



## Between Humboldt and Rockefeller: An organization design approach to hybridity in higher education

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### ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions (HEI) are maneuvering the competing institutional logics of academia and commerce, which provide widely conflicting bases for legitimacy ascriptions. HEI that try to internalize both competing institutional logics become hybrids, addressing the resulting internal tensions and conflicts through efforts of structural separation or blending. Whereas these generic approaches have been well described, also for HEI, their underlying, constituting organizational design remains unclear. We refer to the general organization design literature to suggest templates for hybrid HEI. Dependent on the relative strength attributed to the two competing logics, respectively, we specify typical organizational designs reflecting separation as well as blending solutions. We embed these hybrid organizational design types with the pure archetypes of both logics and offer implications for research and practice in the HE field.

### 1. Introduction

The institutional environment determines the practices and structures within an organizational field to a large degree (DiMaggio, 1988). In this environment, stakeholders form and voice various expectations with regard to organizational structures, processes and patterns of behavior. When these expectations align with prevailing belief systems and interpretive schemes of central organizational members and key external stakeholders, they form a dominant institutional logic and elicit ascriptions of legitimacy across their stakeholders and the wider public (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are organizations in a field that

used to be characterized by substantial autonomy, widely shielded from outside influence and interests (Bleiklie et al., 2013). HEIs traditionally follow the universal and Humboldtian ideal of academic freedom (e.g. Karran, 2009) in teaching, learning and research. This has led to the emergence of the professionally governed, public HEI as a social institution. Its organizational form has been widely studied and, inter alia, has been described as a professional bureaucracy (Kallio et al., 2020; Mintzberg, 1979), an academic structure (Gumpert & Snyderman, 2002), or a collegial HEI (Bruckmann & Carvalho, 2018).

The organizational field has changed, though, and comprises a range of institutions providing tertiary education that differ, among other aspects, according to their historical development and traditional features

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in various (inter-) national contexts (e.g. Enders, 2002).<sup>6</sup> HEIs face a wide variety of expectations from diverse stakeholders such as the state, professions, and the broader public (e.g. Jongbloed et al., 2008; Mainardes et al., 2010). The changing societal understanding regarding HEIs' purpose, their resource endowments and adequate output, have changed in the wake of the new public management turn in higher education (HE) (e.g. Ferlie et al., 2009; Tight, 2019), foregrounding employability, efficiency, valorization and impact, and leading to the emergence of alternative institutional logics. These changes lead to different understandings of what constitutes a legitimate or effective organizational form, hence giving rise to a new HEI archetype, often called "managerial" (Bruckmann & Carvalho, 2018) or "entrepreneurial" (Reihlen & Wenzlaff, 2016).

Neither organizational changes, nor institutional logics, however, occur fully blown and dominant. Institutional logics emerge, evolve, and fade over time. Different, partially competing and even contradictory logics often coexist, leading organizations to search for ways to conforming to such competing expectations. This is not different for the HEI domain (Rundshagen & Gronau, 2022; Cai & Mountford, 2022). Traditional academic values and belief systems have not been substituted, but complemented by managerial and market values. This led to multiple and contradictory sets of expectations directed at HEIs and their organizational design. Organizations that are subject to such competing logics and try to internally organize conforming behavior to competing demands are labelled as hybrids (Greenwood et al., 2011; Gümüşay et al., 2020). Hybrids try to address the tensions and antagonisms created by competing logics via either keeping them separate ("structural separation") or by attempting to reconcile them internally ("blending") (Gümüşay et al., 2020; Pache & Santos, 2013; Schildt & Perkmann, 2017). Both principal approaches are far from trivial to implement and pose potentially existential threats to HEIs (Gümüşay et al., 2020; Pache & Santos, 2013).

Accordingly, researchers have started to develop a deeper understanding of hybrid HEIs (e.g. Bruckmann & Carvalho, 2018; Jongbloed, 2015; Kleimann, 2019; Pekkola et al., 2022; Upton & Warshaw, 2017). Yet, our knowledge about the implications of hybridity for HEIs' organizational design is still limited. This is surprising, given the crucial impact of organizational structure, processes, and practices on organizational effectiveness and legitimacy – factors in which all HEI stakeholders (incl. students, staff, management, boards and policy makers) have essential roles and interests (Hogan, 2012).

With regard to their organizational design, hybrid HEIs cannot rely on theoretically grounded and well-developed organizational forms or templates, as the scholarly discourse has focused mostly on governmental organizations (Denis et al., 2015) and organizations at the interface of the private and public sectors (i.e. on Public Private Partnerships, see Emmert & Crow, 1987; Reissner, 2019). The specificities of the academic sector have been widely acknowledged (e.g. Kleimann, 2019), yet organizational analyses of strategies and responses to competing logics tend to aim for rather high-level, archetypal responses (e.g. Bruckmann & Carvalho, 2018) leaving more fine-grained assessments of internal organizational designs untouched. Hybrid HEIs, however, will need to explore how existing organizational designs can reflect effective structural separation or blending efforts. Very concrete and theoretically sound organizational designs of hybrid HEIs need to be developed and implemented, yet still have to be brought forward.

In this conceptual paper, we attempt to facilitate this challenge. Based on the classical organization design literature we develop a HEI-specific typology of hybrid organizational designs that incorporate effective structural separation and blending solutions. We detail the two

prominent yet competing logics of academia and commerce in the HE sector and resulting organizational archetypes. Based on different constellations of the two logics, we then develop three organizational types of hybrid HEIs.

This paper extends our understanding on HEIs as hybrid organizations beyond abstract separation and blending principles. More specifically, it contributes to the organization and management discourse on HEIs by (1) specifying the institutional logics of academia and commerce and their corresponding HEI organizational archetypes, (2) showing how different logics constellations can be reflected in HEI organization design and detailing hybrid organizational design templates specific to HEIs, and (3) informing managers in and commissioners of HEIs via a compact, HE specific organizational model and five templates as references and structuring tools in their struggles of creating and maintaining effective HEIs in a complex and evolving environment.

## 2. The higher education context: Institutional demands and organizational responses

HEIs are operating in a highly institutionalized context, characterized by professions, policies and programs shaping the field and driving organizations to integrate divergent practices and procedures in order to increase their legitimacy and survival prospects (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Institutional logics have been advanced as a useful concept to describe and analyze different sets of legitimizing expectations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), prescribing or establishing (expected) structures and patterns of behavior. With the acknowledgement that different, potentially conflicting institutional logics exist and might yield different organizational responses (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008), the institutional logics framework is well suited for the analysis of the HEI context and resulting organizational design implications.

The literature features analyses of institutional logics in the field of HE against the backdrop of substantial changes that have transformed the sector (e.g. Bronstein & Reihlen, 2014; Bruckmann & Carvalho, 2018; Cai & Mountford, 2022; Reihlen & Wenzlaff, 2016). Policymakers (among others) continually generate new pressures and administer schemes such as ranking, accreditation or research assessment exercises (e.g. Adler & Harzing, 2009; Collini, 2017; Julian & Ofori-Dankwa, 2006), steering resource allocation and rendering legitimacy. Even though there is significant complexity in the HE field, we can crystallize a contrast between two fundamental and opposed logics facing HEIs in line with the literature (Cai & Mountford, 2022): a traditional logic based on academic principles on the one hand, and a new logic that has emerged over recent decades following market-oriented principles on the other hand. Exemplary accounts on the two opposing logics and labels assigned to them include Michael's (1997) "consumerism versus professionalism"; Gumpert's (2000) contrasting of a "social institution" vs. an "industry" logic; and "public good" vs. "commodity to be capitalized on" (and thus with for-profit intentions) ideals (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Furthermore, "a public good knowledge/learning" vs. "an academic capitalism" regime (Mars & Rhoades, 2012); or "traditional" vs. "private sector" paradigms (Bruckmann & Carvalho, 2018) feature in the literature. We condense these two opposing logics as *academic* and *commercial*, and articulate their dimensions and characteristics along their respective purposes, sources of legitimacy, organizational behaviors or governance modes, and individual roles, following Ramus et al. (2021) suggested categories.

The historic Humboldtian ideal is a guiding theme for the academic logic. It encompasses freedom of teaching–learning–research, unity of research and teaching, unity of science and scholarship, and primacy of pure science over professional training (e.g. Ash, 2006). These principles, beliefs and values have shaped the organizational design of the traditional university. This "Humboldt"-archetype matches Mintzberg's (1992) professional bureaucracy as relying on specialized and qualified professionals who are granted a high level of autonomy (Bruckmann & Carvalho, 2018). Its major *raison d'être* are knowledge generation and

<sup>6</sup> Under the umbrella term of HEI, we summarize traditional universities, university colleges, universities of applied sciences, liberal arts colleges, business or management schools, medical schools, law schools and the like that have at least some discretion to set their strategy and choose their structures.

the provision of *Bildung*, resulting in educated citizens (Nussbaum, 2002), as such serving the common good in a broader sense (Collini, 2012; Marginson, 2011). Thus, the key source of legitimacy for HEIs is meeting collective interests, originating from society-at-large. Individuals at the core of such organizations are mostly tenured professors who act as intrinsically motivated professionals devoted to their area of expertise and who engage in self-directed academic activity. Students are self-motivated learners. Public service attitude drives organizational behavior, and decision-making processes are collegiate.

However, considering the profound changes HEIs have been facing during the past three decades, forces outmaneuvering or even discarding these Humboldtian ideals have gained traction. The contemporary role model for the field is a (widely) liberalized (quasi-) market with competition as key characteristic and central resource allocation mechanism (e.g. Kallio et al., 2020; Naidoo, 2016). HE has been re-conceptualized through processes (and their underlying ideas) of commercialization (e.g. Bok, 2003; Gupta, 2015), marketization (e.g. del Cerro Santamaría, 2020; Natale & Doran, 2012) and consumerism/consumer orientation (e.g. Bunce et al., 2017; Wellen, 2015). “Deregulation, the influx of for-profit organizations and increased quasi market competition between and across national higher education systems have all become features of the higher education landscape” (Naidoo, 2016: 2) and add to the tableau of expectations and pressures. In consequence, Davidson (2015) depicts a “corporatization shift”, taking up observations that HEIs “now are encountering strong pressure to behave like corporations” (Engwall, 2008, p. 9).

Accordingly, a different, “Rockefeller” archetype accommodates this commercial logic. It is, with different accentuations, referred to as the “managerial” archetype (Bruckmann & Carvalho, 2018) or the “competitive bureaucracy” (Kallio et al., 2020) in the literature. Ideal-typically, it represents the completion of a development of HEIs adopting procedures and structures from the corporate world (Engwall, 2008). Its major *raison d’être* is profit generation, either in the mild form in order to become self-sustaining (public HEIs), or the strong form to maximize profits (often private HEIs). According to the commercial logic, HEIs provide marketable services and vocational knowledge. “Anti-Harvards” (Althaus, 2009) have emerged as a new mainstream HEI type particularly in the United States, and degree or diploma mills have arisen as a highly controversial business model undermining traditional academic credentials (Contreras & Gollin, 2009), as such being an even more extreme illustration of market orientation. Commercial success, expressed in enrolment figures or financial performance indicators, but also visible in favorable positions in rankings or league tables (e.g. Enders, 2014; Wedlin, 2006) provides legitimacy. Individuals within such organizations are mostly employed service providers (professors or adjunct lecturers) who have to meet budgeted targets and are expected to satisfy customers. In line with a market model of governance (Reihlen & Wenzlaff, 2016), they are incentivized if they perform well in this regard. Furthermore, successful (i.e. customer satisfying) as well as efficient teaching methods and materials are replicated (Althaus, 2009), which could lead in *extremis* to an “automation of higher education” (Noble, 1998). Student are consumers (e.g. Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005; Tomlinson, 2017) within the Rockefeller, assuming the role of paying customers instead of independent learners. Hence, organizational behavior is strictly market-driven (e.g. Althaus, 2009), and extensive control mechanisms associated with the rise of managerialism in HE (e.g. Deem, 1998) dominate.

Table 1 provides an overview of these two opposing logics.

In the contemporary reality of the HE field, both logics are prevalent at the same time; they simultaneously exert pressure on HEIs to conform to their prescriptions (Bruckmann & Carvalho, 2018). As evidenced by a series of studies on emerging hybrids in the HE field, most organizations do not entirely adopt and conform to only one of these two existing logics while completely ignoring the other. Bruckmann and Carvalho (2018), for example, report on the emergence of a hybrid interpretive scheme underlying what they call the “efficient-collegial” university

**Table 1**  
Conflicting logics and their dimensions.

Logics Dimensions	Academic Logic	Commercial Logic
<b>Purpose/goals</b>	– Knowledge generation – Provision of <i>Bildung</i>	– Profit generation – Provision of services and of vocational knowledge
<b>Sources of legitimacy</b>	– Serving collective interests and the common good – Society at large	– Market positioning – Competitiveness – Commercial success
<b>Organizational behavior/governance</b>	– Collegiate, bureaucratic – Safeguarding academic freedom	– Managerial – Sales-/market-driven – Entrepreneurial
<b>Individual behavior/roles</b>	– Academic professionals – Independent individuals – Self-motivated learners	– Service providers – Managing/managed workforce – Student-consumers

archetype, in which the structures and systems of both the collegial and managerial archetypes are (partly) adopted. Kleimann (2019) argues that the German university even is a multiple hybrid organization, implying that they work with “a variety of contradicting structures on all structural levels of universities: on the level of goal programs, conditional programs, communication channels, and personnel.” (Kleimann, 2019:1097).

In the next section, we further develop this line of research by first consolidating the particularly valuable, yet scarce portfolio of structural solutions for hybrid HEIs. We then develop organizational types of hybrid HEIs.

### 3. Structural solutions for HEIs as hybrid organizations: On structural separation and blending

The emergence of conflicting belief systems and principles for organizational behavior and structure have wielded high research interest, and organization scholars have been trying to understand ways in which such conflicting principles can effectively and efficiently be accounted for. This resulted in the emergence of the concept of hybrid organizations which can be described as organizations that are characterized by an intended internalization of different institutional logics (e.g. Denis et al., 2015; Skelcher & Smith, 2015). Compared to their non-hybrid counterparts, hybrid organizations are subject to tensions that arise from the combination and integration of different and conflicting institutional logics (Denis et al., 2015).

Organizations, in their attempts to deal with these challenges employ different responses: they can decide to follow both logics and organizationally *separate* the operating units into dedicated compartments (Gümüşay et al., 2020). This compartmentalization can take place within the same organization, leading towards segmentation or can result in the emergence of separate, yet associated organizations, causing segregation (Skelcher, 2013). Another reaction is *blending*, which occurs when elements of the conflicting demands are blended into new “synthetic” prescriptions (Gümüşay et al., 2020).

Such organizational responses to competing logics are also prevalent in HEIs. In a sense, HEIs have been seen as hybrids already for a long time, albeit not always that explicitly (Jolink & Niesten, 2012; Vakkuri & Johanson, 2020). For example, Gumport and Snyderman (2002) explain how in the past three decades, the “realities of constraining organizational factors, such as money and space” (2002: 378) have forced universities to carefully select investing in those activities that are most central to their mission, least costly and/or of the highest quality (Gumport & Snyderman, 2002). In a similar vein, Kleimann (2019) explains that the German university is one of multiple hybridity. He stresses that this multiple hybrid organization emerged because German universities – as well as many others around the globe – face contradictions and tensions forcing them to develop a hybrid organization.

While these are all well-developed and empirically manifest observations, they lead up to the same problem: the antagonisms created in the organization due to the internalization of competing logics result in conflicts between factions representing these competing logics (Gümüsay et al., 2020: 128). For example, Gumpport and Snyderman's (2002) study on the influence of formal organizational structures in academia on the legitimization of knowledge points towards the contingent effect of institutional logics on the attribution of truth, finality and value to knowledge: when competing logics offer different criteria, truth, finality and value of knowledge are contested, constructive discourse becomes impossible in the organization.

Structural hybridity solutions for HEIs have been identified and described by authors such as Skelcher (2014), Jongbloed (2015), and Bruckmann and Carvalho (2018). These studies have established the relevance of competing institutional logics in HEI, as well as their intricate organizational consequences. Yet despite these inroads towards describing and explaining HEI hybridity, extant approaches fall short on at least two fronts:

First, extant approaches often remain vague in their conceptualization of different or competing logics, and especially on the nature of the relation between competing logics. Authors such as Pache and Santos (2013) have highlighted the relevance of core vs. peripheral logics, and dominant vs. minor logics, and their potentially shifting relation for the urgency and effectiveness of organizational responses over time.

Second, the suggested structural solutions remain widely generic, as hybridity proponents rarely leverage the respective organizational or sectoral contexts. These would allow a deeper engagement with the abundant repertoire of available organizational design parameters (e.g. Mintzberg, 1979, Nadler & Tushman, 1997) for the specification of hybrid organizational designs (Pache & Santos, 2013). Already Gumpport and Snyderman (2002) remark that the "multi-dimensionality of formal organizational structure has been neglected in higher education research, even though it is well known to those who work and live in academic organisations" (2002: 377).

Overall, the current literature acknowledges structural solutions to hybridity of HEIs, but falls short of (a) specifying different constellations of competing logics and their effect on organizational design options and choices, and (b) detailing configurations of organizational design parameters underlying the generic structural hybridity solutions. In the following, we provide such organizational templates as more fine-grained design options for HEIs along three analytical constellations of the competing logics in the HE sector.

#### 4. Organizational designs of HEIs as hybrids: A typology beyond structural separation and blending

##### 4.1. An HEI organizational template

The classic organizational solutions for hybrid organizations along the separation – blending dichotomy are available to HEIs as well, yet have not been molded to reflect the multi-dimensional character of organizational structure (Gumpport & Snyderman, 2002). A parameterization of HEIs' organizational structure and subsequent integration to more differentiated organizational design types of hybrid HEIs, therefore holds substantial promise.

As the HE literature does not provide a pertinent template on HEIs as organizations, we draw on the general organization design literature (Groth, 1999; Harris & Raviv, 2002; Mintzberg, 1979) to adopt five organizational parameters along which we map a simple HEI organizational template: (1) organizational differentiation, (2) unit grouping, (3) decision making, (4) employment type, and (5) reward system. While these parameters are HE-agnostic, their specification and suggested parameter values are special to HEIs, and inspired by the more proximate literature on HE organization and strategy (e.g. Gumpport & Snyderman, 2002; Pringle & Huisman, 2011; Shattock, 2003; Wedlin, 2006). In their combination, these parameters sketch a HE organization.

The individual parameter values vary in effectiveness with regard to their ability to address values and ideals, and to elicit or just reflect legitimate behavior according to the institutional logics of academia and commerce:

The *differentiation* of the organizational structure refers to the degree to which it is decomposed into specialized sub-units along spatial, hierarchical or functional dimensions (Blau, 1970; Kretschmer & Puranam, 2008). The academic logic encourages a high degree of differentiation as a consequence of the professional values of freedom and autonomy of the individual researchers in both research and teaching (e.g. Enders, 2002, a differentiation that is even derogatorily referred to as the realm of "academic fiefdoms"). This differentiation is often accompanied by a large and differentiated portfolio of support staff that facilitates research and teaching. The commercial logic's focus on efficiency, the balancing of inputs and outputs and service delivery to customers, discourages this type of horizontal differentiation and pushes towards integration. Spatial differentiation (i.e. multi-campus systems) in turn, is encouraged in commercial terms as it signals scale and standardization efficiencies (Althaus, 2009). In the academic logic, spatial differentiation is rather dysfunctional as it discourages the academic discourse with peers of the same institution.

*Unit grouping* refers to the dominant criterion of clustering individuals in the HEI. In the academic logic this is typically done via academic disciplines and fields, i.e. knowledge domains. The commercial logic favors grouping via teaching oriented criteria such as degree programs or levels that are a primary source of income generation.

*Decision making* in the academic logic is typically collegial as the professional organization relies on self-governance and regulation according to professional standards established via the socialization and professionalization of its primary members (Bergquist, 1992). This differs from the market oriented and managerial top-down approach of decision making that corresponds to the commercial logic (e.g. Althaus, 2009).

The freedom and autonomy related values of the academic logic are reflected in the *employment relations* it offers its professional members. Tenure systems and open-ended contracts are manifestations of this freedom that needs to be guaranteed and shielded from outside influence even if the employee works and communicates in ways that do not conform to the HEI's preferences or current priorities (e.g. Stergiou & Somarakis, 2016). In the commercial logic, conformity and flexibility are key to achieve organizational efficiency goals and satisfy key stakeholders on competitive markets – it therefore relies much more on temporary and flexible employment relations rather than on open-ended contracts, let alone even more restrictive tenure systems.

Finally, different *reward systems* and types of incentives are legitimized via the two logics. The academic system works with reputation and status stemming from expert knowledge and peer impact as primary incentives. It tends to detest maneuvering according to financial interests, which is entirely legitimate according to the commercial logic. Table 2 provides an overview of our HE specific parameter definitions and values.

Overall, we constitute a rather strong influence of the institutional logic on the suitability, or even effectiveness on organizational design choices along these design parameters. This also implies that the choice between these parameter values is all but trivial in situations in which proponents or factions of both logics exert their influence on the HEIs. The choice between these parameter values, in other words, necessarily reflects the struggle of hybrid HEIs to find adequate and functional organizational designs.

The next section tries to resolve this challenge by differentiating typical constellations of institutional logics and specifying fitting sets – types – of hybrid HEIs along these organizational dimensions.

##### 4.2. A typology of hybrid HEI organizations

In a contingency tradition, we argue that the choices HEIs make with

**Table 2**  
Structural design parameters for HEIs.

Design Parameters	Explanation
<b>Differentiation</b> multi-unit vs. integrated form	Horizontal: Prominence (relative number) of traditional auxiliary academic personnel (support staff) to professors (as teachers and researchers) Spatial: One vs. multiple campuses (e.g. multi-campus systems) and legal entities
<b>Unit grouping</b> product vs. discipline	Product (e.g. degree programs) vs. discipline (e.g. Finance, Marketing, etc.) as dominant grouping criterion
<b>Decision-making</b> collegiate / managerial	Collegiate decision making (relying on self-governance of professionally established experts from within) vs. managerial decision making (e.g. administrators or managers rather than academics)
<b>Employment type</b> core / permanent vs. peripheral / freelance	Core / permanent (e.g. tenure) or peripheral / freelance employment (e.g. freelance lecturer)
<b>Reward system (incentives)</b> monetary vs professional	Monetary, e.g. bonus payments vs. professional rewards such as professor titles or tenure

regard to the hybrid structures they adopt will be a function of their exposure to, and absorption of the expectation of their stakeholders as expressed in the *constellation* of institutional logics that they encounter. Adherents, proponents and opponents of the academic and commercial logics vie for dominance in and around HEIs. Absolute dominance of the academic logic yields a Humboldt type organization, absolute dominance of the commercial logic favors a Rockefeller type organization. Every other constellation tends to yield hybrids – and the constellation, the relative strength of the two logics, influences how the hybrid organizational design will look like. Following [Pache and Santos \(2013\)](#) who point out the existence of balanced and imbalanced constellations of institutional logics, we derive three typical constellations that can be usefully distinguished in this regard: (1) a balanced situation where the academic and commercial logic are equally strong in a dominant/dominant setting, (2) an imbalanced dominant/minor situation in which the academic logic dominates, and (3) an imbalanced minor/dominant situation in which the commercial logic dominates. We label the emerging typical organizational templates as the Truncated Humboldt, the Ambitious Nerd, and the Educational Factory, respectively.

#### 4.3. Dominant/dominant: The Truncated Humboldt as a structurally separated HEI hybrid

In situations where both, the commercial and the academic logic are dominant, HEIs need to resort to structural separation in order to please their relevant coalitions and create pure yet structurally separated organizational units. They combine an entirely academically orientated unit (Humboldt) with a fully commercially orientated organization (Rockefeller), and minimize interdependencies and interactions between these sub-units. This combination works as both separated units are granted a high degree of autonomy. Only their respective autonomy allows them to follow their respective lead logics. This autonomy, however, also comes at the expense of intra-organizational frictions. The purpose of the Truncated Humboldt's Rockefeller unit may well be profit generation, as can be the case for example with business schools serving as "cash cows" of universities (e.g. [Pfeffer & Fong, 2004](#)). The Truncated Humboldt's commercially orientated unit is clearly set up to be competitive in the international HE market through the provision of highly acclaimed degrees to an ambitious constituency looking for credentials for a promising international career (e.g. [Tholen, 2017](#)). To that end, it can draw on the academic reputation of its "internal" academic-type sister unit (in practice, one unit is usually formed as the subsidiary or sister organization of the other) to at least secure academic credibility and to showcase high-quality standards.

From an organizational design point of view, the hybridity of this organization is reflected particularly in the unit grouping, which is both

product and discipline-based ([Gumport & Snyderman, 2002](#)): on the one hand the degree programs offered are consequently understood and managed as products so that staff is grouped along these degree programs in the Rockefeller sub-unit. On the other hand, substantial (credible) academic input is required, which ultimately stems from academic disciplines that are located in the Humboldt-type organizational unit.

Furthermore, the organization is highly differentiated, as it allows the dedicated professionals (academics) to specialize on their core tasks of research and teaching, and employs an elaborate body of support staff. In the commercially oriented unit, this staff mainly consists of program managers, plus secretaries or assistants serving the needs of teachers and of students, who are seen as customers demanding high quality products. In the academic unit, administrative support staff and supplementary research aids are common, but also the facilitation of high quality teaching (in terms of content and style) is key; it includes e.g. convenient scheduling and course material supply. Notably, the teaching process also is hybrid: it is automated insofar as basic courses covering mainstream business functions such as accounting or marketing (exemplifying business or management school subjects here) can be easily standardized and taught "off the shelf". At the same time, it is individual insofar as courses covering more sophisticated areas or specialization options require top-notch research input and the draw of experts' reputation (professors or practitioners) in their field. For the commercially oriented part, to be effective in this approach, there is a permanent core management (and support) team whereas the teaching personnel is largely peripheral and freelance; ideally, the faculty is almost exclusively virtual and perfectly tailored to the respective program.

These differentiation and unit grouping choices undoubtedly affect decision-making, employment types, and reward systems. The Humboldt sub-unit's staff of professors is tenured, following tenure tracks, or alternative open-ended employment relations. The HEI binds expertise, teaching expertise and current and prospective reputation via this means. The decision making process is collegial, following the academic tradition. The commercially oriented sub-unit is run based on strong managerial decision-making from program managers and executed via administrators that liaise with widely independent or freelance teaching staff.

#### 4.4. Dominant academic logic, minor commercial logic: The Ambitious Nerd as a blended HEI hybrid

The Ambitious Nerd sees the academic (research) logic as its core, which is also interpreted as leading to commercial success. This hybrid HEI pursues high academic ambitions; it intends to play in the national (for example in the case of law schools where national law limits international transferability of licenses or concepts) if not global (for example in the case of business or medical schools) elite segment of HE. It specializes in one (or very few) core domains in which it excels, in both research and teaching. In its niche, the faculty's research is acclaimed, and leveraged to offer high profile teaching programs to more mature, often professional student population. Around its core domain, the Ambitious Nerd is able to attract the brightest graduate students and scholars, and its input is sought after by public and private organizations. The commercial benefits of such a high level of specialization and reputation are not left idle, allowing the Ambitious Nerd to also monetize its specialized expertise in various teaching programs that contribute substantially to its earnings.

Reflecting the academic ambition, which is inseparably linked to academic credibility, the structure of the Ambitious Nerd is highly integrated, and its units are grouped based on academic (sub-)disciplines. Decision-making is partly collegiate and partly managerial: the former approach reflects the intention to play a serious academic role, whereas the latter approach enables the Nerd to act fast and at least situationally market oriented towards its commercial interests. The hybridity is also

visible in the teaching process, which is both tailor-made and standardized. On the one hand, a small core group of tenured, high-profile professors teach research-inspired input. On the other hand, peripheral and basic courses are delivered efficiently by a (large) pool of associated, non-tenured, but mostly senior teaching staff that have shown to perform well in the classroom.

Research is continuous: The small prestigious core of tenured professors must remain at the forefront of their respective area of expertise. It must keep publishing at highest level, but the peripheral (teaching) staff on top may not or just partially engage in noteworthy research – or do so in the name of other affiliations they might have. Furthermore, the reward system is built around monetary incentives otherwise known from the (big) business world. Such incentives are effective for this hybrid, because top academic talent must be recruited (which may otherwise be drawn into corporate jobs). In addition, some fast-paced managerial decisions (reacting to market trends) require commitment of employees who may have to take on extra workload e.g. to attract funding – and participate in it with a bonus.

#### 4.5. *Minor academic logic, dominant commercial logic: The Educational Factory as a blended HEI hybrid*

The educational factory is characterized by the dominance of the commercial logic. It largely follows a conceptualization of higher education “as an input–output system which can be reduced to an economic production function” (Olssen & Peters, 2005, p. 324). Considering the two core activities of universities mentioned earlier, this type prioritizes teaching in fulfilling the main task of supplying a solid foundation in a relevant field of applied sciences to a constituency with a rather utilitarian perception of higher education. This constituency comprises students seeking a degree as reliable and well-respected pathway into the job market as well as businesses absorbing employable graduates (e.g. Moreau & Leathwood, 2006) as fittingly processed, although rarely tailor-made output. Thus, market orientation comes especially in the guise of serving the job market here. Consequently, the degree programs offered represent vocationally oriented academic education. They tend to mirror both traditional strongholds (for example engineering taught at engineering schools or technical faculties of universities of applied sciences) and changes in the world of work where new job profiles are emerging (for example game designer) and previously fashionable specialization areas are vanishing.

Teaching is the major income-generating activity, whereby satisfying the (either tuition-fee-paying or publicly subsidized) student clientele is paramount. For example, business and law schools, but also smaller colleges will have a teaching orientation. However, other income sources in the respective field include practical work; as a case in point, medical schools will be geared towards clinical activity. Research, by contrast, plays a minor role and is pursued either to inform the teaching and / or to achieve additional valuable outreach to stakeholders mainly from the business world. It might assume the form of consultancy-style reports made to specification for a business audience. There is a tendency towards a multi-unit organizational form with the operation of several campuses to achieve synergies through scale effects (either improving profitability of private institutions or reducing public deficit within state college/public university systems). A largely profession-driven decision-making and a “one committee - one function” rationale with a product-driven unit grouping reflects the focus on degree program provision (and not on discipline-oriented research). Consequently, there is only a small body of support staff, which in turn is linked to broad job specialization: professors / lecturers have to cover some administrative functions, too, and to teach a variety of subjects still related to their area of expertise. The organization employs a large permanent core of tenured professors who largely are “teaching robots” spending many hours in classrooms or lecture halls, although teaching style and contents are still subject to academic freedom. Incentives are partly professional, as the large teaching staff receives the professor title

and a tenured position, but essentially monetary, as professors can earn bonuses or face public salary schemes in which advances are tied to research output that can be either directly marketed or is deemed relevant for the institution in an indirect way.

We summarize the organizational design parameters of the three hybrid HEIs in Table 3 below, including the corresponding parameterization of the Humboldt and Rockefeller archetypes to illustrate the contrast between the archetypal (“pure”) non-hybrids and our hybrid types. Table 4 provides real-world HEIs as illustrative examples of the five types.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

Against the backdrop of a changing HE sector, where HEIs face manifold stakeholder expectations culminating in conflicting logics we summarized from the literature as academic and commercial, we argued that HEIs are challenged in accommodating one of these logics alone. For most HEIs, neither a traditional Humboldtian university model, nor a purely profit-driven, market oriented (Rockefeller) model allows to secure sufficient legitimacy vis-à-vis key stakeholders including policy-makers allocating vital resources, prospective students seeking promising education, and a greater public demanding service to the common good. Deploying classic and recent literature on organizational hybridity and organizational design, we developed three hybrid types of HEI reflecting effective structural separation or blending efforts (Gümüsay et al., 2020) allowing these organizations to accommodate the two conflicting logics with varying emphases.

We thus broaden the discussion of HEIs and their options to prevail in their contemporary, increasingly complex environment: the literature covering hybridity in organizations within sectors traditionally understood as public, such as HE, mostly focuses on (traditionally given) public logics versus (newly emerged) private logics and the manifold implications of the ensued dichotomy (Emmert & Crow, 1987). We transcend this public-private pairing by considering an academic logic that is captured adequately neither through the lens of the public nor the lens of the private alone. The focus on the academic and commercial logics on the one hand, and their analytical constellations along the dominant/minor values on the other, allowed an identification and articulation of discrete design options and hybrid types that go beyond generic solutions that tend to remain at a macro level with a governance orientation (e.g. Bruckmann & Carvalho, 2018; Skelcher & Smith, 2015). We therefore answer calls to map out what forms hybrid HE organizations (could) take in their attempts to overcome difficulties in respect of their internal set-up (e.g. Skelcher & Smith, 2015).

However, while the specification of hybrid HE organizational templates as a response to constellations of two competing institutional logics breaks some ground, it needs to be acknowledged that HEIs are subject to a more complex environment than can be mapped along two institutional logics. Many real HEIs will blur boundaries between our HEI types, as variations and other combinations of design parameters and/or (sub-) elements than we suggest will be mandated or expected. We have referred to the understanding of HEI as multiple hybrids before (Kleimann, 2019) due to their exposure to multiple competing institutional logics, among which the commercial and academic logics are universal, but not exclusive. Buckner and Zapp (2021:31), for example, acknowledge that “universities are profoundly shaped by global factors including specific institutional logics located above and beyond the nation-state” – but at the same time imply the relevance of HEIs’ national contexts as moderators of such global field level logics, as well as origins of additional regional logics. Various studies investigate the influence of regional institutional logics, that is “logics that are particularly salient in a geographic community” (Vedula et al., 2022: 5), on actors’ interpretation and responses in their environment (Vedula et al., 2019; 2022). These regional logics moderate the strength, impact and particular constellation of broader field-level logics (Lee & Lounsbury, 2015; Vedula et al., 2022), such as the academic and commercial logics

**Table 3**  
Overview of Hybrid and Archetypes.

	Traditional Humboldt	Truncated Humboldt	Ambitious Nerd	Educational Factory	Rockefeller
	Academic (A) archetype	Dominant A Dominant C	Dominant A Minor C	Minor A Dominant C	Commercial (C) archetype
<i>Differentiation</i> multi-unit vs. integrated form	Integrated	Multi-unit	Integrated	Multi-unit	Multi-unit
<i>Unit grouping</i> product vs. discipline	Discipline	Both	Discipline	Product	Product
<i>Decision-making</i> collegiate / managerial	Collegiate	Collegiate & Managerial	Collegiate & Managerial	Managerial & Collegiate	Managerial
<i>Employment type</i> core / permanent vs. peripheral / local	Large core, small periph.; Individualists	Both. Humboldt and Rockefeller values in resp. org unit	Small core, large periph.; Individualists	Large core, small periph.; Robots	Medium core, large periph. / freelance; Robots
<i>Reward system (incentives)</i> monetary vs professional	Professional	Both. Humboldt and Rockefeller values in resp. org unit	Monetary	Professional & Monetary	Monetary

**Table 4**  
Examples of HEI per type.

Traditional Humboldt	Truncated Humboldt	Ambitious Nerd	Educational Factory	Rockefeller
<b>Universiteit van Tilburg, NL</b> Public Dutch university, founded 1927, motto: "understanding society". Clustering mostly based on expertise. Collegiate decision-making in a bottom-up approach, Combination of tenured and flexible staff. Reward-system mostly status-based.	<b>Universiteit Antwerpen / Antwerp Management School (AMS), BE</b> Major public research university in Belgium with some 20,000 students across nine faculties. AMS is its "independent" business school (since 2000), catering to a global tuition paying student constituency via nine full-time Master (plus various executive) programs.	<b>IMD – International Institute for Management Development, CH</b> Private business school in Switzerland holding triple-crown accreditation (AACSB, AMBA, EQUIS), offering three top-ranked degree programs (MBA/MSc level), and executive programs. Academic core of individualists. Dedicated research in management areas.	<b>FOM Hochschule für Oekonomie und Management, DE</b> Private, not-for-profit university of applied sciences in Germany since 1993, > 30 centers. Close ties with industries, co-operative education programs with big businesses. Mostly managerial decision-making, monetary incentives for research output.	<b>IU International University of Applied Sciences, DE</b> Private university. of applied sciences in Germany with > 25 campuses. Strong market orientation, employability focus, several co-operative education programs. Product-driven unit grouping. Scalable teaching (massive efforts in developing distance/online education), managerial decision-making.
<b>Università degli Studi di Milano, IT</b> Largest public university in Northern Italy with some 60,000 students, member of the League of European Research Universities (LERU). There are nine faculties in natural and social sciences and liberal arts	<b>Universität Erfurt / Willy Brandt School of Public Policy, DE</b> Public university in Germany (1389-1816, re-established 1993), several affiliated institutions. Willy-Brandt School as professional school since 2002, largely financed through third-party funding.	<b>Semmelweis University, HU</b> Research-oriented medical school in Budapest, Hungary, founded 1769. Three faculties (all related to health sciences), affiliated university hospitals.	<b>Högskolan Dalarna, SE</b> Public university of applied sciences in the Swedish province of Dalarna, founded 1977, campuses at Falun and Borlänge. Close ties with regional industry and businesses. Large permanent core of professors, mostly product-driven unit grouping	<b>Laureate Education, Inc., US</b> US corporation, listed at NASDAQ stock market. Multi-campus operations in Mexico and Peru under the brand name of Laureate International Universities. Standardized and scalable teaching, managerial decision-making.

Note: These selected, international example institutions illustrating our five types of HEI closely represent the respective organizational design parameter values and combinations. We acknowledge that the reality of organizations will not allow perfect matches with the conceptually derived ideal types. Slight deviations or exceptional combinations of parameter values (or details thereof) and some partly blurred boundaries are unavoidable.

in focus here. For example, the Scandinavian model is described as historically heavily influenced by the German (Humboldtian) university system (Alajoutsijärvi & Kerttu, 2016) and evolved around a Humboldt type. In the two transformative phases of HE systems in the 1960s (democratization of HE access) and 1990s (new public management turn) the Scandinavian HEI have seen the commercial logic influence "filtered" (Lee & Lounsbury, 2015) via a local public access logic stemming from the particular and enduring Nordic social democratic welfare orientation (Swank, 2000). The latter materializes in high enrolment rates, high public funding levels and continuous investments in HE on both, education and research (Bleiklie & Michelsen, 2019). This specific Scandinavian model sees a closer involvement of the state and government influence via bureaucratic traits (the rule of law is key for operations; see the *Rechtsstaat* administrative tradition in the Nordic countries; Bleiklie & Michelsen, 2019) towards a "mass public university

bureaucracy".<sup>7</sup> Hence, in our terms that regional model can be seen to reflect a local logic of public service moderating the academic and commercial ones, which leads to regional idiosyncrasies also in the approaches to HEIs' organizational design and the leeway to configure the design parameters. The articulation of HEI-specific organizational designs reflecting the universal logics, however, provides a potentially fertile ground to further explore variations based on moderating influences such as regional logics.

In this sense, our HEI specific typology is also helpful for managers and commissioners of HE. The nature of HEI as large and complex organizations (Altbach, 2014) has led to calls for approaches and models supporting more professionally governed HEIs enabled by "skilled management, innovative leadership, and effective frameworks for decision-making" (Altbach, 2014: 1307). At the same time, it has been stressed that HEI are not the same as large businesses and hence require

<sup>7</sup> We thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing towards the specificities of the Nordic higher education system.

sector specific frameworks (Altbach, 2014). We provide such a framework that conceptualizes sets of HE-specific external pressures and organizational design options. A better understanding of these pressures, their analytical combinations and effects on underlying organizational design parameters and their interplay can fuel debates on good management of HEIs (Csizmadia et al., 2008). Our typology provides orientation along the suggested types and might hence also aid HE commissioners in structural reform debates that necessarily reflect regional idiosyncrasies, but benefit from guideposts of HEI specific organizational structures.

Finally, this paper also contributes to the general and critical discourse on the utility or benefit of hybridity concepts for HEI. Hybrids have been called “monstrous” (Vakkuri & Johanson, 2020) to illustrate the seemingly satisfying approach to please multiple constituents via internal compromise that might lead to not satisfying any constituent to a sufficient degree, but just leads to heightened internal complexity for the organization. Hybridity, so the argument, will lead to organizational decline rather than survival. This point has especially been made in the HE context, which is seen as particularly complex with regard to the diversity and centrality of expectations directed at HEIs, and stakeholder groups that hold such expectations and claims. Vakkuri and Johanson (2020) consider it more appropriate to conceptualize HEI as “hybrid assemblages” that organize research, development and innovation activities as meso-level systems, rather than hybrid organizations. Kleiman’s description of the university system as a form of “multiple hybridity” (Kleiman 2019) supports the point that hybridity approaches do not allow for sufficient degrees of requisite variety to adequately cope with their overly complex environment. Recent studies on dysfunctional hybrids seem to support this argument (Cappellaro, Tracey, & Greenwood, 2020; Vakkuri, Johanson, Feng, & Giordano, 2021). As hybrids reflect changes in their institutional environment, they will need to change as their relevant institutional logics change, or even evolve. Teelken (2015) points out that in such fluid environments especially loosely coupled members of the organization can be very critical towards change. This can even result in pretending enthusiasm, or symbolic compliance, while simultaneously doing “things one’s own way” (2015: 310), corrupting the legitimacy efforts of the hybrid.

Given these critical voices, we stress the role of our suggested organizational hybridity types of HEI that pay tribute to the complex HE environment by stepping beyond generic and overly general structural solutions, and explicitly consider external contingencies (the constellation of the two institutional logics) in the development of the organizational templates. We therefore establish a balance of analytical differentiation and model parsimony that allows our typology to serve as a platform for future inroads into the study of HEI hybridity models. These may include a closer examination of conditions and types of dysfunctional HE organizations, and a further stratification of the institutional environment with regard to expectation sets, or logics, and a corresponding enrichment of the design templates.

#### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Sascha Albers:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft preparation, Writing – review & editing. **Volker Rundshagen:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft preparation, Writing – reviewing & editing. **Johanna Vanderstraeten:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft preparation, Writing – review & editing. **Markus Raueiser:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft preparation, Writing – review & editing. **Lode De Waele:** Writing – review & editing.

#### Data Availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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