

University Strategies on Affiliated Faculty

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Aim

The overall aim of this work is to contribute to a better understanding of human resource strategy at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In this study, affiliated faculty as a strategic tool is investigated. Affiliated faculty refers to researchers from industry affiliated part time as academics at HEIs. The question raised in this paper is: what are the strategies and expectations on affiliated faculty from HEI management?

Background

The conditions for universities all over the world have changed dramatically in the last decades (Clark 2008, Slaughter and Leslie 1997, Maassen and Stensaker 2011). The entire concept of knowledge has been broadened to also include what has been described as Mode 2, i.e. knowledge created in a much wider context than the traditional disciplinary area (Gibbons et al. 1994). Motivated by the strive for excellence, universities have been transformed from being primarily a national institution to a global organizational actor (Ramirez, 2010). Reforms in Europe, such as the Bologna process and the Lisbon Strategy 2000 aiming at reforming Europe into a competitive knowledge-based economy, are examples of the high expectations on reforming the sector (Maassen and Stensaker 2011). The Swedish university system has gone through extensive change in the last decade (Pinheiro, Geschwind and Aarrevaara, 2014), making it an interesting case to study. Besides education and research, the Swedish system for higher education was in 1997 assigned a 'third mission'; to interact with society (Brundenius, Göransson and Ågren, 2011). HEIs have also gained greater formal authority through deregulation and are now expected to formulate their own strategies and establish employment positions and career paths. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2010). These reforms puts pressure on traditional knowledge producing institutions, including universities. One way of meeting new demands is by building relationships with external organizations, outside the HEI sector (Clark 2008). Affiliated faculty is one strategy to increase industry contacts which challenges the internal university structures on leadership and management of human resources.

Methodology

The paper presents a comparative study between two Swedish HEIs both operating in the field of technology. The first case is a large research intense Technical University. The second is a younger University College, with a profile of close collaboration with society. The design enable us to compare how different institutional structures affect strategic action in the academic field of technology. The paper is based on documentary studies and semi-structured interviews of HEI management on different levels and affiliated faculty. 23 interviews, of which 11 with HEI management and 12 with affiliated professors, have been undertaken. The interviewed affiliated faculty members are all professors, since affiliated positions below professor level are still rare. From this material, a pattern has been distinguished through content analysis (Patton, 2002).

Results

In the first case, the Technical University, mobility between academia and the surrounding society is considered a strategic priority. A vice president is devoted to the area, a sign of its importance. Strategic collaboration agreements with industry and public actors are to increase, the number of affiliated professors are now above 50 with the target of 100. This is out of a total of 378 professors (UKÄ, 2013). The researchers have often had an ongoing collaboration and contacts with the HEI throughout their career, and the affiliation as a professor is a formalization of this long lasting relationship. This is in contrast with the intention of the HEI;

to bring in new experiences and contacts through the affiliations. Affiliated faculty is seen as a way to strengthen the industry relevance and application of the research. It is very unusual that a person affiliated from industry is receiving a position as full professor.

The second case, the younger University College has today 12 affiliated professors, out of a total of 59 professors (UKÄ, 2013). The affiliated professors are expected to contribute with competence or strengthen collaboration with industry. The input from the affiliated faculty has for some departments at this HEI been an important way of increasing the critical mass of supervisors and researchers while growing. The industry relevance is embedded in the academic environments and the affiliated faculty is considered as a lasting platform for further collaboration and additional initiatives. Affiliations are seen as a way to increase mobility by attracting persons from industry to an academic career. At this HEI, affiliations has in some cases led to a position as full professor.

Discussion

University management has in neither case identified particular departments where affiliations are to increase or from what companies they should come. Recruitment of affiliated faculty is done from bottom-up. The faculty is growing organically and less strategic than expected considering it being a high profile issue at both HEIs. The initiative lies on department level and the individual affiliations are at both HEIs entirely dependent on personal contacts. At both HEIs the motives for affiliations are to develop a relationship with the company and for the individual to contribute with competence and contacts. In addition the focus from the central management at the Technical University is to strengthen the industry relevance of the research, a way of preventing academic drift, as well as a way of promoting the HEI. At department level the affiliations are considered as a way to formalize a long lasting relationship. At the University College affiliated faculty is making an important contribution adding work force to the ordinary faculty which is important in building the academic environments. At the University College mobility by researchers from industry to academy can be implemented through affiliations.

The study has shown how affiliated faculty can be used as a strategic tool in different phases of the development of a HEI. There are interesting tensions to be further discussed, concerning for example mobility and the relation between affiliated and regular faculty. As well as on whether it is the company or the individual that is in focus. Results reveal that high but divergent expectations from different levels of management are placed on the affiliated faculty.

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