advocates the importance of understanding the multiple views and interpretations of interviewees with arguing that in-depth interviewing *“goes beyond common sense explanations... and aims to explore contextual boundaries of that experience or perception, to uncover what is usually hidden from ordinary view or reflection or to penetrate to more reflective understandings about the nature of that experience.”*

There are multiple ways of telling our stories or elaborating on our experiences. Rapley (2004, p.25) explains an experience with something that is: *“intimately tied to who I’m speaking to, where I am, the way I feel, what has been said before.”* Rapley refers to this as the local interactional context, and explains that this is further embedded in, and emerges from, the broader historico-socio-cultural context. I tried to be sensitive to this in my own interviews. In terms of how I completed my interviews I did something similar to what Rapley (2004) refers to as “mundane interaction.” I started with introducing the topic for discussion. I gave my informants insight in how I had prepared, that I had read up on the discourse on changing dynamics in higher education both in an international and national context and that I now wanted to take this in a local context by studying the merger of NTNU. I explained that I was most curious about how the university could be interpreted differently depending on perspectives, and I referred to a traditional view and a modern view. I explained

that I was interested in the potential conflicts emerging from the meeting between these different perspectives, in particular connected to how the merger seemed to change the meaning of the university. The interview-guide was presented briefly by stating that I wanted to talk about the university in general, thereby becoming more specific discussing certain aspects of the university in relations to the merger, and lastly to look a bit ahead by discussing the future of the university. Afterwards, I let the interviewees speak their minds and I actively listened and asked follow-up questions on occasions whenever I felt something was unclear or particularly interesting. Sometimes I would follow up with my own experiences or ideas/opinions of others. While listening I nodded, smiled, went on with small reassuring comments such as “mmm, yes, interesting, I see and so on.” Rapley (2004, p. 26) referred to this as an engaged, active and collaborative interview process.

### **The informants: treated as individuals and as part of a broader social context**

Rapley (2004, p. 29) stress that an interview study that only uses interviews to understand peoples individually lived, situated, practices is problematic, because it is essential to be sensitive to how the interview is a contextually situated practice. Therefore, when using interview as a method I understand my informants both as individuals and individuals as a part of a greater social context, which means that I tried to view their stories in relations to a broader-story-of-the-whole research. In practice this happened in similar vein to how Rapley explained it. When I wrote the report after my interviews the different individual stories became a part of a broader collection of voices, I looked after what was unique to the specific story and how it compared to the other stories, in which I tried to identify similarities and differences. Also during the process of the interviews I would sometimes ask the informants to speak with reference to a specific perspective, such as to elaborate on the meaning of the university through both a traditional perspective and modern perspective. For the same reasons as researchers not always orientate towards interviewees as “only” individuals, interviewees does not always speak as “only” individuals, but as representatives of institutions, organizations or professions (Rapley 2004). I experienced that my informants shifted between different roles. In example, one of the leaders at one point explicitly said that he talked in the words of the rector [how he thought the rector would answer].

### **The interviews are presented as stories**

I have chosen to present the empirical evidence gained through the interviews as stories. Bornat (2004) emphasise in a chapter about oral history as method, that the interview can be

viewed as a social relationship. Bornat argues among other things that oral history demonstrates how individual agency expressed through language, meaning and memory, interacts with and serves to mediate and moderate the broader social structure determinants of society today and in the past. The empirical presentation in chapter 4 can serve as an example of that argument. In the different stories the informants elaborate on how the university has changed. They talk about their own experiences within these contexts and they emphasize different aspects of the university depending first and foremost on their professional roles, but also to some extent their personal opinions. Their stories are situated in a local context, however they can have important relevance to the broader social structure of higher education nationally and internationally.

### **3.2.6 Processing empirical data**

In the following I describe in more detail how I stepped forward in processing the qualitative data, namely the work of transcribing, coding and categorizing. In the end, some reflections around the challenges I have met during this process are presented.

#### **Audio recording followed by transcription**

Audio recording is used as a general rule, upon completion of an interview (Tjora, 2012, p. 137). Audio recording is also a tool to ensure the quality of the empirical presentation. Having the interview on tape is an extra security that enables citation check. Prior to the first interview I performed a trial recording and there was nothing to fault on the sound quality. Before each interview, in line with the ethical considerations (Tjora, 2012), I asked permission to record the interview by using my Iphone. All of the informants agreed to these conditions, which I also expected because of their various roles within academia and previous research experience. They are familiar with working with students and they have been interviewed several times before. Therefore, I experienced the formalities as unproblematic and I could jump more or less straight to my questions. Using my Iphone as opposed to a dictaphone worked well since it felt like a natural element in the room that did not take too much attention, not to mention how easy and effective it was in use. I let all informants decide place for conducting the interview. It took place either in their office or a meeting room. Overall the interviews were not bothered by noise, except for one incident. One of the interviews was interrupted by a student entering the meeting room to use a printer. However, we waited until the student was finished before continuing the interview. The contents were taken care of even though it was a few minutes of noise on the audio file. In line with Tjoras'

(2012) recommendations I informed that the recordings would be transferred from my Iphone to my Mac computer and deleted as soon as the dissertation was completed. No one other than myself listened to the files. The interviews were fully transcribed by me during the first few days after each interview, and I also chose to do what Tjora (2012) called normalizing transcripts, which is to correct grammatical and linguistic errors in addition to translating from Norwegian to English. Normalizing transcripts can also function as a way of anonymizing informants.

### **Coding and Categorizing**

According to Tjora (2012, p. 179) coding is about generating codes that are close to the text, which means codes that are developed from data, and not theory, hypothesis, research questions or from planned themes. Since my empiricism is worked forward through re-writing the interviews into individual stories I found it easier to liberate myself from a variable thinking mindset (Tjora, 2012). I chose to structure the headlines in every single story with statements from the text, in other words codes that have a close relationship with the text. Tjora (2012) recommend using a data tool set in the process of coding and categorizing. Why I chose not to use this is elaborated further in chapter 3.4.3. Instead, I categorized and structured the empirical presentation and the analysis/discussion on the basis of a conceptual framework (ref figure 2, p. 72). I used the schematic layout as inspiration when writing my informants' stories. I believe this was an advantage for my readers as well, because it allowed them to get access to the rich data I had gained through my interviews. It enabled my readers with the opportunity to make their own analysis of the empirical data – free from my interpretations. The analysis however was structured by using the research questions. The research questions helped to categorize the empirical data. These are in many ways a result of what was interesting topics from the empirical presentation and thus they function as themes in the analysis. Which ultimately answered the overarching problem statement in the end.

### **3.4 Challenges and reflections**

The biggest challenge throughout this research process has been the constant struggle with the complexity of the case complex, the endless different opportunities and interesting ways of looking at the questions raised. I have been in constant battle with theories and methodology, struggling most of all with the delimitation of the task. Mostly due to the fact that I did not have any prior experience from literature on higher education and the job with orienting myself in that landscape was at times overwhelming. Perhaps mostly because of my own

difficulties with saying - *now you have read enough*. I was alone both in the implementation of the interviews and in the process of transcription. I see this as being both an advantage and a disadvantage. The advantage was that when I read a transcribed text from an interview I had attended, I found myself immediately back in the situation and could envision body language and expressions that belonged to that specific situation (Tjora, 2012). In that sense, I avoided losing information in the "translation" from oral to written text. However, if we were two people conducting the interviews one of us could have asked the questions while the other one could pay more attention to body language. That person could have acted more as an observer. We would be two people discussing the interviews in retrospect, confirming and challenging each others experiences and understandings. It could also enable the implementation of a larger number of interviews. Which would further strengthen the quality of research, not to mention that we would be each others motivators along the way (Tjora, 2012). On the other hand, if we were two we might not have been able to establish the same trusting atmosphere during the interviews (Tjora, 2012). In my experience, it is easier to feel confident and natural in a one-to-one conversation as opposed to being more people. In addition, being alone in the process made everything more flexible in terms of when I wanted to perform the interviews, how I wanted to do it and when and where I would do the supplementary work. Lastly, I would like to stress that this process has been extremely time-consuming, challenging and that I have learned a great deal about how I work alone under pressure.

### 3.5 Quality of research

According to Tjora (2012) when evaluating the quality of research the following indicators are commonly used: *reliability, validity and generalizability*. These concepts are basically geared towards quantitative research - especially research within a positivistic tradition, but in the lack of more appropriate criteria's they are also used to assess the quality of qualitative research contributions (Wennes, 2006). In addition, Tjora (2012) also argues for the benefit of *transparency* and *reflexivity* as quality indicators within qualitative research. Since this thesis does not aim at making any generalizations, I leave this particular indicator behind and make use of the more appropriate indicators of transparency and reflexivity.

#### 3.5.1 Reliability

According to Tjora (2012) reliability is about internal logic throughout the entire research project. It is about whether there is a clear correlation between empiricism, analysis and results and that this relationship should not be governed by factors that are not accounted for

(Tjora, 2012). Within all types of social research the scientist will have some sort of involvement in the topic being researched. Unlike positivism where the ideal is a complete neutral and objective researcher, and where the researcher's involvement in the subject matter will be considered as biasing the results, it is recognized in the interpretive hermeneutics that complete neutrality is impossible (Nyeng, 2004). Tjora (2012) argues that the researchers knowledge is an advantage as long as it is made explicit how it has been used in the analysis.

With hermeneutics as a starting point, I recognize that others may interpret the empirical data presented in chapter 4 different from myself, and therefore arrive at different conclusions. On that basis I have chosen to present the empirical data in a separate chapter to clarify the distinction between empirical data and my own analysis of it. By doing this I also get the opportunity to clarify how the citations in the discussion have been selected and what they represent in relation to the quotes I leave behind, which helps to strengthen the reliability (Tjora, 2012). I can also point to a broader context and reinforce my own arguments with other research done in the field (view literature review chapter 2). This type of connection strengthens the reliability and makes it relevant. In addition, I made audio recordings of the interviews, which made it possible for me to introduce direct quotations in the empirical part after transcription, which according Tjora (2012) also strengthens reliability. Although the dissertation does not aim at making generalizations, I will argue that it has a certain transferability to other higher educational institutions. The findings does not have direct transferability because they are closely attached to the context in this particular thesis, but the findings can be used as inspiration for people interested in changes within higher education in general.

### 3.5.2 Validity

According to Jacobsen (2005) validity is about whether the description of a phenomenon is perceived as appropriate. In social science inter-subjectivity is used more often than truth as an indicator of validity (Jacobsen, 2005). Inter-subjectivity happens when several people create a common understanding of the world – or the phenomenon under study (Tjora, 2012). Tjora (2012, p. 206) argues that validity is concerned with “*whether the answers we find in our research are the actual answers to the questions we are trying to ask.*” With my starting point in the interpretive tradition, this is according Tjora (2012) a relatively complex affair. A prerequisite for ensuring validity is to familiarize myself with different perspectives, current theories and previous research done in similar themes and with similar research methods,

since that makes it possible to compare my findings with other research conducted in the field (Tjora, 2012). Tjora (2012) argues that the most important source to high validity is that the research takes place within the framework of professionalism, rooted in other relevant research.

There exists a massive amount of literature and a lot of different studies on change within higher education. I spent a lot of time trying to get an overview of this literature, but due to the wide range I had to prioritize what I would chose to immerse myself in. This ended up being my biggest challenge. My curiosity grew in pace with my knowledge of the field. The field I have immersed myself with has been interdisciplinary, challenging, frustrating and interesting – it draws upon insights from various fields such as political science, sociology, and organizational theory to mention some. My choice of theory was led by the research I had done prior to my interviews and what insights I gained from my informants. Those two factors combined led me to institutional theory under the umbrella of public organizational theory. It should also be mentioned that the research I had done on changes within higher education in an international perspective had made me curious to see how this was affecting higher education in Norway. Therefore, I used these changes in addition to what I had read on the theme in a national context as inspiration to formulate relevant questions to my informants. The interviews I conducted were partly structured, providing me with the opportunity to adjust focus whenever necessary. If something was unclear I would ask follow-up questions to ensure that I had understood the informants correctly. Although the interview-guide was semi-structured, the interviews became open in process, meaning that I deviated from the guide and let the informants speak more freely.

### **3.5.3 Transparency and reflexivity**

According to Tjora (2012) transparency is about illustrating how a research project is conducted, what choices have been made on different stages of the process, what problems have occurred, what theories have been used and how these have functioned. The goal is that the readers will get such a good insight into the research that they can decide on the quality of the research themselves (Tjora, 2012). In this regard Tjora (2012) argues for the benefit of using computer tools, such as CAQDAS, when transcribing, coding and categorising data. I chose not to use that type of tool for several reasons. I had no prior experience with it, and given the strict time-line, limited resources and the fact that I was working on this project alone I saw no other option then to proceed with manual editing instead. I also clarified it



with my supervisor. In my experience manual editing was beneficial. It made it possible for me to gain a close connection with what I had written. I worked through the recordings of my interviews several times. The first time I heard through the audio files I wrote down rough notes on paper – my first impressions. Then I went to a meeting with my supervisor to discuss what I thought so far and how I would proceed. I listen a second time, while adding more notes and sketching multiple mind maps. Then I started to transcribe into a word document. This was time-consuming because I had to go back and forth to make sure that what I had written down was exactly the same as what was communicated through my interviews.

The most important lesson in this process was how my own pre-assumptions changed along the way. Which is where reflexivity becomes relevant. Tjora (2012, p. 217) argues that it is important to do an interpretation of our own interpretations: *“How is my interpretations shaped by my own cognitive, theoretical, linguistic, political and cultural opportunities and surroundings?”* When reading relevant theory, similar research, public debates and newspaper articles combined with personal values and perspectives on the world it is human to for example take sides. As an economics student with specialization within strategy, organization and leadership I come with a certain toolbox of theories. In addition, I have professional work experience both from the banking industry and the health-care industry. This is enabling and constraining at the same time. However, when being aware of this it is considered as reflexive strength (Tjora, 2012). In my experience, this is what makes qualitative research and social science challenging, frustrating and interesting at the same time. My pre-assumptions changed after the interviews. When my knowledge got more nuanced and I could compare my findings with what I had read beforehand, I could fill out the gaps. My perspectives grew and it became easier to look at the problem from different angles. I also tried to discuss my work with different people – my supervisor, family and friends – to widen my perspectives even more. Suddenly, my research questions had several correct but at the same time conflicting answers. This became an important discovery. It paved the way for multiple perspectives, which I have argued vital to understand the complexity of this case complex.

I have now introduced the methodological guidelines for this thesis. Now, I will move on to the next chapter, which is the presentation of my empirical data.

## 4 EMPIRICAL PRESENTATION AS STORYTELLING

In the following I will present relevant excerpts from my in-depth interviews. I have argued that by using multiple perspectives we do a better job in understanding the processual, ambiguous, and conflicting aspects of the university. The empiricism is presented as four individual stories to make justice to the richness of data gained through these interviews and to give my readers the possibility to make their own interpretations of the material. I have chosen to use citations from the interviews to structure the headings throughout the different stories.

### 4.1 Voice of a young professor (YP)

#### 4.1.1 The multifaceted university

In this subchapter the young professor describes the purpose of a university, important tasks and important aspects of his role as a professor. The core of the university is research and education. Teaching is according to YP about: *“teaching candidates with a high level of knowledge, high level of reflection...[] moral training is a part of it, a sort of critical reflection and understanding of society, to say it in more general terms.”* Research is more or less the same he explained, however, the emphasis is put more on: *“developing knowledge over time.”* Research and education are intertwined: *“[...] same processes that is about learning some things.”* Another important aspect, which has been connected to moral training, is dissemination: *“...it is about taking some sort of intermediary role in a broad social sense [...] connected to this is being a sort of...[pause]...critical independent voice in society. And that is extremely important, in my opinion.”*

In fact, YP explicitly claimed that: *“I see it as my job to criticize changes that I mean are bad, and by that I do not mean the merger, but more the type of structural change that has a little type of generality...that you can discuss the reasons for.”* In addition to this, he saw it as his duty as a professional academic to have some opinions about these changes and to feed the debate with: *“not only points of view but also something from my own discipline.”*

This task seemed to be most crucial to YP, especially since Norwegian universities are owned by the state: *“[...] the state does not intervene with what the universities prioritizes academically, and that means - as a task - to be able to stand on the sideline commenting and criticizing...in a way, trends in society and so on.”* A distinct feature with NTNU he added is:

*“thinking new thoughts [innovation].”* By this he meant to: *“build new knowledge that also can build new activity, new industry, new ways of organizing society...[pause] and that is important.”* These are all important roles in this young professor’s view and he used the word, *“multifaceted”*, when summarizing the purpose of a university.

#### **4.1.2 Independence is the most important value**

I asked YP what values he believed the university should be founded upon? That is a tough question to answer, he said: *“it is difficult to answer complete in a way, but I think that for me the most important aspect of the university is...independence. Independence means to be able to prioritize activities [research, curriculum etc.] based upon subjects.”*

The other values he spoke of were professional integrity, humanism, and tolerance for diversity. The first he described as: *“being given a fair space, a rightful place to develop their own subject areas [psychology, anthropology, social economy].”* The second might be the most important he claimed, because it was not only about respect for every human being, but also: *“respect for different types of knowledge, different views, different methods, different...[...] perspectives.”*

Another important value was related to criticism and connected with quality. YP explained the essence of criticism as: *“uncompromised pursuit of knowledge and quality in that knowledge.”* He used the following anecdote to problematize the notion of quality and relevance: *“[...] immediately when NTNU starts talking about production at the university one should be a little careful because it means that one may become more committed to just producing stuff rather than producing important stuff.”* According to YP, quality was also about the value of relevance: *“relevance – societal relevance or social benefit.”* He also underlined that relevance should be defined broadly: *“does not have to be relevant today, or tomorrow [...] it can be relevant in fifty years.”*

#### **4.2.1 A superficial consideration of quality**

In the following, YP explain how he interpreted the concept of quality with relations to the current white paper on re-structuring the landscapes of higher education. Lastly, he stressed the relevance of discussing values with relations to change. One of the reasons for the merger has been to create more robust environments, which YP did not seem opposed to as long as it did not get mixed with the saying “bigger is better”. He drew upon numerous of examples where small research environments had made it all the way to the top internationally. The

explanation seemed to be found in how the academic work was organized: *“it is about relations (connections) and work being done in international networks.”* YP described further that a small research group producing a lot (ie publishing, gaining money) could lead to: *“superficial consideration of quality, because looking at the content it can in fact not be interesting at all or not socially relevant or very mainstream.”* He was somewhat worried that a side effect stemming from the merger could be: *“a streamlined sector.”*

For those reasons, YP was of the opinion that: *“it is important to reflect a little upon what the university is meant to be, since the entire sector is in quite a major change.”* He emphasized the importance of changing with a purpose, whereby he left the following question for contemplation: *“what is the content of the university, and what values should it be founded upon?”*

#### **4.2.2 I have never really spoken negatively about the merger**

It can be argued that the structural change represents the solution to increase quality within higher education and research. In the following paragraphs YP problematizes why too much focus on structure before quality seem to be problematic. In conjunction, he also explain why he has been viewed as a merger opponent through his engagement in the merger debate: *“I have never really spoken negatively about the merger [...] what I am sceptical about is the type of discussions that are just on the structural level [...] we are about to head in a direction where everyone is just sitting writing applications instead of researching.”*

YP had no problem with the merger itself, but he seemed to be worried about what it could mean to the academic depth: *“do more of everything [...] everything is just moving on this type of surface where the content that we were supposed to be working with, good teaching methods and good research, is just taken for granted as happening even though everyone is spending there time on other stuff [...] I do not have any problems with the merger as long as we manage to build solid academic environments.”*

YP has been actively engaged in the merger debate through for example writing chronicles for the university paper [UA], as well as performing interviews and attending public debates. On that background he claimed to be given a lot of opinions he did not have:

*“My point was that you need to ask the question...[...] discuss the content more...done studies of different types of academic environments, different sizes, how you organize the work.... for example, the environment of Moser and Moser...because they are example of an environment that has emerged outside the priority areas. [...] I think that type of environment would maybe have even more difficulties emerging today than at that time.”*

Before turning over to management models we discussed how the merger could be positive to some academic environments due to new connections being made. However, YP still argued that: *“these connections happen independently of institutions. [...] No money is floating back and forth, and it does not have to either, because people are working based upon a type of academic premise that you want to be doing what you are doing.”* According to YP this way of organizing worked because: *“the control is as little as possible.”*

#### **4.1.3 The academic model is in a way the good model**

NTNU had already introduced unitary management on all levels prior to the merger and according to YP this is what has happened: *“what happened with hired leaders, leaders on institute level... is not really that much... you have the same people that could have been chosen that now have applied for the positions instead.”* Therefore, YP still believed that the academic management model is the good model in university context: *“on institute level I mean that the academic model is in a way the good model.... mostly because you do not need that much leadership. [...] Scientific employees are almost like a sole proprietorship.”*

The main problem YP had with unified [strategic] management was shifts in loyalty: *“Loyalty to institute leader is managed more upwards than what has previously been collegial [...] the same with deans being hired by rector [...] strategic thinking and priorities are being pushed down...[...] it is a problem that you try to control academics that are supposed to have a very liberated position.”* This shift in loyalty appeared to affect the basic values that YP mentioned earlier: *“Independence is being destroyed by (strong) strategic leadership [...]”* and he followed up by stressing that: *“...if I do not choose to write the applications [ie research funds] to EU or to the Research Council...it does not happen. [...] I do not get fired [...], however, internationally it is a different story [ie USA, Australia, England].”*

If we allowed a stronger market orientation to continue growing, YP seemed to believe that Norway could end up similar to one of the countries mentioned above. YP gave the following

example to illustrate how it already seemed to be happening: “[...] *Temporary research positions, post-docs and so forth end up with spending limited time on research, because they have to think that ok I need to write a bunch of applications to have a job in a year, so that market-orientation is...evident, and I mean that it is worth fighting against it, and as long as the Norwegian universities remain owned by the state, we have the possibility to do that.*”

#### **4.1.4 NTNU thought it would be a grand university**

I asked YP what he thought when I said “the future university.” He seemed to be a bit worried that the merger could lead to: “*NTNU thought it would be a grand university, but it ended up becoming just a large (university) college. It can lead to less rewarding kind of study environments at a more like... humanities, social sciences, or other type of critical subjects. I fear that it will make what NTNU has to offer narrower over time.*”

The merger seemed to represent a stronger focus on vocational education, in which YP thought could be problematic among other things because it could lead to the loss of certain academic environments and thus affect the quality of research and education: “*the consequence of a pure vocational education in type of merger direction [...] could possibly lead to the loss of certain academic environments, or some academic employees... that is sort of a bit like my fear [...] if very many of those interested in conducting independent research deselect NTNU because that NTNU is emerging as a very pure profession university then you can in a way loose some of the basic academic quality at NTNU.*” YP claimed however, that this was a driving force long before the merger was a fact: “*you see this in the priority areas between different subject areas, you can see it in NTNU’s financial model where the faculty of social science finances the other programs all the time [...] it is overstated what you want to be and what you pretend to be.*”

## **4.2 Voice of an older professor (OP)**

### **4.2.1 We pretend as if...**

OP expressed concern about the gap between how it was spoken about the university and the actual practice at the university: “*it is very big [the gap], because the people talking do not know much about how practical day life occurs.*” According to OP there was a difference between how the university [NTNU] was formally organized and how practice actually worked: “*We pretend as if we have a simple line from rector to dean to institute leader. However, the institute leader has a span of control with 150 [people] ...both you and I know*

*that this does not work, because a normal span of control cannot be more than 8 to 10 people. So how can it be that the university works at all? It is of course because people know what to do...roughly speaking. It is partly invisible leadership, and partly that people have their assignments in which they take care of more or less independently of the leadership system.”*

OP expressed concern that the university to a little extent studied itself: *“ironically, what is happening in this sector is very little knowledge based, the universities are one of the few types of modern social institutions studying themselves [...] I think I can say that we have no research giving grounds to say what sort of governance model is the best applied on universities, not at least since nobody can agree on what is best.”*

#### **4.2.2 The university is relatively independent**

When discussing the purpose of the university, OP started with explaining the difference between teaching and research: *“teaching is based upon the research being done... and to some extent also the other way around [...]. Teaching is on a certain level about making oversight, while research is specialized”* and the distinct feature is the connection between the two.

The most important feature of the university, similar to what the younger professor also emphasized, was independence. OP described it in the following way: *“the university is relatively independent compared to other social institutions, is has some traditions for.... independent critical examinations, and truth endeavours [...]. It is a part of a whole bunch of international networks for knowledge exchange and view points and experiences.”* In which he also highlighted the *“very special system with collegial evaluation [peer review]”* to evaluate quality and truth of what was being produced (ie research).

I followed up by asking why it could be important to reflect upon the meaning of the university: *“I think it is important because it is easy to think of the university as a resource in line with the oil field in the North sea... and then it is about depleting that resource in the best possible way, as quickly as possible [...]. In principle, the university is supposed to be an inexhaustible resource.”* In connection to the NTNU merger OP argued that: *“[...] There are really no clear goals on the purpose of this merger. Sometimes, it seems like the only goal is to create Norway’s largest university [...].”* OP seemed clearly concerned that the University would come to a point where it had no convers for renewal.



### 4.2.3 A more or less parodic form of management by objectives

OP elaborated on why he believes that management by objectives becomes nothing other than what he calls a parody when applied at universities. OP seemed to be in particular frustrated by (unclear) goals in relations to the merger. Therefore, I wanted him to elaborate some more and I asked what type of values he thought the university should build upon?

*“It is a little complicated [...] last time I counted NTNU had 27 different goals they were trying to measure on. And that...it reflects an attempt to try and make some sort of dimensional analysis of what is called the “social mission” like if that in itself is a given size [...] the value that most likely is underneath the merger process is a pure efficiency value. Hence, things are supposed to be relatively cheaper, give better results [...].”*

Subsequently, OP explained that results mean a lot of different things: *“something is about research, something is about teaching, something is about dissemination [...] delivering stuff to the business world...innovation processes, business establishment.... you name it.”* He referred to the literature where Peter Drucker have said that three maybe four goals are max, and he stressed the following:

*“In Norway, the office of the Auditor General of Norway has decided that the universities should have management by objectives (MBO)[...], thus a more or less parodic form of MBO. The advantage of this seen from the bottom is that when you have 27 different goals, you can take what you want and let the rest be. In many ways, 27 goals are just as good as not having any goals at all.”*

#### 4.3.1 Hoping that the merger process will give the least possible effect

When talking about goals in the previous subchapter OP made the following important quote which led us to discuss the merger in more detail: *“I think there are quite the few of us hoping that the merger process will give the least possible effect on the workplace.”* I followed up with asking if OP felt that the merger would end up as a merger on paper only. In terms of changes he explained that he thought this would probably vary, but what seemed to be clear in his eyes was that some educational programs would be cut down: *“[...] if we are to do what the ministry and the minister have instructed the number will be reduced. These are questions no one will talk about out loud... hush, hush [...].”* However, he believed that the changes for many of the academic environments at NTNU would not be that severe because: *“nothing*



*new will happen when it comes to collaborators, or in the connection between how research and teaching are supposed to be performed [...].”*

#### **4.3.2 Merger, pressure and statistical quality indicators**

The main issue OP seemed to have with the merger was not necessarily the merger itself, but more that it represented a shift from collegial assessment of quality to statistical evaluation of quality:

*“What we have seen developing over a long period, but which has accelerated in Norway the last 10 years is quantitative quality indicators, that is among others, number of publication points (the most used) [...] this is how the ministry measures quality. Relatively loosely coupled to the quality understanding in the academic environments.”*

According to OP, these pressures are something that in a way happen independently of the merger process, however, they will lead to some challenges: *“too much attention around organizational conditions and too little attention on what we are actually doing: teaching, research, and dissemination [...] conflicts around weighting research and teaching.”*

Consequently this shift had lead to a certain pressure in which the academic environments tried to satisfy these quantitative indicators, however, according to OP they seemed to come with certain side effects: *“too much focus on quantity and too little on the actual quality of what is being done [...].”*

Similar to the story of the younger professor, OP has engaged himself in the merger debate through writing a few chronicles in the university paper. This is what he had to say on the matter: *“I think that the decision on merger was wrong [...] after the decision was made I have not seen any big point in engaging myself any further [...] I am so old that I will retire soon, so in that sense, it is not that important to me personally.”*

#### **4.2.4 You loose a type of strange institution**

On question regarding the future of the university, not only in the context of NTNU but also other universities, OP responded that: *“they are exposed to some types of pressure that will make it difficult to do the job that the university is meant to do in a good way.”* The types of pressures he was talking about are related to: *“Some places it has to do with reduced allocations, other places it is also connected with new management regimes and increased inclusion of commando-control [...] this is apparent in the Norwegian context also, where*

*increasingly more things has to be reported and controlled [...]. The paradox for you students is that people are spending more time reporting about teaching quality than actually spending time doing something with it.”*

What seemed to be at stake when it came to the merged NTNU, OP summarized as: *“the quality of the work (under pressure by statistical indicators) and the attractiveness for people to work in this sector.”* Traditionally university employees have been strongly motivated to do their work. The more they are being controlled, the less they become motivated, OP explained: *“In that sense, you loose a type of strange institution in society that have had a great deal of assignments that they have solved more or less good [...].”*

### **4.3 Voice of a merged leader (ML)**

#### **4.3.1 It depends on the perspective you take**

ML explained the meaning of the university in several ways: *“It depends on the perspective [you take],”* he said. ML started with a more historical explanation and followed up with what he thought the university should be about today:

*“[...] It started as an idea about a higher learning way where some masters gathered some learning friends around them and developed a collegial cooperation of learning at the highest level of what society needed at that time, all the way back to around the 12<sup>th</sup> century [...] then it has developed...and it has gone in waves. Society has sometimes meant that the institutions called universities was universal and the fellowship – fellowship about knowledge development – became too self-governing. Too self-governing, too little concerned with society or maybe too critical of society, too little concerned of society at societies premises such as the leaders defined it. It has varied.”*

ML explained that the answer depended on how deep we went, historically, whereby he mentioned ‘Humboldt’. The Humboldtian model was a university model developed by Wilhelm von Humboldt in connection with the founding of the University of Berlin in 1810 (denstoredanske, 2009). The model has been an ideal for universities in much of Europe through its emphasis on personal acquisition of knowledge and free choice of study. In relation to the current competing understandings of the meaning of the university, ML explained: *“Humboldt came in a situation where the outside world, the rulers, management, state management, had begun to demand that the universities should after all be some tools to*

*the rulers, to society, which this Humboldt meant that they should not be, they should be allowed free formation of opinion and free knowledge development. Here, yes, there is a balance.”*

What ML thought a university should be about today is summarized in the following quote:

*“[...] Ensure that one train candidates who have the best of knowledge on the different areas of knowledge that we call science areas [...]. But there are some traditions with educating candidates who shall serve society on different areas, that is what you want, and all the time there will be a discussion on what the society needs, whom should decide what society needs. In Norway there is a great deal of freedom for this sector [higher education]. This sector, compared to other public sectors, has relatively much money [...]. ”*

#### **4.3.2 The world is becoming more and more international**

When discussing the meaning of the university and what value it can provide in relations to the merger debate, ML became focused upon internationalization: *“We have built a society with high welfare level [...] and then we also need expertise in labour, and we also see that the world is becoming more and more international.”* ML made the connection to why internationalization was particularly important by using my experience as a study abroad student as an example:

*“Instead of going back to [the name of my hometown] and read about higher education, you go to Australia, in two or three generations people travel to the moon, right (?). I am just saying that it has become a lot more international [...] it only illustrates that we have to have a higher educational system [...] that can contribute to the Norwegian society and the value creation society needs. ”*

Afterwards he explained that the competition within higher education was getting closer, that we are living in a social democratic society with a high degree of consensus, homogeneity and trust, which was now changing: *“it is not enough to produce in the old-fashioned way and have income, because that we will not have, because the competition is getting so close.”* According to ML it was essential to be good in higher education, and not only that, but we also had a responsibility to help the rest of the world: *“it is a part of the Norwegian culture...joint European cultural heritage.”*

#### 4.3.3. You see that you can do more if you merge the forces

In this subchapter ML explain what the NTNU merger can mean especially to the region where he is coming from. Against the backdrop of fiercer competition, ML seemed to centre the focus on the connection between higher education and society. He talked about his own region and how the different university colleges within this region had for a long time participated in competence development to lift the entire region because they were experiencing falling behind in the international competition: *"[...] there is a low level of education in this region and the population declines particularly in the remote areas (districts), attractiveness relative to youth is low, the youth get educated, move out and does not come back."*

The merger with NTNU became a reality when: *"a new political leadership on national level saw that we needed to strengthen Norwegian competence in general and because of that we need more competitive and robust universities and research environments [...]."* ML explained further that: *"It is being restructured around us in Europe with mergers to be able to stand stronger [...] you see that you can do a lot more if you merge the forces."* According to ML his university college was attractive to NTNU because of their educational profile and an interesting collaborative environment with market labour actors in the region.

#### 4.3.4 Expectations that NTNU can really mark a new era

Another explanation to what the NTNU merger could mean was related to expectations from the business world. ML explained that regional market labour had reacted extremely positive and expectantly to this merger because NTNU has a reputation of being a university that is interested in cooperating with the business world. In that sense, everyone from businesses, to business clusters, municipalities, regions and counties had: *"expectations that NTNU can really mark a new era,"* when it came to developing their enterprises and products.

ML drew upon another example: *"because we have together with NTNU marked this as a very important merger to us and the region, we arranged a pilgrimage to Nidaros and Trondheim [...] we got 70 participants, and we are talking about top-leaders from both private and public businesses in [name of region]."* These leaders were taken well care of during their stay and the pilgrimage resulted in new business connections. ML spoke of the meeting with one business connection in particular: *"when we had that meeting new doors was opened, because the main actor there – the CEO – had invited an observer from another*

industry [...] because of another role he had in a large health cooperation he wanted to connect this cooperation with the health care education at NTNU.” In ML’s opinion things are going in the right direction: “Together we are going to make a win-win situation for the entire NTNU and society.”

#### 4.3.5 Merger challenges, leadership and the future of NTNU

According to ML: “the main challenge of this mergers is to make the interaction work internally, which is required for us to be able to work together in this new football team and not be left sulking at each other from different corners, positioning ourselves and digging ourselves down in protection.” ML emphasized the importance of building trustful relationships and playing each other good, just like a football team.

ML thought these challenges would become easier when the new organization had fallen more into place: “The merger has not fallen quite in place yet, and now many are busy with positioning themselves and protecting themselves and making those kind of strategic chess moves a bit too much. This will most likely change once we get the final organization in place.”

The type of management model best applied at universities seemed to be a battle between an academic leadership model and unified (strategic) management depending on the perspective one takes. Given how the Norwegian society works today, ML was quite clear that strategic management is an obvious advantage:

*“In short term I absolutely believe that it is – a little more philosophical – a tool for building the welfare state in the long foreseeable future, I believe it is reasonable to go in the direction we are (strategic management) and at the same time focusing strongly that the universities role is education, research which is connected to education, but also interaction with society, to give something back to society [...] and it is politically desired.”*

My last question for ML was if he believed that NTNU was headed in the right direction, and his answer was as followed: “Yes... but as in the same way as Norsk Tipping I think we need to be prepared that something has to happen, but we do not know what. It is going to have something to do with new technology.... Internationalization [...] in 20 years something

*meaningful has happened based upon how we are structured and operate today [...] In a way, we (Norway) are just a corner in relations to foreign influence, but it will [surely] come.”*

#### **4.4 Voice of a leader from the pre-merged university (PML)**

##### **4.4.1 The purpose of the university**

The purpose of the university, according to PML, is to give education on the highest levels within the subjects that are right for how society should develop and to conduct research correspondingly. PML emphasized that the university of our time has received some additional duties: *“associated with the expectations from society that education and research must have significance related to the innovative ability of a society, in other words, being able to use and apply knowledge,”* which can be linked to one of the universities key tasks, dissemination of knowledge, not only in scientific sense but also publications in more general dissemination. According to PML dissemination was probably the area being most neglected today, albeit an important task as defined by law.

When I asked him why it could be important to reflect upon the meaning of the university, especially relating to the merger, PML referred to a document called the “merger platform”: *“this is sort of what we want with the merger based on a somewhat overarching view of what a university should be. [...] The purpose is that every decision we make and how we carry out the merger in practice shall be based on this overarching document.”* The merger platform is based on NTNU’s strategies, which PML believed came closest to what a university should be, or how he put it: *“what NTNU believes a university should be.”*

When it came to the question about which values the university should be founded upon, PML’s answer remained short and not personalized, however, in line with the overall organization of NTNU: *“I have no other meaning except that NTNU has a set of values that are formulated in NTNU’s strategy [...] Critical, constructive, creative.... respectful and thoughtful. [...]. As mentioned, this is described in more detail in NTNU’s objectives and strategy document, and I have no other opinion expect that these are good values.”*

##### **4.4.2 The merger platform on quality**

The steering committee for the merger between the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Sør-Trøndelag University College (HiST), Gjøvik University College (HiG) and Aalesund University College (HiÅ) established a group that, based on the

institutions' present strategies, was to prepare a proposal on a common platform for the four institutions that could help to clarify their social mission, vision, profile and level of ambition as a merged institution. PML referred to this platform when the discussion was moved from values to the current white paper and its relevance to the term quality.

PML expressed that it was impossible to explain in an easy way what quality is: *because it is sort of...somewhat overarching question, that there are some agreed upon opinions about at the university and in the surrounding society, also there are something that one might be discussing.*” However, he claimed that it was possible to say something about how to measure quality: *“we measure through publication systems [...] fairly agreed upon that we have good measurement parameters on this, in addition, we have the so-called ‘peer review’ that is a system for evaluating research quality.... it is reasonably recognized internationally [...].”*

When it came to education it was more difficult to measure: *“you have the NOKUT system [...] that says something about how to measure quality, but as most people acknowledge [it] is not developed enough, this is a type of international affair [...] What is good educational quality? That becomes the essential question, right...because that is where you start, before you start measuring it. And that I experience is a discussion that is demanding.”*

PML drew upon an example where the rector at a previous management workshop for 250 people had raised the following question in his opening speech: How many have been peer reviewed in their research? Most people raised their hands. But when asking how many had been peer reviewed in their teaching no hands were raised. PML explained: *“[...] That is a part of the debate we have to develop and that NTNU is very conscious of and that rector is – now I am speaking a little with his words – concerned that we need to build good quality systems for education [...].”* PML made it clear that he did not have any other opinions about the merger except from what he meant that the rector should mean, or to follow up his opinions or the board's opinions: *“my role is not to be just a random person attending a meaning poll of what do you think about the merger [...] that is like working in, I was about to say, any kind of public control system.”* PML explained that he only related to the decision being made and that he did not have any further opinion whether or not this was a good or bad decision: *“we carry out that decision.”* PML would recommend how it should be done, but he made it clear that he could not be a “random opinion-informant.” Unlike a professor, PML's entire job was the merger.

#### 4.4.3 Merger challenges and strategic management

One of the main challenges of the merger was according to PML, extracting academic gains: “[...] *academic added value, creating better education above all else. Better research, but especially on the educational side.*” This seemed to be the reason for integrating the three other university colleges with NTNU. The other main challenge was to make sure that everything worked good together. PML gave the following examples: “*different cultures, different academic traditions, people living in different places, working in different places, probably also having different personal research interests and academic interests.*” This was a major challenge according to PML: “*it takes time.*”

With the challenges fresh in mind I followed up by asking what type of management model PML meant was best applied in university context: “*unified management (academic and administrative management blends into one). We facilitated that decision in 2005, I have been quite close on assessing and implementing that...I considered that as a necessary grip in 2005, and of course do I mean that... at NTNU it is obvious to mean that.*”

According to PML unified management has been a clear advantage: “*I mean that it has given force to NTNU’s strategic management, considerable force.*” He followed up with an example of another Norwegian university where it seemed to be unclear who made the decisions. PML explained that the rector at this university talked as if he decided over fund usage, when in fact the controller of this was the director. According to PML this was an example of classic divided management and it was problematic because:

*“I think that anyone outside the university will say we do not understand this, where is the decision capability, where is the strategic capability? That is NTNU’s acknowledgement on these questions, and as said, today there is marginal internal disagreement on this at NTNU. Someone probably still believes that chosen management is right, on the basis of a sort of tradition [...] in my opinion what is fundamentally wrong with that principle is that you cannot choose that the same leader in a four years period should dispose millions of millions of public assets being flushed into education and research [...].”*

PML summarized with saying that strategic management is a huge advantage for NTNU when making a position in the national and international landscape: “*We can decide quickly, effectively and strategic.*” PML did not deny that he thought the entrance of new public



management systems and other types of (modern) systems that are focused upon managing the universities more professionally was good: *“having appointed leadership means that you accept to some extent the rules that otherwise applies for the rest of society about managing businesses.”*

The universities in Norway are publicly funded through tax revenues, which is politically controlled by the Parliament and in PML’s opinion: *“one has to have some sort of control, politically, from society on how the money is managed.”* In relations to this, he explained that it was important not to mix academic freedom with a privatized business, which a researcher in principal almost could do today: *“a professor is a public employee and must be expected to deliver back to society, and it has to be requirements for that.”*

#### **4.4.4 NTNU is definitely headed in the right direction**

On question if NTNU was headed in the right direction, PML answered without any hesitation at all: *“yes, definitely headed in the right direction. We have a course at NTNU that we see more and more are choosing with relations to management models and forms of governance.”* He explained further that all trends are indicating this internationally and every university is headed in this type of direction. The only thing that could change the picture was if Norway would enter a financially demanding time. If that became a reality, PML was insecure about the future of Norwegian universities:

*“I do not think that it will become less public control, I do not think it will be more academic freedom, but it could be that there will be some political tendencies that also I would be sceptical of [such as] much stronger, should we call it, market control...competition over scarce funds... it creates something, perhaps governance eagerness from political side.”*

Against that background, increased control regime from state authorities could make what PML had seen as positive so far, become negative: *“there have been attempts from the auditors’ side to say something about academic activities at the universities [...] if that type of control mechanisms make their way into the universities we loose necessary freedom, because I am not against academic freedom, far from it... but you shall not privatize it [...].”*

#### **4.5 Comparing the stories: what seems to be the core?**

My informant’s stories must first be understood as intimately tied to the contexts of their production (Rapley, 2004). However, in my interpretation the informants have also actively

and collaboratively produced, sustained and negotiated contemporary knowledge(s) about various experiences with structural change in higher education not only in a local context but also in an international context (Rapley, 2004). Their stories have inter alia reflected increased competition, stronger market orientation and accountability of higher education institutions. A development the professors evidently felt pressured by. To clarify this point I wish to highlight some relevant quotes from the informants in the next section.

According to the merged leader it was: “**not enough to produce in the old-fashioned way and have income, because that we will not have, because the competition is getting so close**” [my emphasis]. The pre-merged leader stressed: “**a professor is a public employee and must be expected to deliver back to society, and it has to be requirements for that**” [my emphasis]. NTNU is moving in the same direction as other (international) universities: *We have a course at NTNU that we see more and more are choosing with relations to management models and forms of governance*” [Quote, PML]. However, brought to the surface are the conflicting logics fighting underneath, which are concerned with the performance of NTNU’s core activities (ie research and education). The younger professor expressed it this way: “**do more of everything** [...] *everything is just moving on this type of surface where the content that we were supposed to be working with, good teaching methods and good research, is just taken for granted as happening even though everyone is spending there time on other stuff* [...]” [my emphasis] and the older professors stressed that: “**they are exposed to some types of pressure** [ie professors] *that will make it difficult to do the job that the university is meant to do in a good way*” [my emphasis]. The younger professor stated that: “*Independence is being destroyed by (strong) strategic leadership* [...].” Strategic management was emphasized as a necessity by the leaders through a more contemporary understanding of what the university’s role in society should be today, while at the same time the entrance of commando-control regimes seemed to threaten traditional academic values as expressed through the experiences of the professors with regards to their performance of core activities.

In my interpretation, that seems to be the core of the conflict. Which is why this thesis aims to understand the conflict and to get closer to the bottom of what it is that seems to be at stake. Thus, contributing to a more nuanced picture of the whole. This could also provide important knowledge on how the meaning of the university is being reshaped. My findings will be further discussed in chapter 6. On the way there, it is essential to bring along the knowledge from next chapter, which is the thesis theoretical foundation.

## 5 A THEORETICAL BACKDROP

According to Christensen and Lægreid (2004) public administration research in Norway falls into three distinct periods. The pioneer period (1955–71), the breakthrough period (1972–86), and the last 15 years, a period characterized by continuity, growth and variation (Christensen & Lægreid, 2004, p. 680). The third period, to the present, builds on the heritage of the first two, but is more varied in many respects. Overall this period can be characterized with the emergence of different types of institutional theory. This dissertation will be reflected in light of relevant institutional theory.

### 5.1 How public organizations are different from private organizations

NTNU is a part of the public sector, owned by the Norwegian Government and the Ministry of Education and Research. As a university, NTNU is closely connected to society and how society develops. Despite the fact that there is a substantial gray area or blurring line (Rainey, 2009) between public and private organizations, Røvik et al. (2009) argue that public organizations in fundamental ways are different from private organizations. Public and private organizations differ from each other based on the fact that public organizations have elected leadership, and that they are multifunctional with a broader set of goals and values, and supposed to preserve sometimes contradictory considerations (Røvik et al., 2009, p. 9). In addition, democratic considerations, constitutional values and the consideration of community is given an entirely different weight in public sector as opposed to private sector (Allison, 1983, cited in Røvik et al. p.31). Røvik et al. (2009) argue further that public organizations face permanent and insoluble tensions that there are no simple answers to. Which also seems to reflect my empirical findings. On that background I find it expedient to look more closely at organizational theory aimed at the public sector for this dissertation. The attention is focused around new institutionalism, in light of a myth perspective but also with insights from a cultural perspective and an instrumental perspective. I believe it is important to make use of multiple perspectives because they can shed light on different aspects of the context under study. In light of an instrumental perspective public organizations are viewed as devices or tools disposable to the hands of leaders (Røvik et al., 2009). Contrary, institutional perspectives opens up to the possibility for organizations to have their own rules, values and norms that allow them to have independent influence on decision behaviour, and at the same time they will not adapt to changing policy signals from leaders in a simple and straightforward manner (Røvik et al., 2009).

First, the three different perspectives are introduced: (1) *instrumental perspective*, (2) *cultural perspective* [institutionalism], (3) *myth perspective* [new institutionalism]. Second, *goals and values* are explored in light of these perspectives. Third, building upon the various perspectives presented, a *transformative approach* is discussed as an appropriate way of studying NTNU as a multifaceted university and as a part of a complex public sector. This approach will take into account the processual aspects and dynamic interplay between perspectives and different logics of action as it is expressed through how NTNU interprets, edits and adjusts to the overall and ongoing structural changes in the Norwegian higher educational sector. As argued in the empirical presentation, multiple perspectives not only enables a better understanding of change in more general terms but it is in fact essential for understanding change in the context of NTNU.

## 5.2 Multiple perspectives: introducing perspectives in use

### **What are the perspectives suppose to explain?**

How and why organizations are established and why they change depends on the perspective in use and what the perspective(s) emphasize. An instrumental perspective emphasises the ability for political and social control and clear organizational thought or rational calculation when it comes to both causality and effects (Røvik et al., 2009, p. 23). The cultural perspective problematizes instrumental assumptions and the underlying target-middle-rationality, thus emphasising possibilities and limitations in established cultures and traditions (Røvik et al., 2009, p. 23). The myth perspective highlights adaptations to prevailing opinions and values in the surroundings in order to understand how change happens and what effects and implications they have (Røvik et al., 2009, p. 23). To understand the complexity of change in the context of NTNU and in the stories of the informants presented in chapter 4, the three perspectives mentioned above need to be seen in conjunction. Before introducing the perspectives, the basic premise for public organizations and why change seem to be complicated are presented in the following.

### **Basic premise for public organizations**

Public organizations are woven into complex political and social networks of various organized interest groups, citizens, consumer groups and clients. They face competing logics, loyalties and influence sources, which are rooted in the organization's political and administrative leadership, embodied in the organization's culture and tradition and rooted in external environment of action and surroundings (Røvik et al., 2009, p. 22). Røvik et al.

(2009), argue that it is necessary to take different perspectives into account when analysing public organizations. Not only is it important to clarify what the different perspectives assume in their pure form, but also the interaction between structural features, cultural bindings and myths (Røvik et al., 2009). Public organizations are characterized by greater goal ambiguity, multiplicity and conflict (Rainey, 2009). The organizations do not work as unified stakeholders, but must live with tension and disagreement. According to Rainey (2009, p. 84) public managers have less decision-making autonomy because of elaborate institutional constraints and external political influences. Røvik et al. (2009) stress that decision makers in that context find themselves in a world where both past, present and future is unclear and requires interpretation. Actors, problems and solutions will in different and partly unpredictable ways be selected and connected to decisions (Røvik et al., 2009). In addition to decision processes, sensemaking or formations of opinions such as: interpretations of experiences, where people's values, attitudes and opinions are influenced, are central to public organizations (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

Change in the context of a public organization does not occur easily in accordance with shifting demands from the environment or from changing political leadership. This is an important observation, highlighted by Røvik et al. (2009). In that respect, the instrumental perspective seem to not extend far enough in creating an understanding of what is going on, because institutional factors, expressed through cultural traditions, established rules and socially defined conventions, puts constraints on the decisions made by public organizations (Røvik et al., 2009, p. 22). The reason for this could be emphasized both through a cultural perspective and through a myth perspective.

In light of the cultural perspective, organizations in addition to solve tasks instrumentally has become value-bearing institutions with their own distinct identities and understandings of what is seen as relevant problems and solutions (Røvik et al., 2009). While in the perspective of myths, organizations are institutionalized through adopting models or modern organizational recipes of what is seen as appropriate to similar organizations in their surroundings, thus making them more alike, at least on the surface (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983, 1991; Røvik, 1998; Røvik et al., 2009). These institutionalized surroundings can add clear guidelines on how an organization should work in practice represented through a type of forced fashion (Røvik, 1998; Røvik et al., 2009). With this we understand that institutions

both enable and prevent behaviour while gradually changing over time through for example policy initiatives.

### 5.2.1 Instrumental perspective

According to Røvik et al. (2009) public organizations are supposed to perform task on behalf of society. Within higher education institutions this could be exemplified through preparations of educational reforms by a ministry, or implementation of new study arrangements by public universities and/or university colleges. An organization such as the university could be viewed as a tool for achieving certain goals that are important in the eyes of society, for example through increasing quality in higher education (Røvik et al., 2009). In this sense, the university and its members act rational when executing tasks. Thereby, actions are as wanted. Instrumentality can also present itself when organizational structure are shaped by target-means considerations, that in turn seems to be decisive for its member's course of action during task performance.

Røvik et al. (2009) explains that actions are based on *logic of consequences*. For example, a university may face a set of possible forms of leadership, and choose between these based upon expected consequences in relations to achieving goals. Simon (1947) analysed administrative decision behaviour based on the individual actions in organizations, and emphasized that the individual has limited cognitive capacity. As a counterweight to the 'economic man' motivated by self-interest and with full knowledge of all options and consequences, Simon outlined 'the administrative man', acting within specific structural frames, but having incomplete knowledge of alternatives and consequences (Røvik et al., 2009). A specialized organizational structure provide individuals in their roles a relatively narrow framework of understanding and a narrow focus, which can both ease understanding and capacity issues, but also give knowledge challenges and problems with seeing own activity and role in a larger perspective. Moreover, it is believed that possible conflicts between individual interests and organizational interests and goals can be solved through designing an appropriate organizational structure (Røvik et al., 2009). In conjunction, Scott (1981) developed what is called a rational organizational perspective, where organizations are seen as instruments for achieving goals. It is believed that rationality on organizational level can be strengthened through structural features. The organizations surrounding is important to the shaping of organizational structure. Hatch and Cunliffe (2006) divides the general surroundings into social, cultural, legal, political, economical, technological and physical.

Based on an instrumental perspective on public organizations, technical surroundings are most important (Røvik et al., 2009). These can include both parts of the intra-organizational network, some types of general surrounding and in some cases also parts of the international/global surroundings (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). What are meant with the close action environment are those participants in the inter-organizational network that the organization is particularly dependent on to get added resources or to accept the results of task.

Broadly and briefly summarized we understand that explanations based on a view of organizations as instruments are concerned with clarifying objectives and target means- understandings with organizations and their members, and they are also concerned with which choices of action they make and how the result of actions are in accordance with what they wish for. Taking on an instrumental perspective also means believing in management's capability of rational calculation, political and social control, but as stressed by Røvik et al. (2009) there might be limitations in these abilities. The instrumental perspective could be explained more in depth, however, the main objective was to illustrate some of the main understandings of how organizations can be understood through an instrumental lens so that when I later in the chapter contrast institutional perspectives with instrumental elements the readers understand what I am talking about. The emphasis is on institutional theory, and that is where the theoretical depth should lay.

### **Institutional perspectives**

According to Nielsen (2005) institutional theory primarily serve as a rebuttal on the dominance that neoclassical economic theory or more generally rational-choice theory have gained in social sciences. March and Olsen (1989) have outlined a broad institutional perspective on analyses of public administration and policies. This is founded on three basic ideas: (1) that human action is based on a logic of appropriateness; (2) that meaning is constructed through political and social processes; and (3) that institutions normally adapt slowly to their environments (March & Olsen, 1989). Institutional-cultural theories, seeing public organizations as 'institutionalized organizations', inspired by the works of Selznick, have increasingly been used in empirical studies of public administration (Christensen & Peters, 1999). Norwegian researchers have also been inspired in their studies of public sector reforms by another more social-constructive school, often labelled the myth or fashion/fad perspective, these theoretical ideas focus on the 'institutional environment' (Christensen &

Lægreid, 2004). Røvik (1998) developed such a perspective on studies of changes in public administration and emphasizes that organizations are multi-standard organizations, combining institutional components from different organization fields. Christensen and Lægreid (2001) have developed and used a transformative perspective on public reforms by discussing the dynamic relationship between environmental, structural and cultural factors.

### **What are institutions?**

Institutions are complex phenomena. Commonly we speak about economic, political, social and legal institutions, however, it is necessary to break with the division of disciplines when analysing institutions in the context of formation, functioning and change. Institutions must be seen in light of each other. Nielsen (2005, p. 16) gives the following definition:

“The term includes

- formal organizations (ranging from firms to technical societies, trade unions, universities, all the way to state agencies)
- patterns of behaviour that are collectively shared (from routines to social conventions and ethical codes- negative norms and constraints (from moral prescriptions to formal laws) (Dosi & Coriat 1998, p. 4)”

The human body is a widely used metaphor to illustrate the relationship between an organization and institution. An organization represents the skeleton, while the institutional features represents the flesh and blood covering the skeleton.

### **New institutionalism**

New institutional theory reframes basic assumptions in the understanding of social action and institutions dynamics (Nielsen, 2005). New institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991) is based on the social constructivist theory and unlike the old institutional theory it is the cognitive taken-for-granted-knowledge, which is seen as the element of institutions. Hence, removing distinctions between structure-actor and between objective-subjective (Nielsen, 2005). In this perspective, institutions are not external systems or structures that actors can select or deselect to adapt, instead actors are embedded in institutions (Nielsen, 2005). Institutions cannot be objectified and understood from the outside. Sensemaking, symbols, culture and beliefs are central to institutional understanding. New institutional theory is interested in the social formation process of both micro-and macro phenomena (Nielsen, 2005).



### 5.2.2 Cultural perspective

Institutional theory in sociology encompasses a broad range of theorizing about the role of broader cultural norms in influencing and understanding organizational behaviour, for example the work of Scott and Christensen (1995), Kodydek and Hochreiter (2013), P. Scott (2003). The American organizational researcher Philip Selznick draws a classic line between an *institution*; informal, gradually emerging, that can be understood on the basis of an organic metaphor, and the *organization*; formal norms, attached to the instrumental, tool-alike or mechanical (Røvik et al., 2009). When a formal organization develops informal norms and values in addition to the formal, it gets institutional features, and it becomes possible to begin and speak about institutionalized organizations (Røvik et al., 2009). This makes an organization more complex and less flexible and adaptable to new requirements, but it also receives new and necessary qualities, which allows it to solve problems in a better way and develop a stronger social community (Røvik et al., 2009). Both elements are essential to the well functioning of organizations. It is spoken about internal pressure as a source to institutional features and external pressure as something connected to the close environment of action (Røvik et al., 2009). An example of internal pressure could be an organizational members social background, but also values from a specific education or academic profession. An example of external pressure could for example be that a university is affected in particular by the overall values and norms of the Ministry of Research and Education.

#### **Organizational culture**

How is it possible to grasp the culture of for example a university? This is not as easy as finding out something about the formal norms, such as laws and regulations, organizational map or job descriptions. Organizational culture is something that is somehow “stuck in the walls” of an organization and that the employees learn about, experience and gradually socialize into after a while in the institution (Røvik et al., 2009). One method is to interview organizational members that has been in the game for a while and that knows the institutional features well (Tjora, 2013). In a university context, this could for example be an experienced professor. Another interesting perspective could be gained through a younger professor. Written representations of the university history and traditions can also be useful when trying to understand how the university is institutionalized. Hence, a traditional university would according to Røvik et al. (2009) have a lot of legitimacy based upon what it is and what it has represented, such as an academically based culture and autonomy, in addition to its pure production in terms of teaching, research and dissemination.

Røvik et al. (2009) explain that when culture of an organization is connected with the development of a set of distinct, informal norms and values, it means that the emphasis is put on aspects that are integrating organizational members. This could be called moral framing of appropriate behaviour or esprit de corps (Røvik et al., 2009). It also creates conditions for a high degree of mutual trust and common values of the organization (Røvik et al., 2009). The meaning of organizational culture can be reflected in reforms and reorganizations in public organization, especially if it exists threats to the dominating, informal norms and values. Tor and Lone Sletbakk (2006) study on modernization of public sector: change, legitimacy and loose coupling can be used as an example.

### **Logic about the culturally appropriate**

Contrary to a logic of consequences, the fundamental logic of action related to organizational culture by March and Olsen (1989) is called the logic of appropriate behaviour. Based on this logic, decisions are taken based upon what is perceived as appropriate and not by acting rational after a thorough evaluation of instrumental pro et contra arguments or vested interests as emphasised through a logic of consequences. Situations and identities are connected through engaging in a process of what can be called a matching. Røvik et al. (2009, p. 54) points to three relevant questions in this context:

- (1) *Question of recognition*: what type of situation do I stand above as a public actor? Is it easy to decide? Is it characterized by routine or emergency?
- (2) *Question of identity*: what identities are the most important to my institution and myself? How clear and consistent are my own and the institutions identities?
- (3) *Question of matching*: what is it that my institution and I are supposed to do in a situation like this? For the last question, the idea is that the matching is happening relatively intuitive, and that the organizational culture consists of a set of relatively consistent rules and identities, so that the matching or coupling is easy to do.

What makes an action appropriate builds on cultural normative an institutional foundation that can be very different depending on the course of development an organizational culture have had, and what have been established as dominating informal values and norms. In some public organizations, such as the university it could be appropriate to act on norms and values that are based on equality and more broadly defined benefit considerations. Røvik et al.

(2009) explain that it is worth noting that the cultural and informal rules are primarily directed towards the past, while the instrumental and formal rules are more future-oriented. In that sense, an organization is expected to act based upon experiences with what has turned out good in the past. Often other actors or public organizations experiences are used. This can happen either through de-contextualization (ie generalizing others experiences and making them universal) or contextualisation (ie using examples from others in the same situation) (Røvik et al., 2009). For example, the latter is common when a public selection choose to base their evaluations on experiences from other countries when investigating possible reorganizations. For example, interpretations from other countries higher education mergers are done to see if their experiences are relevant in a Norwegian context.

Even though a well-developed organizational culture in the public sector often can be distinguished by consistency in rules and identities, one cannot disregard the fact that complexities of public policy and the public system also leads to inconsistent decisions and diversity (Røvik et al., 2009). Røvik et al. (2009) explain further that cultural inconsistency and cultural diversity can create problems for public leadership, but also give flexibility. The problem may consist in public governance-and control being undermined by either uncertainty about wether actions are appropriate, or that the leadership must fight a hard battle to get their logic of action accepted (Røvik et al., 2009).

### **Path dependency or historical inefficiency: a double-edged sword**

A growing number of scholars use the theory of path-dependency to study organizational inertia and institutional rigidities (Krücken, 2003; R. m. Pinheiro et al., 2012; Schreyögg & Sydow, 2009; Wimmer & Kössler, 2005). Røvik et al. (2009) explain that public organizations established in a particular time period have *birthmarks* that can be characterized by specific cultural contexts or norms and values, which will influence the organization strongly in its development and affect how it reacts to change.

When studying the institutionalization of technology transfer offices at German universities Krücken (2003) found that universities are best understood as entities that are embedded in larger institutional environments and which due to historically developed practices and identity concepts mostly symbolically adapt to new challenges that are exogenous to them. Universities customarily cope with heterogeneous, rapidly changing, and sometimes even contradictory expectations in their environment, without transforming these expectations

directly into institutional change (Krücken, 2003). This could also reflect what March and Olsen (1989) have called historical inefficiency. In light of an instrumental logic, when institutions do not quickly adapt to changing circumstances the institutions are not capable of being efficient. However, in light of a cultural perspective an institution could quite possibly live with this historical inefficiency over time. In this sense, path-dependency can be perceived as having both advantages and disadvantages. The advantage according to Røvik et al. (2009) is related to the possibility for path-dependency to create stability and depth within the informal values and norms of public institutions. However, historical skewness could also lead to lack of institutional flexibility (Røvik et al., 2009). This can be particularly problematic when the environment changes fast and there are large gaps between external problems and in the internal culture (Røvik et al., 2009). An example to illustrate, are claims about public organizations not being ready to embrace change during reforms and that a cultural revolution is needed to enable them for the future. From this perspective, institutional features and rules of action work as break pads (Røvik et al., 2009).

Røvik et al. (2009) refer to March and Olsen emphasizing that political processes and institutions form and develop various societies and citizens, different public policy, different political and administrative actors and different kind of decision behaviours. March and Olsen draw a distinction between aggregative and integrative political processes and institutions, with emphasis on the latter and culturally orientated type. Within integrated political processes, which can be associated with discourse democratic ideal, the people are included in a community with a past and a future, where path-dependency is important. In this sense, political institutions create individual opinions and interests, and they give actors a normative context to relate to and develop meaning (Røvik et al., 2009).

Pollitt (2008) problematizes the theory of path-dependency. He introduces a variant of the theory based on the premise that long and stable periods will be followed by a breach, before it again is established a stable cultural development line. An alternative view on path-dependency is the context in which cycling or alternation is typical (Pollitt, 2008). As an example, Røvik et al. (2009) refer to the literature on reforms where it is often stated that after a period with certain reform moves there will come a period with quite opposite moves, which again are resolved by a period with moves from the first period. An example may be that parts of the traditional public administration in Norway from the late 1980s is replaced by the pull of New Public Management (NPM) reforms, characterized by efficiency and

devolution, which again during the last decade is partly replaced by a post-NPM wave going back to more control and interaction (Røvik et al., 2009). Lastly, an alternative to this cyclical understanding is that different cultural features do not replace each other, but instead supplement each other in a layered process where NPM-elements come in addition to traditional management cultures, and that these after a while melt together with post-NPM values into a more hybrid and complex administrative culture (Røvik et al., 2009).

### 5.2.3 Myth perspective

In light of the cultural perspective we saw that organizations became more different over time, which emphasized cultural diversity. Contrary, the myth perspective highlights organizations becoming more alike - at least on the outside (Røvik, 2010). Røvik et al. (2009) explain that while the cultural perspective is focused on values and norms that have emerged over a long period internally in the organization, the myth perspective is more focused on shifting values in the organizations surroundings. These socially created norms are called myths (Røvik et al., 2009). Myths travel and spread rapidly, often through imitation, and they can be used in public organizations without providing instrumental effects, in this sense they function as a showcase or a varnish (Røvik, 1998, 2010). For example, public leaders could talk about reforms in a way that make people believe that they are put into life, while in reality they do little to make this happen (Røvik, 1998). This divide between talk and action, Brunsson (2002) calls hypocrisy.

Organizations must deal with complex institutional environments. According to Røvik et al. (2009) different parts of an organization can be directed towards and depend upon the legitimacy of various external actor groups, such as the media, intellectuals, professionals, banks and accreditation institutions (ie national and international organizations that support the growth and proliferation of myths). An organization must often deal with many different, often inconsistent, and over time changing recipes for legitimate structures, procedures and routines (Røvik et al., 2009). One might call recipes from institutional environments institutionalized elements and rationalized myths (Røvik, 1998, 2010; Røvik et al., 2009). Which means institutionalized and widespread recipes for how organizations should act and look like, for example in terms of formal structures, technologies, processes and ideologies (Røvik et al., 2009). A myth is thus a legitimate prescription for how one should design a section or part of an organization. It is a recipe that gladly excites and attracts attention, and who has received an exemplary status for several organizations (Røvik et al., 2009).

According to Røvik et al. (2009) rationalized myths have two important characteristics. Firstly, myths are presented as highly effective tools that organizations can use for effective achievement. Røvik (2010) explains that a myth is rationalized and accepted by using similar arguments within science to create a conviction that this is an effective method to achieve specific organizational goals. Organizations, however, often experience that the instrumental effect of adopting myths was not as expected (Røvik et al., 2009). Therefore, Røvik et al. (2009) argued that a rationalized myth is a non-scientific based belief that an organization model tries to justify on a scientifically rational basis. In that sense, the term myth is similar to Hood and Jackson (1991) term about administrative doctrines. Secondly, and relatively independent of whether the myths have the expected effects or not, they are still institutionalized in the sense that they in a period of time are taken for granted as the timely, efficient, modern and even natural way of organizing (Røvik et al., 2009).

In conjunction with the instrumental perspective of organizations, it may be questioned whether myths should be understood as symbols or as sharp, instrumental efficiency tools. Since the late 1980s the myth perspective has been increasingly used as theoretical reference in studies of reforms in the public sector (Røvik et al., 2009). This applies particularly to the massive efforts to transfer ideas from the private to the public sector. It is partly connected with political science that in general have become more aware of the symbolic aspects of public policy, which in turn reflects that even public organizations in general emerges as increasingly expressive organizations, in the sense that they are keen on ensuring their reputation in the surroundings, such as towards the media, the public and overarching political authorities (Røvik et al., 2009). For example, a popular reform idea in contemporary history is balanced scorecard or activity based costing. Lægreid, Roness, and Rubecksen (2007) identified different recipes in 150 Norwegian state owned enterprises. They found that the use of modern management tools were widespread, that some were very common while others more marginal, that there were families of tools that supplemented each other, that there were a significant variation in the use of different tools and that the size was the most important independent variable in explaining the use of different tools. Several of the recipes they identified in the government administration are the kind of recipes normally associated with private organizations, such as balanced scorecard, benchmarking, contract management and service management.

### **The relationship between different recipes**

The most famous set of organizational recipes in the public sector at the time is, however, known as New Public Management (NPM) (Røvik, 1998). NPM is claimed to be a family of modernization recipes for public sector drawn from the private sector, where the core is constituted by ideas of professional management, ie managers with leadership skills and degrees of freedom to make decisions, break down of public organizations into independent profit centers, increased competition and the use of contracts as a political control tool (Røvik et al., 2009). Additionally, it is often talked about competing recipes. This could be illustrated with reference to the very popular and widespread ideas, called Management By Objectives (MBO) and Total Quality Management (TQM). The problem however, is that the recipes appear competing and contradictory as to how organizational processes should be organized (Røvik et al., 2009). The contradictory relationship could be partly reflected in that the former (MBO) provides many degrees of freedom for management to allocate resources and organize work processes based on the account of effective goal achievement, while the latter (TQM) restricts in principle often these degrees of freedom by prescribing largely by detail and out from the objective of assuring service production (Røvik et al., 2009).

### **Semifinished recipes**

How can it be that organizations introduces concepts and models that appears to be inconsistent? One explanation could be that in large organizations with several and different units contradictory ideas are not seen in conjunction with each other, thus inconsistency is not put into daylight (Røvik et al., 2009). Another explanation could be that rationalized myths are not physical objects, but immaterial ideas (Røvik et al., 2009). Contrary to physical objects, such as cars or buildings, Røvik et al. (2009) explain that ideas have not received their final form when they are available from the manufacturer. In this sense, they are semifinished recipes that needs to be completed locally in each organization (Røvik et al., 2009). Which makes them elastic on feasibility. Hence, concepts are interpreted locally and solutions are presented in terms of how the recipes should be joined together (Røvik et al., 2009).

### **The spread and fashion of myths**

Røvik in his study of the spread of three popular recipes, namely MBO, TQM and employee appraisals found seven characteristics that seemed to contribute to their wide distribution; they have all been attempted socially authorized, universalized, productivated, time marked, harmonized, dramatized and individualized (Røvik et al., 2009). Newer research points out five

groups of actors in particular relevance to the fast pace and spread of myths (Røvik et al., 2009). These are: (1) *a set of of bodies* (OECD, EU, FN etc.), (2) *consultancies* (ie Deloitte), (3) *Media* (ie Wall Strett Journal, Financial Times, The Economist), (4) *Management books* (ie The Practice of Management by Peter Drucker, In Search of Excellence by Peters and Waterman) , (5) *big multinational companies*. According to Røvik et al. (2009) it is widely believed that between these last four groups of actors is a kind of division of labor in terms of the roles that safeguard the development, dissemination and use of organizational recipes. In practice, however, the boundaries between the mentioned groups of actors have over the past 15-20 years become increasingly overlapped and unclear (Røvik et al., 2009). These various actor groups can be said to create and disseminate technical solutions to efficiency problems in different countries and public organizations within these fields (Røvik et al., 2009). When these technical solutions appears alike, it may be because the problems are similar between countries. Interpreted from a myth perspective, however, solutions spread primarily through myths and recipes with a considerable symbolic power (Røvik et al., 2009). One way to look at how the spread occur is by viewing myths as fashion (Røvik, 1998). Based on this metaphor, one can say that fashion (or a trend) is something that lasts for a while, before they go out of fashion and new ones become popular and receiving fashion status.

### **How recipes travel into organizations: adaption and implementation**

Reserachers have been especially concerned with two questions when it comes to the meeting between recipes (ideas) and organizations: why are organizations motivated to adopt rationalized myths in the form of popular organization recipes? What happens when the recipes are taken into the organization and adopted? (Røvik et al., 2009). Relevant to the first question is Dimaggio and Powell (1983) description of three isomorphic processes: *coercive, mimetic and normative*, which leads to a process in which organizations become more alike. Isomorphism may occur as a result of market competition (Nielsen, 2005). Coercive adaption means that organizations, such as through law and regulations, are required to introduce specific recipes (Nielsen, 2005). Mimetic adaption is emphasized when organizations in a period of great insecurity tries to imitate others with success and repute (Nielsen, 2005). Normative adaption refers to the spread and adoption occuring as a result of various professional groups and professions shared norms, values and skills (Nielsen, 2005). An example of this can be the economists' contribution to the spread of some of the basic ideas behind the reform wave labelled New Public Management (Røvik et al., 2009).



Røvik et al. (2009) stress that even though recipes are formally adopted, it does not mean that they are properly implemented or have guiding effects on activities in the organization. Organizational theory distinguish three expectations about what can be the outcome when recipes are attempted implemented. In brief, these are the theories of *fast connection*, *rejection and decoupling* (Røvik et al., 2009). The prerequisites for *fast connection* is however that the actual implementation happens easily, rationally and systematically. Modern concepts are often seen as quite fully developed and proven tools ready to be adopted. In light of a cultural perspective, *rejection* is emphasized. In this perspective organizations are understood as complex and value-bearing institutions, as generally resistant to reforms, especially in attempts of quick restructuring. The ideas could could potentially come in conflict with the values of the organization, such as hospitals struggling with reforms focused upon economic efficiency. In addition, popular recipes are too simple seen from the complexity in the organizations various work-processes. Therefore, if the recipes does not fit the organizational culture they are likely to be rejected. Although popular concepts are often both too vague and simple compared to the complexity of the tasks that organizations must address, and that they also may be perceived to be at odds with the basic values and norms of the organization, modern organizations still experience pressure from institutional surroundings to incorporate the contemporary and legitimate recipes (Røvik et al., 2009). Thus the following dilemma manifests itself: on the one hand is the concern for efficiency, often claiming that one should stick to well-established and experienced-based solutions, and on the other hand is the concern for taking on the ideas and recipes that at any given time are perceived as modern, and not least could provide the organization with external legitimacy (Røvik et al., 2009). A way of solving this dilemma, according to Røvik et al. (2009), is to adopt modern concepts but at the same time keep them *decoupled* in the way that they have little governing effects on activities. In this sense, the myths or recipes work as window-dressing to convince the surroundings that the organization is modern and efficient, without internal practice changing to a large extent (Røvik et al., 2009).

However, theories of fast connection, rejection and decoupling are criticized for being relatively weak empirically founded (Røvik, 1998). Røvik (1998) argue that longitudinale studies of intraorganisational adoption processes would most likely support an argument of modifying and supplementing the mentioned theories with other theories. In that respect, when the time horizon extends, *virus theory* and *translation theory* (Czarniawska & Sevón,

1996; Røvik et al., 2009) could better capture what happens when popular recipes are adopted and used. The expression virus is used as a metaphor to describe how new recipes enter organizations as a form of language infection that after a relatively long incubation time could turn out into changed routines and practices, in other words emphasizing a connection between new concepts and new approaches (Røvik, 1998). While the virus theory is about what recipes can do with organizations, translation theory is about what organizations can do with recipes (Røvik et al., 2009).

When recipes spread they are continually translated and converted into new versions and variants (Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996). Røvik (1998) distinguishes between three main types of explanations on how concepts are processed and translated internally: (1) rational strategic calculations, (2) unintended events and bounded rationality and (3) organizations attempting to manage their identity. Sometimes, followed by rational and strategic calculation, recipes accommodate to local conditions out of consideration to avoid triggering conflicts (Røvik, 1998). However, translation can happen unintended, for example as a result of incomplete knowledge about the concept's content among those who will implement it (Røvik et al., 2009). Goals and performance management in public organizations can serve as an example of this. Lastly, Røvik (1998) explains that organizational identity management takes place in a paradoxical tension between celebration of tradition and innovation, repulsion and attraction, and between the desire to be unique and at the same time equal to someone or something.

Therefore, intrusive popular concepts is a highly ambiguous stimuli for modern organizations in their attempts to develop and manage their identity (Røvik, 1998). Even though adopting a popular concept could help an organization to resemble other modern and successful organizations, it could also threaten the organizations distinctiveness by erasing what has been independent and unique (Røvik, 1998). Røvik (1998) stresses that the only way to deal with this fundamental ambiguity when one adopts a popular concept is to try to incorporate and balance the demands of being most similar to something/someone with the objective of being independent, i.e. the most unique. With this we understand that recipes spread, are interpreted and re-told, so new and different versions of them are constantly created. According to Røvik et al. (2009) this could be understood as an intermediate form between isomorphism and convergence (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, 1991) on the one hand, which is typical in the standard interpretation of a myth perspective, and divergence and diversity on the other side, which is typical of a culture perspective.

### **Rationalized recipes interpreted instrumentally and institutionally**

Popular organization recipes, from an instrumental perspective, are more or less well-trying tools that management can use in the ongoing efforts of making organizations more efficient (Røvik et al., 2009). From an institutional approach organizational recipes emerge however as bearers of meaning and rationalized symbols. This means that the emphasis is put on defining and presenting them as tools for greater efficiency and modernization. According to Røvik et al. (2009) they resemble modern society with values such as reason, efficiency, democracy and they are associated with continuous progress, with the movement onward and upward toward something ever better. Thus, the symbolperspective is connected to the utilityperspective and the instrumental tradition in a very complex way, and makes it difficult to imagine recipes as either (only) symbols or (only) effective tools (Røvik et al., 2009).

### **5.3 Goals and values**

In light of an instrumental perspective, objectives and underlying values in theory are assumed to have great importance for management of behavior, and it is expected that the effects and results reflect these (Røvik et al., 2009). This can be understood as the reason for increased focus on target and performance management and development of performance indicators in public organizations. The university is no exception. The core in this way of thinking seem to be a belief in consistency and clarity between goals and underlying values. Another core assumption is that there is a close link between clear values and objectives on the one hand and (re) organization of the public system on the other, meaning that formal structure follows changes in goals and values (Røvik et al., 2009). However, clear goals and values are no guarantee of fulfillment, which may be related to resistance within and outside governmental organizations or maybe because the conditions for putting goals into practice have changed over time. According to Røvik et al. (2009) the objectives are often too vague, inconsistent and complex, difficult to fulfill and they do not provide adequate frameworks of action for various actors. In this context, the criticism against NPM is relevant. One of the arguments for introducing NPM is that it becomes easier to place responsibility. Although the responsibility term changes with NPM, it is still difficult to quantify and measure results. Traditionally, public organizations are characterized by a wide and more culturally connected responsibility concept, while the modern concept of responsibility in NPM is more clearly instrumental and closely connected to reporting results from formal goals. In university context, this is a known problem. Therefore, it is interesting to study this issue further by expanding our understanding through using insights from a cultural perspective and a myth

perspective. In light of an cultural perspective one might discover that the maintenance of social networking, learning and self-realization are more important values as opposed to reaching formal goals (Røvik et al., 2009). In the myth persepective we learn that goals and values have a symbolic character and are not meant to have instrumental effects. Goals are thus a way to strengthen the legitimacy, while what actually controls the decision behavior can be led by both formal and informal structures (Røvik et al., 2009).

#### 5.4 A complexity perspective on change and leadership

When discussing change and leadership in the context of knowledge intensive organizations or institutions, such as NTNU, it is necessary to make use of perspectives that acknowledges the complexity of the university and its knowledge workers (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). Before turning the focus over to a complexity perspective on change and leadership, a change model is presented to support this understanding. Both focus (ie core activities) and change can be seen in light of Leavitt's change model (Leavitt, 1964). NTNUs core activities are mainly focused upon what Leavitt calls task and actors or what Hildebrandt (2011) in todays knowledge intensive society more appropriately calls sense making and people. In the following I have combined Leavitt's model with Hildebrandt and added NTNU's core activities.

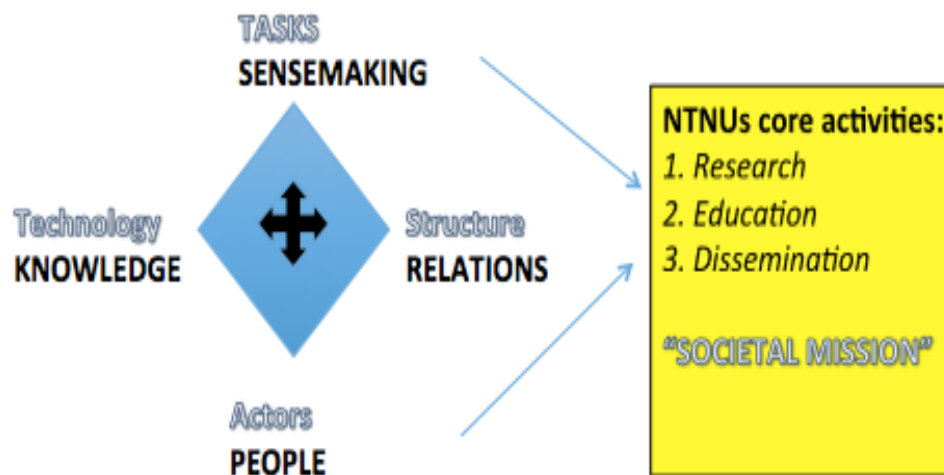


Figure 1 Change model inspired by Leavitt (1964) & Hildebrandt (2011)

The elements within this change model illustrates how the four elements of technology, tasks, structure, and actors are interrelated. For example, if technology changes, this would have certain implications and consequences for the remaining elements. In light of how NTNU is structured in terms of core activities we see that people and sensemaking are essential to the

survival of the university – it is the core of the university. In connection with the empirical presentation, the NTNU merger in the professors opinions are too strongly focused on formal structures. In light of the change model, the staff struggled to see how the merger made sense in order for them to fulfill NTNUs core activities. Hildebrandt (2011) criticized Leavitts's model "structure is about the division of labor, it is about how we organize ourselves in departments. But relationships between people are a lot more crucial and critical phenomenon in todays modern businesses than as opposed to the old industrial companies." In the context of NTNU, it could be argued that the university needs to focus more on institutional aspects, rather than allowing formalized structures become too governing. However, much of what happens in connection with the merger may be the result of bureaucratic thinking(Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

Complexity leadership theory (CLT) can be used as a tool to overcome limitations and weaknesses in traditional bureaucratic thinking (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). According to Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) CLT is a framework for management that facilitates learning, creativity and adaptability to complex adaptive systems in knowledge-producing organizations or organizational units. In this framework, hierarchical structure coexist with enabling adaptive functions across organizational levels of the hierarchy(Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). NTNU, in light of this framework is a complex adaptive (open) system (CAS). CAS can be explained as a neural-like network of interdependent, interacting agents involved in a cooperative relationship related to a common purpose, meaning, need or similar (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Understanding this interaction requires use of relational logic (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Which can also be seen in conjunction with the logic of the culturally appropriate presented in chapter 5.2.2 (Røvik et al., 2009). The components of the system [NTNU] must be understood in its entirety. Hence, the stories of the informants presented in chapter 4 must be placed and understood in a larger context. Good leadership in the context of CAS is emphasised through the entanglement of administrative management, enabling management and adaptive management (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). According to Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) entanglement describes the dynamic relationship between the formal top-down forces (bureaucracy) and the informal, complex adaptive emerging forces in social systems. Enabling management promotes interlocking between administrative and adaptive management through promoting organizational conditions for adaptive management, and through the dissemination of innovative ideas and product upwards and through the formal administrative systems (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

## 5.5 Towards a transformative approach: using multiple perspectives

So far I have tried to construct a theoretical basis by illustrating how one can understand public organizations (ie NTNU) in light of three different perspectives: instrumental perspective, cultural perspective and myth perspective. When trying to understand how public organizations are established, maintained and changed it is not enough with one-factor-explanations or in light of one single perspective. Instead they should be seen based upon a complex interplay of planned strategies, cultural bonds and external pressures (Røvik et al., 2009). Røvik et al. (2009) explained that in certain situations, strategies, historical heritage and myths play together and lead to extensive changes, while in other cases different circumstances counteract each other and contribute to stability. Similar to Røvik et al. (2009) I argue that in the meeting between these various influential factors a transformation could occur, meaning that reforms and restructuring attempts are being reformulated, adapted, modified and reinterpreted. Therefore, translation, revision or editing happens based on the contextual conditions the specific organization faces (Røvik et al., 2009). In addition to looking at the three paired relations between instrumentality, culture and myths separately, it is also important to look at the dynamics between them.

Transformation occur when different logics of action meet and are confronted in public decision making processes (Røvik et al., 2009). New informal norms and mixed cultures often occur in these cultural crossroads and consequently, one can potentially experience the emergence of new and hybrid formal organizational structures (Røvik et al., 2009). Such reasoning have been used in analyzes of the implementation of NPM. Røvik et al. (2009) draws upon a study of NPM in Norway, Sweden, New Zealand and Australia, where variations in the effects of this reform is seen as a complex interaction, and where political and administrative leaders leeway for promoting reforms is dependent on several factors.

In context of NTNU, it will be interesting to see how the informants translate the ongoing structural change in light of different perspectives, what type of historical-cultural context are found and to what extent the merger and overall structural reform seem to be in conflict or in correspondance with cultural characteristics? Rational arguments seem to stand in competition with what is seen as culturally appropriate. I leave all of these questions to be discussed further in the next chapter: *analysis and discussion*.

## 6 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter the empirical findings presented in chapter 4 are discussed in light of relevant theory from chapter 5 and the literature review presented in chapter 2. The literature review is particularly relevant to the first research question where a connection between international development and local interpretations are made evident. In the second research question I discuss how the informants interpret the meaning with the university in different ways. Research question three is concerned with changes in management model. In light of these three research questions the overarching problem statement is discussed in the end.

It should be pointed that certain quotations will be repeated in several places throughout the analysis. This simply indicates that an argument can be seen from various angles. In this way, the complexity of the case complex is emphasised, which is an important point in itself.

The conceptual framework for the empirical presentation and analysis is presented underneath. In order to avoid any misunderstandings, the model does not represent causality. I have only used it as an inspirational tool in the effort to question the relationship between empiricism and theory. For my readers, it is intended to provide an overview of the analysis.

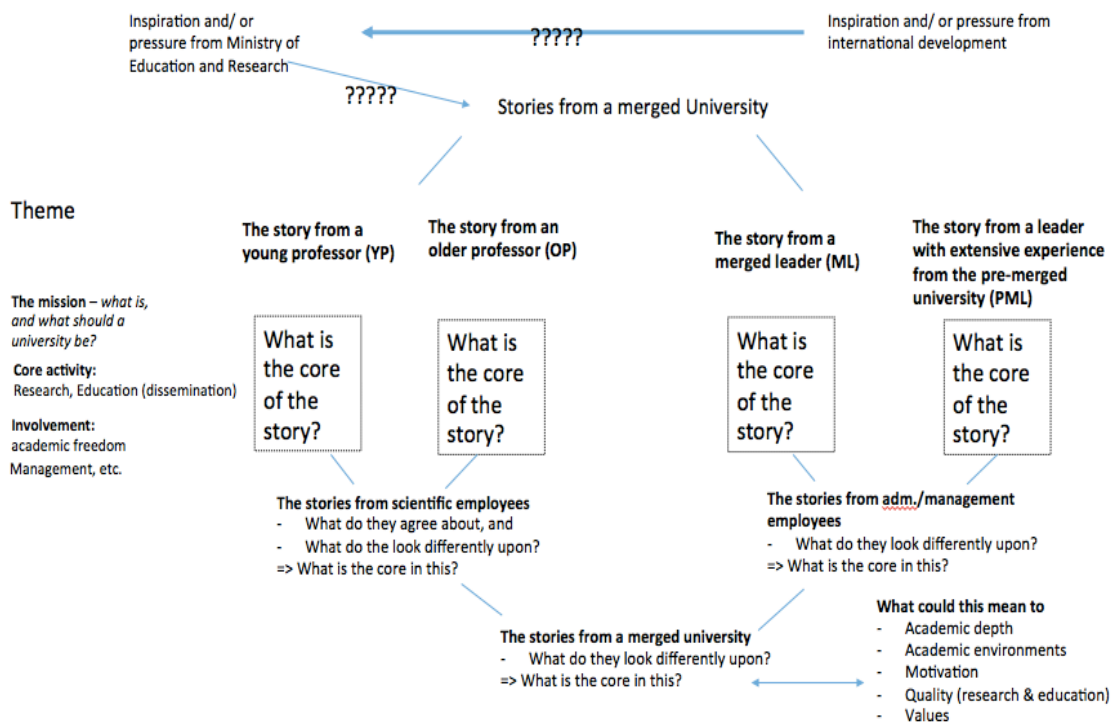


Figure 2 from empiricism to analysis: conceptual framework

## 6.1 Local interpretations of NTNU in an international context

*NTNU is a part of a greater national and international development of higher education, what is that the professors and the leaders emphasize in their local context and understanding of this development?*

The world is becoming increasingly globalized through various forms of internationalization strategies. Higher education is no exception (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2004). An important assumption in this dissertation is that national and local development in higher education has to be understood in a larger international context (Smeby, 1990). It is assumed that international development could inspire and at the same time put pressure on the direction Norwegian higher education is headed to day (Esmu, 2009). In order to clarify this connection it is necessary to see how my informants express their understandings of international developments in light of their local NTNU context. This is the background for research question one.

### 6.1.1 Changes in higher education

In the context of a global competitive knowledge-centred society, Jongbloed et al. (2008) found that higher education institutions had become target of an increasing number of external stakeholders. P. Scott (2003) and R. A. Scott (2003) explained that universities were encouraged to take on a wider range of new responsibilities and Bolden et al. (2009) emphasized that the universities were expected to deliver cutting-edge international research. Grepperud and Toska (2000) emphasized a need for innovation and the strengthening of the community citizens' qualifications. In the 1990s a similar development was found in Norwegian context. Smeby (1990) in his report on governance and evaluation of higher education did a comparison between five different countries - England, Netherlands, West Germany, Sweden and Denmark – and evaluated these in relations to Norwegian development. In connection with society's increased expectations to higher education institutions, Smeby (1990) explained among other things that research and teaching was increasingly seen as a tool for economic and technological development. Which could be interpreted as a desire for increased competitive advantages. Simultaneously the new requirements also posed new demands on the government management of higher education and of the internal management of the institutions in most countries in Western Europe (Smeby, 1990). Kyvik and Ødegård (1990) saw this development in light of society's demands for educational institutions and pointed out three important key words; improved



quality, greater relevance and greater efficiency. In the context of making universities more efficient, improving quality of both research and education, and making the quality of education especially more relevant to society, a tighter connection with the business world was highlighted as a necessary means (Gulbrandsen & Larsen, 2000). A development which, according to Gulbrandsen and Larsen (2000) was just as evident in a Norwegian context as well as internationally. We shall see later that that the same development is apparent in the context of NTNU.

One consequence of closer cooperation between the business sector and higher education institutions was highlighted by Barnett (2007) and Maassen et al. (2011). Barnett together with Maassen et al. (2011) emphasized that management principles derived from the private sector to monitor, measure, compare and judge professional activities had been applied as a way of enhancing the functioning of higher education (Barnett, 2007). In extension of this, Enders et al. (2013) argued that performance funding was not only meant as a tool for monitoring university performance but also as a way to incentivize universities to make strategic choices in line with government's goals. Which underpins an argument about how the government contributes to manage the development of universities. However, this development seem to potentially conflict with the Norwegian act on Universities and University Colleges § 1-5 which explicitly state that the universities must promote and defend academic freedom and that they cannot be instructed about the content of their teaching and the content of research or artistic or scientific development. Following Christensen and Lægveid (2004) and Smeby (1990) line of reasoning it could be argued that universities are facing challenges by globalization, internationalization and Europeanization leading to tensions concerning rationalizations, communalization, devolution, marketization, privatization and deregulation.

In connection with the challenges presented above, Davies et al. (2001) found that demands for greater efficiency, higher quality and reductions in public budgets had led countries to restructure their landscape of higher education. Maassen et al. (2011) explained that almost all European countries had reformed their landscapes of higher education in the last decades. From that perspective, Gornitzka (2009) together with R. Pinheiro et al. (2014) argued that the European commission had played a vital role in promoting a reform agenda aimed at modernizing higher education institutions by making them more efficient, accountable and responsive to external changing dynamics and external events. Which in light of my thesis reflects a certain pressure from international development that Norwegian higher education

should develop in a certain direction. An assumption that can be further confirmed through the government's decision on restructuring the landscape of Norwegian higher education announced on March 2015 in white paper 18 (2014-2015): concentration for quality – structural reform in university and university college sector.

In the white paper's chapter one it is explicitly stated that current social trends provide the foundation for a new reform. The introduction of chapter 1 reads as follows: "*Society is changing fundamentally and rapidly, globally, nationally and locally. The key to meet the changes lies in the higher education sector. Today's structure is not adapted to the future [...]*(St. meld nr. 18, 2014-2015, p. 1). It is further that: "*The global challenges affect all areas of society, including higher education and research. Higher education and research drives the knowledge economy and development of society, and is something both the established and emerging economies are investing heavily in*" (St. meld nr. 18, 2014-2015, p. 10). Lastly, the government emphasized the importance of globalization and technology: "*the combination of globalization and technological advances are changing the world economy and the division of labour leads to a polarization. Those who successfully exploit new technology to become more productive will be the winners, while the losers will be those who are replaced by technology*" (St. meld nr. 18, 2014-2015, p. 9).

In light of these arguments, one might question whether the government is afraid that Norway as a knowledge society will lag behind in the competition compared to other nations. In line with the statements of the Bologna declaration, it is evident that the government wants to increase Norwegian higher education systems attractiveness and competitiveness (Esmu, 2009, p. 8). To accomplish those goals, the government seems to rely on the arguments advocated by the Lisbon strategy about the need to re-structure a still fragmented higher education system into more powerful and more integrated institutions (Esmu, 2009, p. 8). Behind lies the assumption that this will ultimately strengthen Norwegian knowledge economy and society. This development however, reflects an increased focus on a stronger market orientation and it contributes to underpin a new understanding of what higher education would mean and include in the future.

The development argued above is also evident in my empiricism in chapter 4. All of the informants, both professors and leaders, confirm a movement driven by internationalization and stronger market orientation. Which has various consequences for them. The following

quote will highlight the consequence stronger market orientation has for time spent on writing applications for research funding versus the time spent on actually doing research:

*“[...] Temporary research positions, post-docs and so forth end up with spending limited time on research, because they need to think that ok I need to write a bunch of applications to have a job in a year, so that market-orientation is...evident [...] (quote, YP).”*

Despite the quote above reflecting not only increased attention on writing applications to get necessary funding, it also illustrates concerns regarding job safety. However, at this point, YP was not afraid of losing his job: *“If I do not choose to write the applications to EU or to the Research Council [...] I do not get fired (my emphasis) [...] internationally it is a different story.”* Consequently, if Norwegian higher education gets **too internationalized** (my emphasis), in my interpretation even YP will start to fear the potential loss of his job. What this point seem to reflect is not necessarily that the NTNU merger itself is particularly striking compared to other mergers, but rather that the merger symbolizes the concerns on behalf of an entire sector undergoing change. Underpinned by a direction towards increased internationalization and strategic management.

That being said, strategic management is not unfamiliar in the context of NTNU, already in 2005 unitary management was introduced at all levels. According to PML, it was argued that unitary management was not only *“a necessary grip”* back then but that it also had given NTNU’s strategic management *“considerable force.”* The same reasons seem highly applicable in today’s NTNU context. Following PML’s opinion, strategic management continues to be a huge advantage for NTNU when making a position both in the national and the international landscape of higher education: *“we can decide quickly, effectively and strategic.”* As such, PML was reflecting the benefits of NPM and seemed to be of the opinion that these managerial recipes had served the university well. In comparison, the professors represent a contrasting view by emphasising how strategic management seem to represent a conflict in the meeting between academic values and strategic priorities. A tension appears when we compare these more negative arguments with PML's clearly positive arguments. YP explained: *“what happened with hired leaders [...] is not really that much...you have the same people that could have been chosen that now have applied for the position instead.”* Even though the leaders remained the same, the change still marked a shift in loyalty, which was problematic according to YP: *“loyalty to institute leader is managed more upwards than*

*what has previously been collegial [...] strategic thinking and priorities are being pushed down [...],*” which could be interpreted as the main reason to why YP saw strategic management as a threat to (academic) independence: *“independence is being destroyed by strategic leadership.”*

Building upon YP’s argument, OP explained that currently the university(s): *“they are exposed to some types of pressures that will make it difficult to do the job that the university is meant to do in a good way.”* In light of these arguments, I understand that academic staff on the basis of stronger market orientation is experiencing it more problematic to perform their jobs in a satisfactory manner. Therefore, it can be argued that NPM-templates contribute negatively in the academic staffs’ performance of core activities, despite the fact that NPM are perceived as strength to NTNU's strategic management. It thus becomes a question of which values that will get priority in the future.

OP stressed that scientific staff spend more time on reporting about education quality rather than teaching: *“[...] people are spending more time reporting about teaching quality than actually spending time doing something with it.”* Could qualitative aspects be overshadowed by quantitative measurements reflected in statements such as the previous quote? It has already been confirmed that the trend is headed towards greater market orientation, suggesting neither that it becomes less strategic priorities, reporting or control nor will it become more academic independence. There are probably many good arguments for reporting on education quality, such as that it contributes to the visibility of quality, promotion of education and opportunities for additional resources to be facilitating improved quality. However, the problem seems to be that reporting becomes a time thief. Meaning that over time, this might end up damaging the quality of what reporting was initially supposed to increase. Although it appears to be a major challenge, in my interpretation too much reporting must be balanced with too little.

I would suggest that the development we see at NTNU and in higher education in Norway in general both can be interpreted as pressure and inspiration from international development. In the leaders stories the development seem to be expressed as inspiration, in addition to providing them with a certain amount of legitimacy to push forward with new directions such as strategic management because they can rely on this being a direction that "everyone else is doing - and have done successfully." In light of relevant theory, we see here the tendency

towards an instrumental approach and we can use the myth perspective in understanding these movements even better (Røvik et al., 2009). The instrumental aspects are expressed through how it is spoken about what role higher education should have in society. Research and education are referred to as tools and competitive advantages (Smeby, 1990). NTNU, in terms of their immediate access to research and education/teaching and in light of the instrumental perspective, represents an effective tool for achieving certain goals that are important to society, for example through increasing quality in higher education (Røvik, 1998; Røvik et al., 2009). In that sense, we could interpret NTNU as an effective tool open to the hands of their owners, which are the Government and the Ministry of Education and Research. NTNU becomes a tool for them to achieve their goal of further developing Norway as a knowledge society.

In this context, the myth perspective is particularly interesting. Precisely because this perspective illustrates how organizations are becoming more equal, at least on the outside, and at the same time how various recipes run in and out of fashion (Røvik, 1998). According to Røvik et al. (2009) different parts of an organization can be directed towards and depend upon the legitimacy of various external actor groups. In connection with NTNU, and in light of what PML argued, strategic leadership represents a legitimate recipe in the institutional surroundings (Røvik et al., 2009). Which can be further supported by the national analysis in the beginning of this chapter. With regard to the professors' views it should perhaps be questioned whether this recipe actually works in practice. OP, in an example, problematized the entrance of commando-control regimes at the university by arguing that there was a distance between how people were talking about the university and what was actually going on. He explained further how they were pretending to have a simple commando-control regime from rector to dean to institute leader. However, in practice this was not the case and the explanation seemed to lie in the lack of knowledge about how the higher education sector worked in practice. This points out how there can be a difference between talk and practice, which Brunsson (2002) called hypocrisy. It is also an example of how the myth perspective illustrates how it is possible to make organizations similar one the outside, although the inside may tell a very different story. However, recipes that falls under the umbrella of strategic management still wins forward, especially with management at NTNU, because they represent a direction that seems to be required for higher education in the future - at least if we are to follow the international trends.

### 6.1.2 Pressure, persuasion or inspiration?

Against the backdrop of the previous subsection it seems to be clear that NTNU have been persuaded by international development together with the decision made by the Ministry of Education to restructure the landscape of higher education as the right way to develop higher education institutions further in the future. As a response, NTNU merged with three other university colleges. As I referenced in chapter 6.1.1, Ministry of Research and Education argued that: *“Society is changing fundamentally and rapidly, globally, nationally and locally. The key to meet the changes lies in the higher education sector. Today's structure is not adapted to the future [...] in their introduction of white paper 18 on structural change (St. meld nr. 18, 2014-2015, p. 1). The argument found in the white paper could be interpreted as both pressure and inspiration (Røvik et al., 2009). In my interpretation, the phrase “key to meet the changes” goes in the direction of putting more pressure on the university as opposed to be a source of inspiration.*

Up against the Ministry of Research and Educations’ proclaimed arguments for structural change, NTNU seem to represent a kind of role model in the Norwegian context, especially with their interest to work closely with the business community (Smeby, 1990). Which seem to be a desired direction when following a quote by ML: *“regional market labour has reacted extremely positive and expectantly to this merger because NTNU has a reputation of being a university that is interested in cooperating with the business world.”* Similarly, YP also drew attention to NTNU’s innovative ability: *“thinking new thoughts”* when he talked about the meaning of the university. It was a distinct feature he claimed. At the same time YP might not have been as strongly inspired by the closer connection with the business world as the leaders were, however, he still considered it important to: *“build new knowledge that also can build new activity, new industry, new ways of organizing society [...]”* It appears to be a delicate balance between professors 'and managers' opinions and interpretations regarding social responsibility (social mission), innovation, knowledge and whether the merger is helping to strengthen this or not. It must thus be expressed caution against drawing too swift conclusions. OP was the only one explicitly stating that: *“I think that the decision on merger was wrong [...]”* His tone was more conservative and his opinion could be reflected as an extremity, however it has to be seen in conjunction with the fact that he could not see the purpose with the merger: *“[...] sometimes, it seems like the only goal is to create Norway’s largest university.”* This only indicates that sensemaking is important (ref Leavitt change model), and that OP quite possibly could have been of another opinion if the merger made

sense to him (Leavitt, 1964; Nielsen, 2005). Connecting universities with university colleges can also be interpreted as a way of making education even more relevant to society (Kyvik & Ødegård, 1990). The same could apply in the context of NTNU. The merged institutions are known to have a close connection with the business world and they are more focused upon vocational training. The reason for NTNU to merge with the university college ML came from was *“due to their educational profile and the fact that they had an interesting collaborative environment with various businesses in their region.”* In addition ML argued the merger in light of international trends *“it is being restructured around us in Europe with mergers to be able to stand stronger [...].”* ML explained further that: *“there are expectations of NTNU marking a new era”*, which everyone from businesses, to business clusters, municipalities, regions and counties seemed to believe in. In other words, there exists a belief that NTNU together with the business world will create synergies. Which was also a point advocated by Gulbrandsen and Larsen (2000).

Competition in higher education is inevitably getting tighter. Against the backdrop of fiercer international competition and as another reason for merger, ML argued: *“it is not enough to produce in the old-fashioned way [...] because the competition is getting so close [...] you see that you can do a lot more if you merge the forces.”* Again the arguments seem to have their root in an instrumental interpretation (Røvik et al., 2009). When ML, for example, explained that they could do more by joining the forces, a logic of consequences is brought to the surface (Røvik et al., 2009). Røvik et al. (2009) explained this logic by illustrating when a university for example faced a set of possible forms of leadership, their choice of leadership strategy would depend upon expected consequences in relations to achieving goals. In light of PML's argument there is an expectation that the merger will have positive consequences: *“together we are going to make a win-win situation for the entire NTNU and society.”*

### **6.1.3 Tensions in the academic environment**

In the meeting between internationalization, academic values and increased focus on strategy, tensions arise in the academic environment. Despite the argued merger goals by the Ministry of Education together with NTNU's arguments for merging it is impossible to overlook the tensions arising in the academic environment, especially in the meeting between internationalization, academic values and increased focus on strategy (Christensen & Lægneid, 2004). The goal of improving the quality of higher education in itself is a goal both the professors and the leaders can agree on. The problem, however, seems to lie in how to the

goal is supposed to be achieved. While the Ministry of Education advocated re-structuring leading to a wave of mergers, the academic society was sceptical if this was the right way to do it. OP expressed concern as to what value in his opinion the merger appeared to be built on: “[...] a pure efficiency value. Hence, things are supposed to be relatively cheaper, give better results [...].” YP argued: “it is important to reflect a little upon what the university is meant to be, since the entire sector is in quite a major change.” In light of my empirical data, it is evident that the professors was missing a discussion on what the purpose of the merger was and how it was supposed to help increase the quality of the university's core tasks, namely research and education.

YP expressed concerns about too much focus on structure and a lack of discussion about content and quality: “what I am sceptical about is the type of discussions that are just on the structural level [...].” According to OP the university was challenged by: “too much attention around organizational conditions and too little attention on what we are supposed to do in terms of research, education and dissemination [...].” OP saw this in connection with a shift from collegial assessment of quality to statistical evaluation: “too much focus on quantity and too little in the actual quality of what is being done [...].” Both OP and YP used number of scientific publications as an example of the most used statistical quality measurement today, which was according to OP: “relatively loosely coupled to the quality understanding in the academic environments.” According to the professors, when the number of publications became more important than the content itself it should go without saying that it is problematic. In this sense, we could say that the quality indicators work against their purpose. The professors are especially responsible for conducting research, education and dissemination. Unlike the leaders they have a more unique connection to the university's core activities. They work directly with teaching and research. In this sense, they sit in the driver's seat. It is on the basis of this unique association one can begin to understand the tension that emerges as a result when for example qualitative evaluation are being replaced by an increased focus on statistical quality indicators. In this context, the theoretical understanding needs to be expanded with insights from the cultural perspective because the instrumental perspective comes short (Røvik et al., 2009).

Contrary to logic of consequences which was found in the instrumental perspective, March and Olsen (1989) introduced the logic of appropriate behaviour. Based on this logic, decisions are taken based upon what is perceived as culturally appropriate (March & Olsen, 1989) and



relevant to this logic Røvik et al. (2009) pointed out three important questions related to recognition, identity and matching. Matching was explained as a process in which situations and identities were connected. It could be argued that there is no match between what the professors' view as an appropriate way of increasing quality within higher education and how the Ministry of Education and Research used mergers as a tool to increase quality. In this sense, the logic of what is culturally appropriate come in conflict with a logic of consequences, where the former is focused upon the process and the latter is focused on the result. Relating this to the change model inspired by Leavitt (1964) and Hildebrandt (2011) on page 66, it also becomes apparent that while the professors are focused upon actors and tasks the Ministry of Research and Education in addition to management at NTNU have been more focused upon structure and technology. But as the model illustrated, it was impossible to change one element without affecting the remaining elements. Which leaves a question for contemplation, how to unite these elements in a good way?

#### 6.1.4 Summarizing research question 1

In this chapter I have discussed how NTNU is a part of a greater national and international development of higher education and I analysed what the professors and the leaders emphasized in their local context and understanding of this development.

##### **(1) Changes in higher education**

- *Pressure or inspiration:* (depending upon interpretation) from international trends leading to white paper on structural change. Result: mergers. Goal: increase quality within higher education to ultimately increase the competitiveness of Norway as a knowledge society. In line with the Bologna declaration and the Lisbon strategy.
- *Stronger market orientation:* tighter connection with the business world, also as a way of improving quality of both research and education, and making the quality of education especially more relevant to society.
- *The university as a tool:* for economic and technological development.
- *Strategic management:* a tool for success and a tool for disruption.

##### **(2) Pressure, persuasion or inspiration?**

- NTNU persuaded by international development and the Ministry of Education to restructure the landscape of higher education as the right way to develop higher education institutions further in the future.

- *A change with a bitter after taste?* Leaders are inspired? Professors feel pressured?

### **(3) Tensions in the academic environment**

- *Tensions in the meeting between internationalization, academic values and increased focus on strategy:* the performance of core activities seems to be changing with increased focus on quantitative quality indicators -> strategic priorities a threat?

The chapters are closely connected with each other and must therefore be seen in its entirety. What has been discussed in this chapter have relevance to how the leaders and the professors interpret the meaning of the university differently, which will be the focus in next chapter.

## **6.2 Different perspectives on the meaning of the university**

*How is the meaning of the university interpreted differently through the perspectives of the professors and the leaders?*

Another assumption made in this thesis was that there are various interpretations of the meaning of the university and that these are embedded in the context under study. I expected both similarities and differences among my informants. Especially considering what they regarded as the most important task(s) at the university and how it should be managed. Hence it became important to try and obtain what seemed to be the essence of their stories. I believe this can tell us something important about the content of the university – today and in the future. Which in turn could be used to begin to understand what could potentially be at stake.

### **6.2.1 A traditional interpretation of the university**

#### **The special role of the university: the link between research and education**

The fundamental role of the university has always been teaching and research and the university has depended upon having a large degree of institutional autonomy in order to safeguard this role (Clarke et al., 1984). All of the informants agreed upon the role of the university being research, education/teaching and dissemination and they emphasized that the special characteristic with the university was the deep connection between research and education.

According to Clarke et al. (1984) “a university” signified a community of scholars grouping together to educate the clergy. Their mission was to enable a community of scholars to

critically evaluate the intellectual standards and development of society (Clarke et al., 1984). ML was the informant who most clearly reflected upon different ways of understanding the meaning of the university in his story. The explanation could be found in the question I asked: *what is the purpose of the university and how will you with your own words describe what a university is about?* Before asking this question I had also explained that I was interested in different ways of understanding the university and I referred to a traditional way and a more modern way. Therefore, he started his answer with discussing the university in history and gave references to Humboldt. I interpret this as a confirmation on how the context together with how I asked the question has significance for the answer being given. Similar to Clarke et al. (1984), ML explained that “[...] *it started as an idea about a higher learning way where some masters gathered some learning friends around them and developed a collegial cooperation of learning at the highest level of **what society needed at that time** [...](my emphasis).*” The core in ML’s story is that the meaning with the university depends on the perspective one holds and that it has shifted with the needs of society. The meaning and the purpose of the university have in ML’s words: *“developed...it has gone in waves.”*

In relations to the traditional understanding of a university, ML referred to Humboldt and explained that Humboldt had at one point in history found himself in a situation where the outside world (ie management, state management etc.) had meant that the universities should be considered as tools to the hands of society, and that Humboldt had opposed. ML explained that Humboldt strongly believed that universities should be allowed free formation of opinion and free knowledge development. In many ways, one might say that the views of Humboldt reflect some of the ongoing tensions within today's university world.

ML managed to create a much clearer distinction between how the university could be interpreted in light of history and what he in today's society would emphasize as being the meaning of the university. PML on the other hand, referred to NTNU’s strategy and the merger platform instead of using his own words: *“this is sort of what we want with the merger based on a somewhat overarching view of what a university should be [...] what NTNU believes a university should be.”* ML was clearly concerned that the contemporary university should not only educate students with the best of knowledge within different science areas, but also follow a tradition with educating students of relevance to what was important in society: *“that is what you want, and all the time there will be a discussion on what society needs, whom should decide what society needs [...].”* ML expressed in this way

how he was most concerned about a tighter link between the university and society, in addition to implicitly imply disagreement around who it is that should decide on behalf of society's needs. PML seemed to be of the same understanding.

According to PML, even though dissemination was an important task as defined by law, it was at the same time the task being most neglected today. This could be linked to an increased focus on the university's role in society and a closer connection with the business world (Gulbrandsen & Larsen, 2000). In that connection, PML emphasized dissemination not only in scientific terms, but also disseminating research to the public: *"expectations from society that education and research must have significance related to the innovative ability of a society [...] to be able to use and apply knowledge."* This could imply a belief that research will contribute to strengthen the competitiveness of Norwegian society (Smeby, 1990). Contrary YP reflected dissemination in terms of moral training: *"it is about taking some sort of intermediary role in a broad social sense [...] and to be a critical independent voice in society. Criticizing changes in society was part of the job according to YP: "I see it as my job to criticize changes that I mean are bad [...] the type of structural changes that has a little type of generality... that you can discuss the reasons for."*

YP emphasized that it was important to be given the right to pursue an "uncompromised pursuit of knowledge and quality in that knowledge." To some extent we can find traces of this way of thought in the Universities and University Colleges Act § 1-5 where it is stated, *"universities must promote and defend academic freedom [...]"*. However, the interpretation of this wording varies. Although society has changed over the years, the traditional thought with its associated values still seems to be strong. Autonomy have traditionally been specifically protected in Norway, although a transition from regulative control to performance management is registered today (Smeby, 1990). YP for example, explained that as long as Norwegian universities remain owned by the state it is possible, and worth fighting for, stronger market orientation.

### **Social mission: different interpretations**

There are different perceptions on how the university's social responsibility (societal mission) should be interpreted. Questions are raised concerning the contents of the mission and what imposing constraints this have for the performance of the university's core tasks. Within this discussion, in light of my empirical data, there are particularly disagreements about how

strong ties NTNU should have with the business world. Nevertheless, business terminologies seem to increasingly rub off on how it is spoken about the university. In this context, NTNU serve as a manufacturing company and academic staff is the most important input in the production of goods, such as students and publications. One of those who expressed concern for this change was YP: “[...] *Immediately when you start to talk about production at the university one should be a little careful, because it means that one may become more committed to just produce stuff rather than producing important stuff.*” YP saw this “production” (ie research) in light of what should be relevant to society. Increased focus on production can affect both quality and relevance. Research for example, does not have to be relevant tomorrow, but it could be relevant in fifty years.

In my interpretation, YP was concerned that an increased focus on production would lead to a short-term development perspective, which ultimately could damage the quality of research. Meanwhile, one could ask whether the business world increasingly gets to decide what is relevant research and not? If that is the case, this could lead to the commodification of research to the highest bidder and thus not research for the benefit of society as a whole. Despite the opposite being the goal. At the same time a closer connection with the business world may not necessarily be such a cause for concern. There might be many good things coming from this connection. In one example the merged leader (ML) highlighted that a health care enterprise had wanted to work together with the health care education at NTNU. In this connection there could be a potential of making education better and even more socially relevant. In that sense, it is probably more a question about balancing too much involvement with too little involvement, as opposed to not being involved with the business world at all. According to ML, the focus after all it is about creating “*a win-win situation for the entire NTNU and society.*”

### **What values should the university build upon?**

According to OP it was complicated to answer what values the university should be founded upon: “*last time I counted NTNU had 27 different goals they were trying to measure on [...] reflects and attempt to try and make some sort of dimensional analysis of what is called the “social mission” like if that in itself is a given size.*” In light of my empirical data, it is evident that there are tensions concerning what values NTNU is founded upon and shall continue to be founded upon in the future. It seems to be a difference between expressed values and experienced values. YP in particular stressed the importance of discussing values with

relations to change: *“it is important to reflect a little upon what the university is meant to be, since the entire [UH] sector is in quite a major change.”* It seems almost self-evident that something is going to happen with the values of a university when the university structure changes. Maybe the stated values remain the same, but on the contrary they will most likely get a different content. With reference to the quote by OP in the beginning of this paragraph, the question is not which values to choose or how many values one should have, but more about what content the values are reflecting.

Røvik et al. (2009) in their explanation of the difference between public and private organizations highlighted among other things that public organizations were multifunctional with a broader set of goals and values, and that they were supposed to preserve sometimes contradictory considerations (Røvik et al., 2009, p. 9). This same description appears to be applicable also in relations to my empirical data. The professors as opposed to the leaders gave much stronger expression to be concerned with a value discussion. Which can be seen in connection with how the values have special significance for how the professors understand their profession. At the same time these values seem to reflect what is important in the performance of research and teaching. NTNU's official values are: *creative, constructive, critical, respectful and considerate*. The values that appear in the light of the empirical data can be summarized as (1) *independence*, (2) *professional integrity*, (3) *relevance*, (4) *humanism and respect* (5) *tolerance for diversity*. YP and OP highlighted independence as the most important value. PML, however, remained short and precise as to what he saw as important values in the university context. In my interpretation it could have been to do with this being a sensitive matter or maybe more likely because of his administrative/leadership role. In that sense, he has to be “in tune” with NTNU's strategy. ML expressed values in the following way: *“[...] this is described in more detail in NTNU's objectives and strategy document, and I have no other opinion except that these are good values.”* In the following the values expressed by the professors are described a bit further.

### ***(1) Independence***

The most important aspect of a university and thus the most important value, was according to both YP and OP, independence. To YP independence was about the ability to prioritize activities, such as research and curriculum based upon different subjects. OP explained that the university was relatively independent compared to other social institutions. He connected independence with *“independent critical examinations, and truth endeavours”* among other

things. Independence could be interpreted as the main driving force in the performance of the university's core tasks. When YP expressed independence as the ability to prioritize activities on a professional basis, it could for example be questioned whether subjects will suffer under the pressure of more strategic priorities instead of academic priorities? What will happen to the quality of education and research?

### **(2) Professional integrity**

According to YP professional quality can be described as: "*being given a fair space, a rightful space to develop their own subject areas [psychology, anthropology, social economy etc].*" By this he meant that all disciplines should be acknowledged their fair space in university context and get opportunities to develop their portfolio of subjects.

### **(3) Relevance**

Relevance is about making relevant research and education. To make sure that research and education is also relevant to society. A value that has become even more important in today's knowledge-intensive society. But it seems to be a difference between whether one takes a short-term or long-term perspective on this relevance. YP was of the opinion that relevance should be defined broadly and more long-term: "*does not have to be relevant today, or tomorrow [...] it can be relevant in fifty years.*" Why he made this statement should be seen in the context of how relevance is related to quality: "*when NTNU starts talking about production at the university [...] it means that one may become more committed to just producing stuff rather than producing important stuff. (YP)*" Which could ultimately imply a shift towards a short-term perspective on relevance.

### **(4) Humanism and respect**

In addition to see humanism as respect for all people, YP explained that in university context, it was just as much about: "*respect for different types of knowledge, different views, different methods [...].*" Consequently it is also about respecting different perspectives and have **(5) Tolerance for diversity.**

The values mentioned above seem to come in conflict with the entrance of strategic management at the university and an increased focus on commando-control regimes. In OP's interpretation the value of efficiency seemed to be the driving force behind the merger, but

also the overall structural change. Which reflects tensions between a logic of consequences and a logic of appropriate behaviour (March & Olsen, 1989; Røvik et al., 2009).

### 6.2.2 A modern interpretation of the university

The modern university can be understood as the result of a more globalised higher education sector with an increased competition for students among other things (Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007). However, the modern interpretation of the university essentially marks a stronger focus on the needs of society. As a way of increasing the innovative ability and competitive advantages of society research and education will be more open to the business world (P. Scott, 2003). At the same time, this change marks a shift from governing the universities on a collegiate basis to managing them more strategically (Davies et al., 2001). This type of university is often referred to as the entrepreneurial university (Deem, 2001).

R. Pinheiro and Stensaker (2014) explained that becoming an entrepreneurial institution could be identified as the solution to the problems facing contemporary higher education systems, such as decreased quality, lack of efficiency and poor relevance in an increasingly fiercer national and global competitive environment. In that connection, there have also been expressed some concerns. R. Pinheiro and Stensaker (2014) argued that domestic and institution-specific characteristics of universities could potentially be downplayed in favour of a more uniform idea of what a university should do and how it should be organized (R. Pinheiro & Stensaker, 2014). This development makes sense through a myth perspective. In the perspective of myths, organizations are institutionalized through adopting models or modern organizational recipes of what is seen as appropriate to similar organizations in their surroundings, thus making them more alike, at least on the surface (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983, 1991; Røvik, 1998; Røvik et al., 2009).

The same trend prevails at NTNU. Although NTNU is known as an innovative university, the merger is a way of increasing this ability even more. Similar to international trends, NTNU is managed more strategically. Even though new public management templates have been criticized for downplaying differences between the private and the public by presenting universal recipes, PML confirmed that these recipes had been a benefit to NTNU. It had become easier to place responsibility and it was easier for the outside world to understand how the university was managed, who was in charge and so on. However, that does not mean that NPM always serve as a good. The professors had a completely different opinion. To them



new public management meant stronger control. Which had a direct consequence in the way they would perform research and teaching. YP argued that it was a problem to try to control researchers that were supposed to have a very liberated position. In contrast, Norwegian universities remain owned by the state and are publicly funded through tax revenues, therefore, PML found control necessary: *“one has to have some sort of control, politically, from society to how the money are managed,”* in addition he emphasized that academic freedom should not be mixed with a type of privatized business: *a professor is a public employee and must be expected to deliver back to society [....].* ”In other words, there is a lack of consensus between the leaders and the professors concerning expectations and how these expectations should be solved. It becomes a matter of balancing too much control with too little control. In some ways, there seem to be an inevitable tension between tradition and modernity (Røvik et al., 2009).

### 6.2.3 Summarizing research question 2

In this chapter I have discussed how the meaning of the university is interpreted differently through the perspectives of the professors and the leaders. This discussion seems to represent the core of why different roles and perspectives come to clash.

#### **(1) A traditional interpretation of the university vs. a modern interpretation of the university**

- *Traditional academic values:* independence, professional integrity, relevance, humanism and respect, and tolerance for diversity.
- *Modern priorities:* NTNU with stronger focus on the needs of society, research and education will be more open to the business world as way of strengthening society's innovative ability and competitive advantages.
- *Shift from collegiate management to strategic management:* inspired by NPM.
- *Inevitable tension between tradition and modernity:* the performance of core activities are changing – research and teaching under pressure by strategic priorities.

Against that background, the stakes begin to emerge out from the shadow. Which will be discussed in its entirety in chapter 6.4. On the way there, it is important to bring the discussion of the next chapter, namely how strategic management can at the same time both inspire and challenge the idea and development of the university.

### 6.3 How strategic management seems to be changing the university

*In light of these different perspectives, how does strategic management inspire and at the same time challenge the idea and development of the university?*

It has become clear, in light of my empiricism, that strategic management at NTNU works both inspiring and challenging at the same time. In my interpretation strategic management inspires leaders in the way against what they see as key priorities for the university forward, while at the same time this direction challenge the professors' understanding of what they consider the best way to carry out their daily work. In this sense, it can be argued that the purpose of the university is changing. Although the university still remain state-owned and enjoys a relatively high degree of independence, the trend is similar to what was uncovered in the international analysis towards a stronger market orientation (Gulbrandsen & Larsen, 2000).

#### 6.3.1 Strategic management inspired by NPM

In the context of NTNU, a closer link to the business community has also been emphasized, which the leaders in my empiricism highlighted as positive and favourable. ML pointed out an example on how a meeting with a business partner had resulted in a partnership with one of the educational programs at NTNU: “[...] the CEO had invited an observer from another industry [...] because of another role he had in a large health cooperation he wanted to connect this cooperation with the health care education at NTNU.” Not only are these connections intended to facilitate research and education by making sure that they remain socially relevant, but they are also supposed to help solve major societal challenges. In which ML argued to be: “a part of the Norwegian culture...joint European cultural heritage.”

There seems to be an expectation that the university should be held more accountable in its prioritization of progress. This implies also that the professors in greater extent than in the past must be kept responsible for the development of their work. Which was argued by PML: “a professor is a public employee and must be expected to deliver back to society, and it has to be requirements for that.” This change however, has led to increased use of statistical quality indicators. It can be questioned whether this marks a transition toward research and education as a commodity, rather than formation of opinions and critical reflection? The development seems to represent a very contradictory relationship. The professors are therefore more naturally sceptical about this development as opposed to the leaders. They are

after all the “main input” in the “production” of research and education. Meaning that their concerns must be taken seriously since they are essential to the “production” and quality of work. In this context, one of YP’s arguments can be highlighted: *immediately when NTNU starts talking about production at the university one should be a little careful because it means that one may become more committed to just producing stuff rather than producing important stuff.*” In my interpretation, YP was implying that this could potentially lead to research and education with lower quality and ultimately less (social) relevance.

When NTNU decided to merge this can be argued to have its basis in inspiration from international trends and pressure from the Ministry of Education that restructuring was necessary to solve the university's core activities and societal mission in the future. The explanation seems to be based on an instrumental mindset. In this lies a belief in consistency and clarity between goals and underlying values (Røvik et al., 2009). In other words that changing the structure through merger is closely connected to changes in goals and values. In this sense, strategic management also seem unproblematic. However, the problem with this line of reasoning is that it have not taken into account the institutional aspects of organizational change at NTNU. Cultural traditions, established rules and socially defined conventions have in many ways been put in the shadow, but they have not disappeared. Following Røvik et al. (2009) argument, change in the context of a university does not occur easily in accordance with shifting demands from the environment or from changing political leadership (Røvik et al., 2009). NTNU have to live with contradictory consideration which have been exemplified several times through the competing logics of the professors’ and the leaders.

According to Røvik et al. (2009) the arguments for introducing NPM is that it becomes easier to place responsibility. Which was confirmed by the leaders in my empiricism. PML, who was close on facilitating the decision to introduce unified management at NTNU in 2005 stressed that: *“I have been quite close on assessing and implementing that [...] I considered it as a necessary grip I 2005 [...] I mean that it has given force to NTNUs strategic management[...].”* The main problem PML appeared to have with shared management was lack of clarity as to who made the decisions: *“I think that anyone outside the university will say we do not understand this, where is the decision capability, where is the strategic capability?”* It was evident that PML valued clarity with respect to who made decisions and that this was important to external surroundings. ML also saw strategic management as an

obvious advantage in today's society: “[...] a tool for building the welfare state in the long foreseeable [...] at the same time focusing strongly on that the universities role is education, research which is connected to education, but also interaction with society, to give something back to society [...] and that is politically desired.” Although the leaders seem to be in agreement regarding strategic management, the professors were of another opinion. Which has its explanation in how this is affecting their daily work. According to OP quantitative quality indicators had accelerated in Norway over the last 10 years, the most used indicator was: “number of publication points...this is how the Ministry measures quality. Relatively loosely coupled to the quality understanding in the academic environments.” Consequently, in YP’s experience, shift from collegial quality assessment to increased use of statistical indicators put pressure on academic environments and lead to: “too much focus on quantity and too little on actual quality of what is being done.”

The main problem YP seemed to have with strategic management was related to shifts in loyalty: “loyalty to institute leader is managed more upwards than what has previously been collegial [...] strategic thinking and priorities are being pushed down [...] it is a problem that you are trying to control academics that are supposed to have a very liberated position”, therefore, on institute level YP still thought: “[...]the academic model is in a way the good model.... Mostly because you do not need that much leadership.” Even though the responsibility term seem to have changed successfully at NTNU, management are still fighting a relatively hard battle to legitimize tools focused on quantification and measurement of results internally at the university. Mostly because these tools are in conflict with the academic quality understanding at the university and in the professors understanding it seem to put certain (negative) pressure on how they perform their work. These contradictions seem to confirm how NTNU must live with tension and disagreement (Rainey, 2009). Which in my interpretation indicates that it would be beneficial to consider change in light of a complexity perspective.

### **6.3.2 Complexity leadership theory: an alternative to NPM**

Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) explained that complexity leadership theory (CLT) can be used as a tool to overcome limitations and weaknesses in traditional bureaucratic thinking (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). In this framework, hierarchical structure coexist with enabling adaptive functions across organizational levels of the hierarchy (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Instead of shadowing the institutional aspects such as NPM-templates have a tendency to do, this perspective provide

an alternative way of thinking and doing change by illustrating how formal structure co-exist with relational structures by focusing on learning, creativity and adaptability. NTNU in light of this framework is a complex adaptive (open) system (CAS). Which symbolizes a neural-like network of interdependent, interacting agents involved in a cooperative relationship related to a common purpose, meaning, need or similar (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Understanding this interaction requires use of relational logic, which seem to work well together with a logic of appropriate behaviour (Røvik et al., 2009; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

My informants stories stand in stark contrast especially when it comes to what constitutes good management and leadership in academia. The professors preferred the academic model while the leaders preferred the strategic model. In my interpretation the complexity perspective give space for these contrasting views by not attempting to resolve their contradictions like they were a virus, but by offering an alternative way for them to work together. Because it can not be argued in general terms that one model is better than the other. Both have good and bad aspects. The complexity perspective enable the models to work together through drawing on each other's strengths. This way of thinking organization and management takes into account the unique context that belongs to any change process. CLT also help to clarify the embeddedness of the four elements in Leavitts change model. By considering these two models in light of NTNU, CLT seem to do a better job in explaining how practice at the university function and why change is difficult. Rather than to ignore the complexity that belong in any change process, the complexity is brought to the surface and taken seriously. In return, it is also conceivable that the complexity itself serve as a paradox. CLT represents no simple recipe for performing management, it is processual and time-consuming. It is in many ways more demanding. By comparison, the various recipes under the New Public Management (NPM) umbrella represents simplicity, while having legitimacy in the surroundings (Røvik, 1998). For those reasons I believe that NPM-templates will still prevail, also in the context of NTNU, despite the fact that CLT might do a better job in explaining how practice works. Which is also one of the main points that was mentioned in the myth interpretation of the university (Røvik et al., 2009).

### **6.3.3 Summarizing research question 3**

In this chapter I have discussed how strategic management can inspire and at the same time challenge the idea and development of the university in light of the different perspectives discussed in chapter 6.2.

### **(1) Strategic management inspired by NPM**

- *The leader are inspired:* a necessary good, easier to place responsibility, provide clarity in decision-making, a force to strategic management, a tool for building the welfare state, politically desired.
- *The professors feel pressured:* shifts in loyalty and strategic priorities emanating from top to bottom, increased control, shift from collegial quality assessment to increased use of statistical quality indicators, the academic model is the good model because academics do not need that much leadership.
- *Strategic management in conflict with the academic quality understanding.*
- *NTNU must live with tension and disagreement:* how to find a balance?

### **(2) Complexity Leadership theory as an alternative to NPM**

- *Strategic model in company with the academic model:* working out a balance.
- *Using relational logic:* similar to a logic of appropriate behavior.
- *Complex model:* sensitive to context, taking complexity seriously.
- *Complexity a paradox:* NPM represents simplicity.

On the basis of this chapter, together with discussions from chapter 6.1 and 6.2 I will in the following aim to give an answer to the overarching problem statement.

## **6.4 The clash between traditional academic values and strategic management**

*In the meeting between strategic management and traditional academic values a possible conflict might emerge. How can this conflict be understood, and what seems to be at stake?*

### **6.4.1 What seems to be at stake?**

NTNU like most other universities is exposed to some particular types of pressure that, according to OP "[...] will make it difficult to do the job that the university is meant to do in a good way," today and in the future. Some places these pressures are related to reduced allocations, other places they are connected with new management models and increased commando-control regimes. OP claimed that this trend was just as evident in the Norwegian context: "increasingly more things has to be reported and controlled." He believed that this would have consequences for the quality of education and availed the opportunity to criticize the quality regime in education of being expired. The older professor explained that university

employees traditionally had been strongly motivated to do their work and that increased control affected their motivation negatively. This motivation (and way of organizing), the younger professor called the academic premise, and he agreed with OP that: *“it is a problem that you try to control academics that are supposed to have a very liberated position.”* In this context, YP argued that *“independence are being destroyed by strategic management.”* On question related to what seemed to be at stake in light of the ongoing merger and the broader structural change, OP answered: ***“the quality of the work ( under pressure by statistical indicators) and the attractiveness to work in this sector (my emphasis).”*** The younger professor included that when NTNU decided to merge with university colleges this had led to a stronger focus on vocational training which could in time lead to a more narrow academic offer: *“the consequence of a pure vocational education in type of merger direction [...] could possibly lead to the loss of certain academic environments, or some academic employees.”* This seemed to be YP’s strongest fear. Both professors agreed that the attractiveness of working in higher education was in jeopardy – especially if the development would continue in the direction emphasized by YP.

### **Merger, quality and the future [NTNU] university**

When it came to academic depth and quality, OP explained that the quality of work seemed to be under pressure of statistical indicators: *“[...] the paradox for you students is that people are spending more time reporting about teaching quality than actually spending time doing something with it.”* If for example the number of publications would receive precedence over the quality of the publications, this could potentially lead to what YP called a *“streamlined sector”* with a *“superficial consideration of quality.”* YP explained further that in relations to the NTNU merger most of the discussions had been on a structural level: *“we are about to head in a direction where everyone is just sitting writing applications instead of reseraching.”* In this sense, YP was also concerned with the academic depth: *“[...] good teaching methods and good research is just taken for granted as happening even though everyone is spending their time on other stuff.”* In return, YP made it clear that he did not have any issues with the merger as long as they managed to build solid academic environments. On the contrary, OP was of the opinion that the merger was wrong. Which partly has its explanation in the fact that he did not see the meaning or the purpose with the merger: *“there are really no clear goals on the purpose of this merger. Sometimes, it seems like the only goal is to create Norway’s largest university [...].”* One purpose of the merger was to help build robust academic environments. However, OP believed that the changes for

many of the academic environments at NTNU would not be that severe: *“nothing new will happen when it comes to collaborators, or in the connection between how research and teaching are supposed to be performed [...]”* According to YP, these connections happened independently of institutions. In that sense, the merger does not necessarily lead to or contribute to increased cooperation despite the fact that this has been an important assumption advocated by both the Ministry and management at NTNU.

### **Merger challenges in the eyes of the leaders**

The main merger challenge according to ML was to get the four institutions working well together as one united NTNU. PML agreed and highlighted: *“different cultures, academic traditions, people living and working at different places, different personal research interests and academic interests”*, as reasons for why it was challenging. At the same time PML expressed that extracting academic gains was a major challenge, especially within education: *“[...] creating better education above all else. Better research, but especially on the educational side.”* Although the leaders agreed on several aspects they had a somewhat different perception of how the challenges could be solved. From ML’s story it was expressed that working together was a problem today: *“many are busy with positioning themselves and protecting themselves [...] a bit too much”*, at the same time he thought that this would solve itself once the new organization had fallen more into place. ML, however, clearly expressed that: *“it takes time.”*

Taken together, the professors and the leaders express some of the same challenges. Education seems to be particularly demanding to both parties. Working to increase quality within research and education must be regarded as an objective that all of them are striving for. The disagreement however lies in how it should be done. Which illustrates how strategic management appear competing and contradictory as to how organizational processes should be solved in university context (Røvik et al., 2009). The leaders consider strategic management as a necessity, while the professors see it as destructive or threatening to their daily work. Røvik et al. (2009) explained this conflict in light of competing recipes – MBO versus TQM. In light of these recipes, strategic management may seem enhancing and inhibiting at the same time. It enhances managements ability to allocate resources and manage organizational processes more goal-oriented and efficiently, while at the same time increased control inhibit the professors’ freedom to prioritize activities and thus threaten their independence. Which could ultimately reduce the quality of work. Instead of trying to solve



what seems to be an inevitable conflict between competing logics, the focus should be turned over to how these logics could be balanced. In the following I will discuss possible ways of understanding the conflict emerging from the section above.

#### 6.4.2 Understanding the conflict

R. Pinheiro et al. (2014) argued that European Universities were currently struggling to find an adequate balance between: global academic excellence and direct contributions to local and national economic development and innovation or relevance; traditional academic norms and values such as curiosity driven research and the needs and expectations of various external constituencies; collegial forms of governance based on a ‘community of equals’ with managerialist tendencies resulting from increasing rationalisation and strategic decision making. How to balance these challenges in a good way, seem also to be the case in the context of NTNU. In chapter 6.2.1 the professors' expressed values were discussed and summarized as (1) *independence*, (2) *professional integrity*, (3) *relevance*, (4) *humanism and respect*, and (5) *tolerance for diversity*. Independence was highlighted as the most important value to both YP and OP. All of these values are important because they reflect how the professors understand and interpret the university. It is against that background we can begin to understand that in the meeting between strategic management and traditional academic values certain tensions may emerge that give rise to a potential conflict.

In connection with the empirical presentation, it is evident that this conflict must be understood in light of how NTNU has so far carried out their core tasks of research, education and dissemination, and how the NTNU merger symbolize how these tasks are undergoing change affecting the way they are being performed. In many ways it can be argued that the tasks to this date have been conducted on the basis of the traditional academic values referenced above, in which one of my informants called the “*academic premise*.” In light of the professors' stories it becomes apparent that the conflict is propelled by increased focus on command-control regimes and strategic priorities, which seem to threaten academic priorities and essentially the academic premise. Yet again this stands as an example of the clash between competing logics (Røvik et al., 2009). In this respect there is much that can be at stake (view chapter 6.4.1). Similar to R. Pinheiro et al. (2014) my findings seem to be an example of how too much focus on strategic initiatives and external priorities emanating from the top-down aimed at transforming NTNU into an even more efficient, responsive, accountable and tightly coupled organization can contribute to a loss of internal legitimacy

within the academic community. Following the argument of Bolden et al. (2009), I found that the tensions and dilemmas emerging in the context of NTNU can be reflected through how the professors are increasingly expected to deliver on a fast-growing range of conflicting goals and priorities. The tensions are rooted in several different aspects: (1) discussions concerning structure and quality vs. content, (2) academic management model vs. strategic management model, (3) different emphasis on education and research, (4) shift from qualitative evaluation assessments to increased use of statistical indicators, (5) different interpretations of the university's social mission.

R. Pinheiro et al. (2014) found that the more modern cornerstones of accountability, efficiency and responsiveness were replacing traditional academic values, such as trust and loyalty. My informants emphasized much of the same shift. In particular regarding the NTNU merger but also the overall structural change in higher education, which OP argued: “[...] *a pure efficiency value*” to be the driving force. In addition, my findings have documented how the entrance of strategic management challenges new methods for carrying out the university's core activities: research and education. Which is where the core of the conflict seems to lie. The professors expressed a clear concern that the ongoing structural changes in higher education in Norway today could make it difficult for them to perform research and teaching (education) in a good way in the future. OP emphasized the lack of research on what type of governance model was most suitable in university context: “[...] *not at least since nobody can agree on what is best.*” YP explained how strategic management had led to shifts in loyalty and that research was under pressure by strategic priorities. When viewed in conjunction with values it becomes clear that these are under pressure. The professors experienced a pronounced shift from prioritizing activities on a professional basis to prioritizing activities at a strategic basis. Not only were the value of independence threatened but also the value of professional integrity, relevance, and tolerance for diversity, humanism and respect.

Now I have discussed how the conflict can be understood in light of my empirical analysis and compared to what previous researchers in the field have found. Now the question is how this could be interpreted in light of relevant theory. The discussion above reflect the dynamic relationship between environmental, structural and cultural factors (Røvik et al., 2009). All of which are included in the transformational approach that I have argued essential to understand the problem statement.

Røvik et al. (2009) explained that the instrumental perspective emphasizes political control and clear organizational thinking in terms of both causes and effects. An approach that is evident when NTNU is put into a larger context of broader structural change. The NTNU merger tells a story that starts with what could be interpreted as both pressure and inspiration from international development. The Ministry of Research and Education together with the present government have taken this trend seriously. The consequences are interpreted instrumentally. Norwegian higher education must be re-structured to meet future demands. At the bottom is a clear target-means rationality. The solution lies in mergers. These mergers represent the means to reach the goal. But this is not a smooth or unproblematic change, such as the instrumental perspective suggests. Inevitably, changes in structure affect the processual aspects of the university. These challenges are expressed in the cultural perspective (Røvik et al., 2009). Here it becomes evident that the current white paper on structural change reflects external values, such as increased efficiency and accountability. Which consequently appear as a threat to the dominating, informal norms and values, such as represented by the academic staff at NTNU. This gives rise to a conflict between what March and Olsen (1989) have called a logic of appropriate behaviour and a logic of consequences (Røvik et al., 2009).

In conjunction, Røvik et al. (2009) explained that cultural and informal norms, also referenced as birthmarks, are primarily directed towards the past, while the instrumental and formal rules are more future-oriented. In this regard, the professors stated values could be interpreted as NTNU's "birthmarks" and highlighted as an example of how these stand in competition with the more future- and business-oriented focus of the leaders. These birthmarks must be seen in relation to NTNU's history and how the university has developed over time, because this might have led to path-dependency and historical inefficiency (March & Olsen, 1989). Historical inefficiency explains why the goals and values NTNU established from the beginning have great relevance to further development, and why these are not easily changeable despite changing environment and context. Path-dependency could explain why the university might be hesitant to certain changes, such as for example the recent white paper on structural change. The white paper can stand as an example of a clash between different eras leading to completely different organizational structures and informal norms and values. It could also be interpreted as a conflict between internal and external values. The university's history which could be characterized by eras with democracy,

decentralization and independence are clashing with the period we are facing today with much stronger emphasis on hierarchy, control and centralization. On the one hand, path-dependency seem to be favorable to the professors because it provides stability and depth to informal norms and values and makes it easier for them to understand what is appropriate behaviour. On the other hand, path-dependency or historical inefficiency does not provide the university and its actors with necessary flexibility. Seen from an instrumental logic, NTNU have not been efficient enough, which is an explanation for change in management model.

Up against the professors' values and opinions, it appears that management at NTNU must fight a hard battle to get their logic of action accepted when it comes to a stronger strategic focus (Røvik et al., 2009). From this point of view, institutional characteristics and rules of action (path-dependency) act as break pads. In light of the leaders stories (ML and PML) it seems that NPM thinking have been rationalized and firmly rooted in management at NTNU. Strategic leadership is seen as an effective tool to achieve the university's organizational goals. At top mangement it seems to have been institutionalized as the timely, efficient, modern and natural way of organizing (Røvik, 1998). To clarify this point, I refer to one of PML's argument in relations to his reflections upon strategic management: *"we have a course at NTNU that we see more and more are choosing in relations to management models and forms of governance [...] we can decide quickly, effectively and strategic."* Contrasted with the professors stories what might be seen in the future NTNU-context is a more hybrid and complex administrative culture that has combined traditional cultural traits with what Røvik et al. (2009) referred to as post-NPM values. Moving forward it seems that an important task for managers at NTNU will be to find a way to strike a balance between on the one hand maintaining and developing the cultural traditions represented by the professors' stories, and on the other hand gradually changing these over time (Røvik et al., 2009).

### **6.4.3 Transformative approach**

Transformation occurs when reforms and restructuring attempts are being reformulated adapted, modified and reinterpreted (Røvik et al., 2009). Røvik et al. (2009) explained that translation happened based on the contextual conditions the specific organization was facing. In my interpretation translation builds upon the dynamics of culture, myths and instrumentality. Røvik et al. (2009) argued that transformation would occur in the meeting between different logics. This has also been the case in the light of my informants' stories. Their stories exemplify the meeting between competing logics – logic of consequences versus

logic of appropriate behaviour. Underpinning these competing logic is different interpretations with regard to NTNU's values and the university core tasks: research and education. The conflict can be said to be about how various considerations must be balanced in order to arrive at a good solution to what should be the content of the university activities forward and how these activities should be solved. Implicit in this is also the question of values. In my analysis, values seem to be increasingly more important to the professors' interpretation and execution of core activities, unlike the leaders' attempts to control them more strategically in inspiration by various NPM-templates.

What will be the outcome of this transformation is impossible to say at this point. Previous research has shown that it may often occur loose connections between new structural conditions and organizational behaviour despite that the goal might be the opposite (Busch & Ramstad, 2004). Whether this could be a consistent strategy in the context of NTNU or something that happens because of inconsistency between the different logics of actions are open for discussion (Røvik, 1998). However, in light of my empiricism, it seems reasonable to carefully suggest that the result will be a mix between tradition and modernity. Although NTNU is headed in a more modern direction especially in terms of formal structures, it is important to show appreciation for the university's history and more institutional aspects. Formal structures must interact with internal relations in order to be successful (change model, p.66). If not, a way of solving the dilemma could be through using decoupling as a consistent strategy to avoid the loss of both internal and external legitimacy (Røvik, 1998). In that case, strategic management would act as window-dressing (Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996). External surroundings are convinced that NTNU is modern and efficient, without internal practice changing to a large extent (Røvik et al., 2009). However, following the line of reasoning exemplified through the older professor's opinions, decoupling was reflected more as a result because of inconsistency between the logic of consequences and logic of appropriate behaviour, which could indicate the loss of internal legitimacy: *"I think there are quite the few of us hoping that the merger process will give the least possible effects on the workplace."* OP believed that the changes would not be that severe to many of the academic environments because nothing new would happen in terms of collaborators, or in the connection between how research and teaching are supposed to be performed. In his and the younger professors view these connections were made regardless of any merger, due to the academic (work) premise. In that sense, loose connections would continue to occur (Busch & Ramstad, 2004). If that is the case, the merger seems to have worked against its purpose.

## 7 THE END

In the previous chapter the thesis main research question was discussed in its entirety. A brief response on the problem issue will be provided in this conclusion, followed by my reflections on the thesis contributions. Suggestions for further research are presented in the end.

### 7.1 Conclusion

European universities are currently struggling to find an adequate balance between: global academic excellence and direct contributions to local and national economic development and innovation or relevance; traditional academic norms and values such as curiosity driven research and the needs and expectations of various external constituencies; collegial forms of governance based on a ‘community of equals’ with managerialist tendencies resulting from increasing rationalisation and strategic decision making (R. Pinheiro et al., 2014). How to balance these challenges in a good way, seemed also to be the case in the context of NTNU. As an attempt of investigating and understanding these challenges further the thesis focused its attention on the meeting between academic values and strategic management.

The overarching problem statement was focused upon the possible conflict that emerges from the encounter between strategic management and traditional academic values: *How can this conflict be understood, and what seems to be at stake?*

I found that the tensions and dilemmas emerging in the context of NTNU could be reflected through how the professors are expected to deliver on a fast-growing range of conflicting goals and priorities. From the leaders perspectives, in line with international trends and the ministry of Research and Education, strategic management with related standardization tools and subsequent stricter control was a necessary good to the meet the university’s challenges in the future. The tensions are rooted in several different aspects: (1) discussions concerning structure and quality vs. content, (2) academic management model vs. strategic management model, (3) different emphasis on education and research, (4) shift from qualitative evaluation assessments to increased use of statistical indicators, (5) different interpretations of the university’s social mission. Therefore, it became evident that the conflict had to be understood in light of how NTNU had so far carried out their core tasks of research, education and dissemination, and how the NTNU merger symbolized how these tasks are undergoing change affecting the way they are being performed. It was argued that the tasks to this date

had been conducted on the basis of certain traditional academic values, in which one of the informants called an “academic premise.”

Similar to R. Pinheiro et al. (2014) my findings became an example of how too much focus on strategic initiatives and external priorities emanating from the top-down aimed at transforming NTNU into an even more efficient, responsive, accountable and tightly coupled organization can contribute to a loss of internal legitimacy within the academic community. My findings have documented how the entrance of strategic management challenges new methods for carrying out the university’s core activities. The professors' expressed values which was summarized as: (1) *independence*, (2) *professional integrity*, (3) *relevance*, (4) *humanism and respect*, and (5) *tolerance for diversity* are under pressure by the more modern cornerstones of accountability, efficiency and responsiveness. The professors experienced a pronounced shift from prioritizing activities on a professional basis to prioritizing activities at a strategic basis. Which was highlighted as conflict between the logic of appropriate behaviour and logic of consequences (March & Olsen, 1989; Røvik et al., 2009). What seemed to be at stake in the eyes of the professors are among other things the quality of work under pressure by statistical quality indicators and the attractiveness to work in the higher education sector.

The professors stated values was referenced as NTNU’s “birthmarks” and these stand in competition with the leaders more future-and business oriented perspectives. These birthmarks suggested the possibility that historical inefficiency might have led to path-dependency. An important task for leaders at NTNU in the future would therefore be to find a way to strike a balance between on the one hand maintaining and developing the cultural traditions represented by the professors’ stories, and on the other hand gradually changing these over time. A transformation will occur, however, the outcome is impossible to anticipate even though my analysis have carefully suggested something between tradition and modernity. What is certain is that NTNU as a result of increased focus on internationalization and national competitiveness is headed in a more modern direction. Thus, reshaping the meaning of the university. On this journey, my findings stress the importance of showing appreciation for the university’s history and more institutional aspects. If not, the result could quite possibly end up with decoupling between new structural conditions and organizational behaviour. Which previous research on the field also have documented. That type of outcome would indicate that the merger to some extent has worked against its purpose.

## 7.2 Contribution

In today's market and competitive environment the field of higher education is undergoing severe changes that will affect the way we understand the university today and in the future. Based on trends identified in the sector, both nationally and internationally, as well as society's increasing dependence on the knowledge economy and higher education institutions important contribution to this, I would argue that we need a greater focus on how higher education sector is governed, organized and managed at all levels (Gulbrandsen & Larsen, 2000; Jongbloed et al., 2008). For in the wake of these changes, there are many conflicts emerging – especially within the heartland of the academic community (R. Pinheiro et al., 2014). This thesis has shown the importance of understanding these conflicts while ensuring that they are taken seriously in order to build a good higher education system for the future.

In this thesis I have taken the meeting between traditional academic values and strategic management closer to scrutiny. Values are important because they can reflect and help to clarify how we understand and interpret the university. This is an important topic because it also illustrates how the university's core tasks - research and education, are facing changes that will affect the way they are being performed today as well as in the future. The thesis has come to the core of why different perspectives and roles, in this case illustrated by two professors and two leaders, come to clash. My findings have also been assessed against an analysis of international developments in higher education, Esmu (2009), Bolden et al. (2009) and R. Pinheiro et al. (2014) to mention a few, which together have contributed to an understanding of what is at stake. Through a critical review on competing logics the thesis main contribution has thus been to stress that when values and the creation of meaning is overshadowed by too much focus on formal structures it may quickly end up in a paradox where the structures break down the quality they were intended to build. In that sense, the thesis has helped to focus attention on a particularly complex field of research and it has helped to shed light on a topic that should be explored even further, preferably over a longer period of time and with a greater amount of empirical data.

## 7.3 Suggestions for further research

Strategic management has been accepted as the timely and efficient way of organizing in private organizations as well as public organizations. The university has been no exception. However, as one of my informants (OP) argued there is a lack of research indicating which management model is best applied at the university – *“at least since nobody can agree on*



*what is best.*” My thesis has uncovered several of the tensions and ongoing conflicts related in this matter, and I hope it can become an inspiration for further research. Another interesting point that emerged from one of my interviews was that universities are of the few modern social institutions studying themselves. Which indicates a need to take the university as a subject of closer examination. Of a particular interest and social relevance is the question of quality - both research quality and quality of education. Among those things that were uncovered in this thesis is precisely an increasing attempt on measuring quality. The problem is that quality is no measurable size in itself, but rather represents the characteristics of *something*. It becomes evident that the university's social responsibilities neither represent a measurable size. Instead of focusing the attention on various measurements, the focus should be directed towards the processes that contribute to increasing quality. One of my informants (YP) suggested studying specific research communities, such as Moser and Moser. Observe and investigate how they work over time to find out what it is that seem to have enabled their success. In addition, several questions arise in the context of educational quality. Which was also emphasized by one of my informants (PML). What is it that makes some subjects excel? What is happening in the classrooms? How does the interaction between teacher-student and among students occur? What do the students emphasize when they evaluate a subject? How do the professors meet the student's expectations? What can different countries learn from each other? Are there any similarities or is every classroom experience uniquely connected to that specific context? How should we then compare between countries? What is exactly the educational benefit with rankings?

In connection with an increased focus on internationalization and line with the ministry's structural change and long-term plan for research and education, it would be both interesting and highly relevant to do a cross-cultural and comparative study on various educational programs. I would suggest a longitudinal study that preferably combines several methods, such as interviews, observations and surveys. Perhaps following students throughout the course of their education. Having them write reflection papers on various subjects along the way. Which could contribute to a deeper understanding of the students' perspectives. The professors could do the same. With regards to my thesis it would be interesting to follow up the merger after some time to investigate further what has happened. Gain the perspectives of more people in the NTNU context. I would assume that interesting differences and similarities could be found between and across educational programs, faculties and institutions.

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## APPENDIX

### Attachment 1: Written request to interview

#### **Notification to the readers of this thesis:**

*I had mail correspondence back and forth with all of my informants. This is a copy of the first email I sent to one of my informants. This copy is only meant to illustrate how I formulated my self when inviting potential informants at the very beginning of project.*

Hei!

Mitt navn er Karoline Leikanger og jeg er siviløkonomstudent ved Handelshøyskolen i Trondheim (profilering: organisasjon, strategi og ledelse). Jeg er i gang med min masteroppgave hvor tema er NTNU fusjon. Min veileder er Førsteamanuensis, Nord U./NTNU, Knut Arne Hovdal.

Foreløpig jobber jeg ut fra følgende overordnede problemstilling:

*"Why is it problematic to blend managerial tendencies focused on strategic management with traditional academic values and orientations? And what is at stake?"*

Jeg har brukt en god periode før jul på å lese og skrive meg inn i feltet høyere utdanning. Gjennom dette arbeidet har jeg klart å danne meg et godt bilde av hva som skjer i høyere utdanning på et mer internasjonalt og overordnet nivå.

Nå ønsker jeg å ta dette inn i en norsk kontekst, og studere hva som skjer i NTNU med bakgrunn i strukturendring og fusjon. Min interesse sentrerer rundt to ulike måter å forstå universitetet som institusjon: "det historiske og det moderne". Gjennom å analysere tekster og foreta dybdeintervju med noen kritiske røster i media, vil jeg diskutere mulige spenninger som vokser frem fra disse to ulike virkelighetsoppfatningene.

På denne måten ønsker jeg å bidra til å skape et mer nyansert bilde av de endringene som pågår i høyere utdanning gjennom å spesielt studere hvordan språket skaper virkelighet, samtidig som jeg ønsker at min masteroppgave skal være til gjenstand for egen og andres refleksjon over universitets rolle i samfunnet og hvorfor denne institusjonen er så viktig for å bringe Norge fremover som kunnskapsnasjon.

Derfor sender jeg mail til deg i håp om at dette trigger din interesse og gjør at du ønsker å bidra til at dette blir en spennende og interessant oppgave.

Har du anledning å treffe meg i løpet av januar, fortrinnsvis på noen av følgende datoer: mandag 25. januar/ tirsdag 26. januar/onsdag 27. januar/torsdag 28. januar.

Det er fint om du kan sette av en times tid til intervjuet.

Jeg kommer reisende fra Sunnmøre, håper derfor på snarlig tilbakemelding, men tidspunkt og sted kan avtales nærmere etter hva som passer din agenda best.

Med vennlig hilsen  
Karoline Leikanger

## Attachment 2: interview guide

### INTERVJUGUIDE

#### INTRO: Presentasjon og oppvarming

##### 0. Presentasjon av meg selv og prosjektet

- Australia
- Interesse
- Refleksjon
- anonymisering/ oppgaven skrives på engelsk

##### 1. Hva er din rolle i NTNU? (stilling, faglig bakgrunn og kompetanse etc)

- hva er du opptatt av? Hva engasjerer deg i din arbeidshverdag?
- Hva identifiserer du deg med i din stilling?
- Føler du på noen måte at din identitet trues av fusjonen? Eller synes du kanskje den styrkes? Hvordan?

#### DEL 1: Vi starter med DET GENERELLE

##### 2. Hva er hensikten med “universitetet” og hvordan vil du med egne ord beskrive/definere hva et universitet er/handler om?

- hva er det grunnleggende/ de aller viktigste etter din mening?
- Kunnskap, innovasjon – grensesprengende forskning?
- Forskning vs. utdanning? Hvordan finner vi balansen?
- samfunnsoppdraget
- de normative vektorer (stat, sivilsamfunn, marked)
- verdier
- eksistensberettigelse
- institusjonaliserte normer, kultur og “forståelseshorisonter”

##### 3. Hvorfor er det viktig å reflektere over meningen med universitetet? Hvilken (mer)verdi kan dette gi til fusjonsdebatten?

#### DEL 2: Vi beveger oss over til det KONKRETE OG KONTEKSTUELLE

##### 4. Hvilke verdier er og bør et universitet være tuftet på etter din mening?

5. *“Konsentrasjon for kvalitet I høyere utdanning” – hva legger du i dette? Hva legger du i kvalitetsbegrepet? Hva tenker du om at denne diskusjonen kommer etter fusjonsvedtaket – hvilke konsekvenser tror du dette har hatt for arbeidet med fusjonen?*

### **DEL 3: Nå ser vi på HVA FUSJONEN KAN BETY**

6. *Hvordan har du engasjert deg i fusjonsdebatten?*

- er du for eller i mot? ”Alle” spør jo om det..
- Hvilke andre alternativer til fusjon mener du kunne bidratt til at man når målsetningene som kunnskapsdepartementet har satt for strukturendringen?
- Er du enig i disse målsetningene? Er du enig/uenig i hvordan de omsettes til handling? Forklar.
- Hvordan synes du prosessen har vært i forkant av endelig fusjonsvedtak? Hva kunne vært gjort annerledes?

7. *Hvorfor har det vært viktig for deg å være engasjert?*

- er dette disiplinavhengig?
- Hvorfor er noen røster mer kritisk enn andre?
- Hva bekymrer deg?
- Hva gleder deg?
- Føler du at det er mange som deler ditt syn?

8. *På hvilken måte mener du å kunne bidra gjennom ditt engasjement? På hvilken måte har du ”oversatt” oppdraget fra kunnskapsdepartementet - mhp strukturendring og konsentrasjon for kvalitet – som gir mening for din (arbeids)hverdag i NTNU?*

9. *Hva mener du er hovedutfordringen i fusjonsdebatten?*

- Synes du media gir et riktig bilde av de ulike sidene/interessene?
- Hvilke av dine uttalelser (om du har hatt noen) til media kunne med fordel vært utdypet?

10. *I forkant av fusjonen ble det mye omtalt at det ”ikke er bare bare” å fusjonere en høyskole med et universitet blant annet på bakgrunn av ulike tradisjoner med hensyn til*

*forskning og utdanning – noe som også tidligere forskning trekker fram som problematisk.*

*Hvilke formeninger har du om dette nå som NTNU har fusjonert med 3 høyskoler?*

- positivt/negativt
- omdømme
- ulik tradisjon/kultur/geografisk avstand/regionale hensyn
- ”academic drift” vs ”vocational drift”
- synergier gjennom fusjon
- utfordringer (avstand, ledelse, ulik kultur, ulik praksis, A og B lag)

*11. Hva er forskjellen mellom faglig ledelse og profesjonell ledelse og hvilken tilnærming mener du best ivaretar universitet som institusjon – og hvorfor er dette viktig? Hvordan skiller universitet seg fra andre organisasjoner?*

- forskjell mellom teori og praksis
- institusjon vs. organisasjon
- hva med en kombinasjon?
- avstand mellom ledelse og ansatte?
- Hva er det som gjør profesjonell ledelse problematisk i universitetssammenheng?

→ Hvordan legitimere endring i ledelsesmodell?

#### **DEL 4: Over til FREMTIDEN**

*12. Det kan synes som vi står overfor en ny ”sosial pakt” i høyere utdanning – mange har referert til dette som en ”moderniseringsagenda” – hvilke meninger har du omkring dette?*

- hva står på spill?

*13. Hva tenker du når jeg sier ”fremtidens universitet” – er NTNU på veg dit du nå beskriver og hvorfor mener du dette er riktig/evt. ikke riktig retning?*

- robuste fagmiljø
- fremragende forskningsmiljøer
- eksellense
- ranking
- verdensledende
- attraktiv
- høyere kvalitet
- innovasjon

- eliteuniversitet

→ hvilke andre ord vil du bruke? Er det andre ord du mener har mer innhold?

*14. Universiteter og høyskoler skal slås sammen for å bli større, sterke og mer tydelige (politisk prioritet på kryss og tvers av Europa) – eller blir de uniforme? Et "multiversity"?*

- Forskningspengene sentraliseres
- Blir det mindre rom for det lokale?
- Hva gjør det med mulighetene for kritisk – og selvkritisk – organisasjonsforskning?

→ Hvorfor er det viktig å ha et både globalt og internasjonalt fokus, samtidig som man ivaretar det lokale handlingsrommet?

#### **AVSLUTNINGSVIS**

*15. Har du noe annet du vil tilføye?*

- Er det noen andre personer du mener kunne bidratt positivt til denne masteroppgaven?