

FORMATION OF A HIGHER EDUCATION ORGANIZATION IDENTITY BETWEEN IMAGINATIONS AND STANDARDS: THE CASE OF TURKISH UNIVERSITIES SYSTEM

Atay Erhan

Suleyman Sah University
Turkey
eatay@ssu.edu.tr

Zehra Topal

Suleyman Sah University
Turkey
ztopal@ssu.edu.tr

Abstract: Nowadays universities on the one hand try to survive and handle to their managerial system on the other hand cope with constrains from their institutional environment. The constrains are multilateral and including organizational demands, increasing competition in the market, national and international standardization however which are comprise of responding to demands of the students who are grown up in the technological era. Hence, universities are increasingly facing a double-sided pressure: to be innovative with a specific organizational duty while at the same time being an embedded part of a growing, and highly interconnected, internationalized and standardized higher education 'industry'. This dilemma has both theoretical and practical interest, and is explored in this paper through an empirical study of how one university has dealt with these challenges of innovation and standardization.

In this paper it is investigated that the processes involved in forming an organizational identity, which it is studied during the founding of a distinctive new college by using an interpretive, insider-outsider research approach. It aimed that to identify elements that constitute the identity. It is considered a dilemma that imaginations and innovations attitudes of entrepreneurs of university such as struggles to be innovative and authentic on the other hand centralized structure of state, national and international standardizations and especially idiosyncratic context of Turkey. By studying a Turkish foundation university from its establishment in 2007 to present, and by extensive triangulation of more qualitative studies on this university in this period, the paper concludes that higher education institutions may handle this dilemma by relating it to the continuous struggle for organizational identity. As methodologically has done per deep interview with founding members and content analysis to archive documents since its establishment.

Key Words: *Higher Education, Organizational Identity, Standardization, Innovative Entrepreneurship, Institutional Isomorphism, Autonomy*

Introduction

In the social life we are living with diverse institutions as in embedded and significant sense the life. Sometimes old institutions weaken by way of loss of legitimacy and meaning although many of their properties of alive. Vice versa is possible; a new social arrangements, agreements and perspectives may be given the outward form of an institution.

Otherwise, function as one of its member finds little or no inner meaning inside it (Beteille, 1995:563).

Institutions have in general a longer life span than people. Even if some institutions by the time they can transform into a new formations. If they do not adapt to recent development they have may conflict. Universities are one of the most extended institutions in the world. On the other hand, the role and character of universities around the world is rapidly changing, with an increasing number of countries witnessing the rise of a market-based model of higher education and a rapid expansion of student enrolments. The world-wide trend in higher education is to push for enhanced student outcomes, accountability and innovation (Shaw et all., 2013:992).

In Turkey as our case, this emphasis has been encapsulated in the some formation process. In this paper it is investigated that the processes involved in forming an organizational identity, which it is studied during the founding of a distinctive new college by using an interpretive, insider-outsider research approach. It aimed that to identify elements that constitute the identity. It is considered a dilemma that imaginations and innovations attitudes of entrepreneurs of university such as struggles to be innovative and authentic on the other hand centralized structure of state, national and international standardizations and especially idiosyncratic context of Turkey.

Theoretical Framework

In the statement of DiMaggio and Powell (1983:150), organizational adaptation as determined by external forces where organizations have to adapt to economic, societal and cultural demands for reasons of legitimacy and survival. A representative theory here is the sociological version of neo-institutionalism, where a central thesis is that due to external political pressure, increased professionalization within a societal sector, or organizational uncertainty, organizations will become increasingly similar. In other words, organizational adaptation is a change towards standardization within a given organizational sector, e.g. higher education.

Also, organizations are dependent on external forces, but argues that each organization still has certain discretion left when it comes to how they should respond to external pressures. The concepts of strategic choice or critical decisions are in this perspective important, along with a view that organizations must find their environmental niche in order to successfully compete for customers, students or markets shares, improve financial support or relations with society at large (e.g., Selznick 1957; Clark 1998; Sporn 1999). At this point our question research is arise, how universities cope with the external pressures by making their own shape organizational identities? For clear understanding we should briefly sort out condition of universities in the context of Turkey.

Condition of Universities in the Context of Turkey

The Council of Higher Education (CoHE) consult, supervise and control to universities in Turkey. The CoHE is an autonomous institution which is responsible for the planning, coordination and governance of higher education system in Turkey. CoHE is established in 1982 and has a constitutional and centralized structure. The number of universities has been increasing by times. Regarding of CoHE's statistics there are two break point have seen in this duration. One of them is in the year of 1992 and other one is in 2006 and after. The count has increased approximately three times in this process. Especially foundation and private universities have establishes intensively in the term.

While the number of non government universities was only one before 1982, they were 16 in 1997, 30 in 2007 and 63 in 2011¹. Recently the update number is 76. Conjunction with this increasing, a competitive market has raised between universities. The rising competition in higher education and the mass demands for education prompt to universities to get seeking differentiation for fixing their strategic situation, and hit them transforming into organizational identity (Sakinc and Bursalioglu, 2012:93). In this case, our question research made out; formation by CoHE and differentiate organization identity of universities has presented a contradiction and how universities cope and deal with between imaginations and standards in their way.

Organizational Identity

Universities as an organization are dependent on external forces while each one still has specific discretion. They should respnd and manage this dependency with concept of strategic choice or critical decisions. They are in a challenge market and they must find their niche in order to prospering compete for their stakeholders (Stensaker and Norgard, 2001:479). In this case organizational identity should be dynamic concept where identity tags last. Organizational identity in relation to both culture and image in order to understand how external and internal definitions of organizational identity interact and commit. Accordig to Whetten (2006) this commitment the identity claims or referents that signify the organization's self determined and self defining position in social space. From this perspective organizations are more than a social collectives they are social actors (Gioia et all. 2010:6). However structure of centralized system of higher education in Turkey caused isomorphism (Stensaker and Norgard, 2001:476) and lead to rationalized formal structures (Meyer and Rowan, 1977:342). In this study we investigated that the processes involved in forming an organizational identity, which it is studied during the founding of a distinctive new college by using an interpretive, insider-outsider research approach. We aimed that to identify elements that constitute the identity.

Methodology

Our unit of observation is a foundation university which is established in 2007. In the academic meaning, there are two faculties and eight departments. University take position and differentiate itself *social science*. In the scope of our study we used a qualitative methods find out an embedded meaning of identity and perception of centralized system by employees in the university. Our sample consist of 32, and we did per deep interview each one by recording during one hour. We did discourse analysis to dechipped text and content analysis to archive documents since its establishment. Our analysis table is still in progress.

Refernceces

- Gioia, D. A., Price, K. N., Hamilton, A. L., & Thomas, J. B. (2010). Forging an identity: An insider-outsider study of processes involved in the formation of organizational identity. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 55(1), 1-46
- Beteille, A. (1995). Universities as institutions. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 563-568.
- Barnett, R. (2011). The idea of the university in the twenty-first century: where's the imagination?. *Yükseköretim Dergisi*, 1, 88-94.

¹ <http://www.yok.gov.tr/en/web/uluslararasi-iliskiler/turkiye-de-yuksekogretim-sistemi>

- DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American sociological review*, 147-160.
- Erdem, A. R. (2012). Küreselleşme: Türk yükseköğretime etkisi. *Yükseköğretim Dergisi*, 2(2), 109-117.
- Stensaker, B., & Norgård, J. D. (2001). Innovation and isomorphism: A case-study of university identity struggle 1969–1999. *Higher Education*, 42(4), 473-492.
- Gioia, D. A., Patvardhan, S. D., Hamilton, A. L., & Corley, K. G. (2013). Organizational identity formation and change. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 7(1), 123-193
- Meyer, J. W., & Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony. *American journal of sociology*, 340-363.