

Adaptation of duality: unique responses of dual-sector institutions (0192)

Government agendas to enhance widening participation have been, in part, responsible for steering dual-sector phenomenon in the UK (Garrod and Macfarlane, 2009). Although dual sector forms offer a potential for enhancing progression routes from further to higher education for students from non-traditional backgrounds (Bathmaker et al, 2008), this is impeded by a range of cultural issues in managing duality (Macfarlane et al, 2007).

Evidence from a doctoral study on managing duality in two English dual-sector institutions demonstrates that the level of 'integration' of cultures and identities within institutions can vary remarkably (Saraswat, 2010). This paper draws on the application of ideologies of duality to other English and international dual-sector forms. It is argued that 'duality' is not a stable phenomenon and that duality can evolve organically. This paper outlines a conceptual analysis of the factors that drive duality together with the levers that cause and affect the adaptation of cultures and identities of dual sector forms.

Introduction

The phenomenon of combining further education (FE) and higher education (HE) within an institutional setting is referred to as duality in this paper. Dual sector institutions can evolve as a result of a merger between a university and an FE college; re-designation of an FE college to a HE college; mixed economy FE colleges (KPMG LLP, 2003), and as networked institutions.

This paper draws on findings from a doctoral study that illuminated the experiences of duality in two English dual-sector institutions. Two in-depth case studies were conducted to illuminate experiences of duality in the institutions under study. Interviews were conducted with staff and managers at the two institutions. The recommendations made by the interviewees were depicted in a matrix that presented a set of ideologies pertaining to separate or combined culture and identity in FE and HE at four intra-institutional levels: institution, faculty, individual and student. Additional interviews with managers at four additional institutions were conducted to understand the possible ideologies adopted in these institutions. Each institution had adopted duality through unique routes and was at different stages of the development of duality. It appeared that these ideologies did not remain stable and were in a state of unrest. This paper sheds light on some of the drivers of duality and possible influences on the adaptation of duality.

Ideologies of managing duality

Ideology of 'separation' follows from a preference to maintain separate cultures and identities of FE and HE; 'realism' refers to a set of ideas where a blended identity of FE and HE is supported in an institution, while allowing aspects of the cultures to remain distinct; 'alignment' refers to those set of beliefs that support separate identities but blended cultures of FE and HE in dual sector institutions; and lastly, 'integration' refers to an integrated culture and identity of FE and HE within an institution.

Drivers of Duality

Regional demand: Absence of a university or an HE provider in some regions of England has motivated some FE colleges to fulfil the regional needs for HE. Regional demand as a lever for duality is also evident in a Canadian context where Community Colleges were brought into existence to help widen access and provide HE especially in the rural areas in the province of British Columbia (Dennison, 2006).

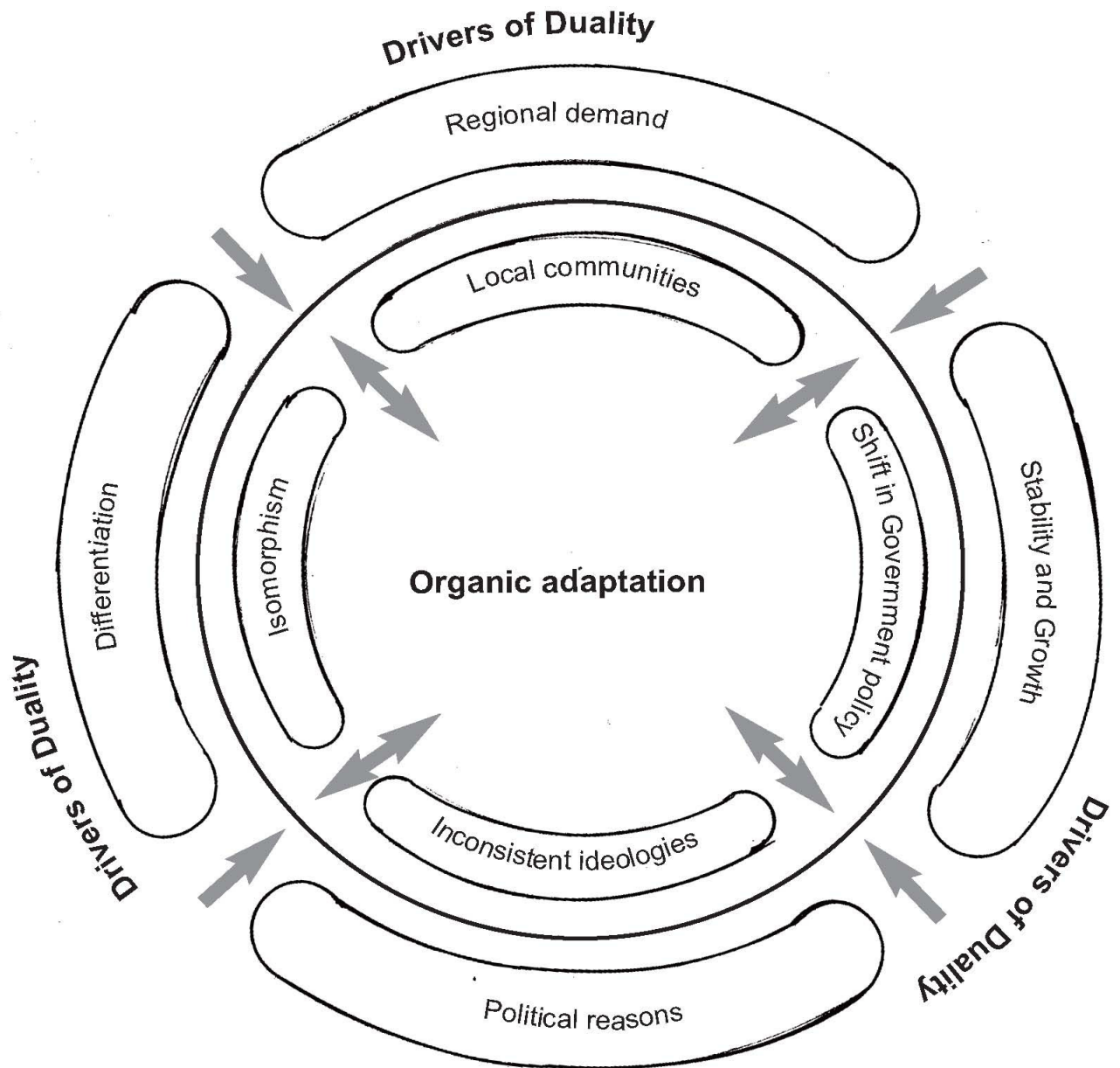


Figure 1 Drivers of duality and organic adaptation

Stability and growth: An imperative to stabilise and grow is common to both universities and colleges that adopt duality. FE funding per student is lower than that for HE. HE funding is believed to add to the financial stability of colleges that have roots in FE, because it enables them to expand their revenue streams rather than relying solely on the LSC funds. English universities that merged with FE colleges predicated that FE students would act as feeders into their HE and hence allow them to secure student numbers for their HE provision.

Differentiation- Provision of a range of courses from basic skills to doctoral programmes is believed to offer HE opportunities to those students who are otherwise less likely to pursue HE. In theory, at least, a dual sector agenda of promoting social justice and enhancing student progression opportunities can help

differentiate them from other FE colleges and universities. These institutions also consider themselves to be better able to respond to the employer needs through the institutional ability to match employer requirements with a wider range of provision offered 'under one roof'.

Political reasons- The rationale to engage in the delivery of dual provision can also be political in nature. There is evidence to illustrate that, though not exclusively, those FE colleges that were deemed to be failing institutions had decided to merge with universities which provided them opportunities for survival. The personal influence and networks of senior managers of partner universities with influential leaders in FE colleges may also guide some of the merger choices.

Influences on organic adaptation

After having adopted duality, institutions appeared to continually adjust and adapt institutional structures, cultures and identities at different levels within the institution. Some of the factors of organic adaptation are illustrated in figure 1. The inward arrows of drivers of duality indicate the underpinning reasons for institutions to adopt duality while the two way arrows inside the sphere of organic adaptation depict the state of flux towards duality and even anti-duality, as evidenced in few cases. Organic adaptation can be viewed as an experiential learning of organisations. Organisations learn from their experiences, more so, if they adopt atypical routes to expansion and growth. The adaptation of duality in some cases is more organic than the others that are heavily steered by an unexpected change in the environment in which the institution operates.

Local communities- The needs of regional businesses, local employers and prospective students can influence the institutional evolution. For instance, in case of an English HE College, there was a perceived demand for HE from prospective students and employers of the region, which a hybrid College was deemed less likely to fulfil. The hybrid college was consequently split into a university campus and an FE College. This institution demonstrated a shift from a 'realist' ideology to a 'separatist' ideology.

Shift in government policy- Major shifts in the government policy pertaining to FE and HE can impact upon duality. For instance, after the merger of a Northern English University with an FE College, the government is believed to have introduced designated funds to support the delivery of HE in FE colleges. Owing to its merger with the university, the partner FE college did not qualify for any funds from HEFCE whilst the LSC did not support the development of HE provision. Amongst other factors, the funding implications finally led to the separation of the college from the university.

Isomorphic tendencies- Dual sector colleges that have roots in FE may display isomorphic tendencies to become more 'university like'. In such colleges, FE bears risks of becoming streamlined as the HE develops and gains more significance. This has been the case at an English Midlands HE College that had acquired a University College status. The College had experienced a gradual shift from 'alignment' to

'realism', as the college developed distinctive spaces on separate geographical sites for some of its HE students. Dual sector universities, on the other hand, may adapt to maintain a level of separateness to preserve their 'HE-ness' and, in some cases, even de-merge to revert back to being university-like rather than being a hybrid provider.

Inconsistent ideologies-. Striking inconsistencies in institutional ideologies can cause unsettledness at various levels, and may even demand for higher level changes in institutional structures and processes. For instance, a preference for 'separatist' ideology by institutional staff is not supportive towards 'integrationist' ideologies at an institutional level.

Conclusion

There are unique reasons for institutions to adopt duality and to subsequently adapt an (in)-organic manner. Institutions tend to adjust to their unique environments and a shift between the institutional ideologies may be observed at different stages of lifecycle of dual-sector operations of universities and colleges.

References

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