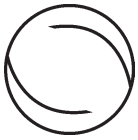

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Academic Institutions in Search of Quality: Local Orders and Global Standards

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Abstract

Quality judgements in terms of academic standards of excellence required by external stakeholders such as labour markets and steering hierarchies obviously exert strong pressure on universities. Do they generate an 'iron cage' effect, imposing a passive and uniform conformity on global standards? The paper examines the organization of higher education and research set-ups with a strong lens. What does academic quality actually mean when observed in the field? How do universities and their subunits – professional schools, colleges, etc. – actually achieve what they call quality? A methodological and analytical framework is tested. Three sociological concepts – diversity, recognition and local order – make it possible to build four ideal types applicable to comparative inquiry. Such a typology identifies the interdependencies existing between how they position themselves with respect to quality dimensions and internal organizational measures. The paper contributes to a broader organizational study agenda: how do local orders face and deal with market and hierarchy dynamics in a global world of apparently increasing standardization under pressure from soft power. It questions the effect of the 'iron cage' hypothesis. It lists a series of changing patterns or dynamics between types of universities in terms of quality sensitivity, fabrication and content. Diversity and standardization in fact coexist.

Keywords

academic quality, global standardization, ideal-type approaches, local orders, organizational diversity

While corporations and public bureaucracies have attracted sociology-based organizational studies since their early modern development, higher education and research institutions as organizations have remained for many years a rather unexplored topic. A few seminal contributions have been made by empirical studies of mainly American academic contexts: the functioning of R&D centres

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(Pelz, 1967; Pelz & Andrews, 1966), the initiation and fulfilment of organizational sagas in three highly distinctive and regarded colleges (Clark, 1972), the integration and differentiation dynamics inside research university departments (Pfeffer, Leong & Strehl, 1976a; Pfeffer, Salancik & Lebledici, 1976b; Salancik and Pfeffer, 1974), the organizational conditions for universities to deal with external evolutions (Mandelbaum, 1979) and the government of research universities and the role of presidents (Cohen, March & Olsen, 1972).

Nevertheless, since the early 1990s higher education and research institutions have become a fast-growing specific domain, with dedicated journals and professional associations, attracting scholars from various social sciences, including sociologists (see for instance Gumport, 2007; Krücken & Meier, 2006; Lamont, 2009; Musselin, 2001; Popp Berman, 2012; Smelser, 2010). This evolution reflects to a large degree the fact that this sector of academia is today a key issue on public agendas, and that, on top of financial concerns, its performances are questioned with respect to their consequences for economic growth and social equality.

This paper contributes to the understanding of academic research and teaching institutions as organizations (Peterson, 2007). More specifically it develops a theoretical framework in the form of a typology dealing with the organizational dynamics of universities, whose robustness is in the process of being tested against a set of 27 case studies of departments in several fields and countries.

This typology addresses a specific research question. How do universities and their subunits build up what is defined as academic quality, based either on their reputation or on their actual output in research, training and a third mission, wealth creation (Laredo, 2007)? We focus on quality as a consequence of social interaction occurring inside and between subunits such as departments, professional schools, colleges or research centres, as well as within their host universities. These processes deal with resource generation and allocation – funds, staff, students, procedures, symbols, etc. – through the setting up and handling of outside connections and networks with public agencies, private patrons, other universities, professional associations and labour markets. They are also crucial for implementing and enforcing the recruitment, assessment and promotion policies of teaching and research staff. They play a major role in building shared identities and common knowledge. They generate norms and values through socialization and internal regulation. They have an impact on authority and power distribution. They legitimize certain decision-making criteria. They provide a rationale for the division of labour.

Such a typology provides a valuable tool for the comparative understanding of the dynamics at work in higher education across different countries, institutions and disciplines by building analytical grids that link actual explicit or implicit quality strategies, the dynamics of academic organizations and the organizational instrumentation they mobilize.

Global Standards: An Alternative Conceptual Framework

Three sociological concepts pave the way for the theoretical background of an approach that will be developed hereafter: diversity, recognition and local order.

Diversity as an Issue for Research Agendas

Since the early 1980s the higher education and research sector has been facing accelerated rationalization. International influences, such as private or public evaluations and league tables for universities, research journals, research institutes and diplomas, are increasingly driving national developments. The use of references and tools inspired by New Public Management (NPM)

converges with the dissemination of national and international soft law indicators and rankings – whether developed by academic institutions (Shanghai classification of universities, etc.), media (*Business Week, Financial Times, Times Higher Education*, etc.), governments as such (RAE/REF – Research Assessment Exercise/Research Excellence Framework in the UK, AERES – Agence d'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur in France, AAQ – Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Switzerland, etc.), other actors (CHE; Centrum für Hochschulentwicklung in Germany) and international accreditation associations such as EQUIS or international organizations such as the OECD and the European Commission. They foster the vision that there is one good way, and only one, to produce and judge quality in higher education and research. Such apparently voluntary soft law instruments nevertheless are to a large extent out of the discretionary control of local and national public authorities, and are effectively mandatory. Contingent on the expanding use of indicators as reliable tracers of academic activity, quality is ontologically supposed to be what is summed up by the measurement of 'excellence'.

Higher education institutions are implicitly or explicitly invited to conform to this new global common sense of quality in so far as the use of these quality judgements is relayed and appropriated as legitimate by a series of public policy incentives. Allocation of funds by steering institutions such as national ministries, the European Commission and private or public bodies supporting research, and references made by key higher education market operators, are big incentives to standardized references or signals because they influence students and families when applying to a specific university, labour market or job offer.

How far are university training and research really subject to irreversible globalization dynamics? Will specific local considerations soon be bulldozed out of existence by the relentless march of global standardization? Are local and national higher education institutes – primarily universities – being forced to adopt a unique strategic position, a uniform vision of quality in terms of performance, whereby they forego any possibility of developing alternative approaches?

In the current literature on higher education and research, arguments that underline a convergence scenario across countries and universities are numerous. Global standards of excellence such as the priority allocated to research performance, the importance of so-called A-ranked journal publications and citation indexes, or the proportion of faculty members who are non-national are gaining ground (Durand & Dameron, 2011). From a broader perspective, NPM-inspired tools of management performance and comparable curricula and grade systems induce uniformity and standardization of quality criteria, not only within the European Union, but in countries worldwide.

Not partaking in the open competition involved in rankings is assumed to be a costly if not suicidal strategy if the process is to be adopted elsewhere. The danger of not conforming involves a higher price when funding agencies and ministries truly believe that the evaluation of excellence can be unambiguously assessed by indicators, in spite of the fact that grassroots faculty members may resist or even reject these methods of assessment, which they consider to be management fads (Birnbaum, 2000).

The analysis of how NPM-style reforms are implemented has reached the top of the agenda for research on higher education in Europe since the turn of the century. The programmes of the CHER (Consortium of Higher Education Researchers) are good examples. Yet there are not many authors in the field of organization theories who consider how universities or countries may exhibit a capacity to reinterpret NPM and set up their own specific hybrid compromises between governance and management in post-NPM reforms (Christensen, 2011; El-Khawas, 2002; Prichard, 2000). Various reasons explain why diversity is not given a fair chance.

One reason is related to the intellectual agenda of the research itself. It deals with the fact that, as with other sectors of society (such as consumption, production or public policy making),

universities are facing explicit standards in terms of management and outcome that are identical or similar all over a country or across the world, the consequence being that they look much more alike than before. Some sort of global rationalization is supposed to be at work. Therefore what differs is considered as beyond the scope of the research. The differences are marginal and hardly worth studying. They are 'noise in the system' produced by residual variables whose only impact on higher education institutions would be to lead them to underperform. Such is the argument most globalization theories express (Brunsson & Jacobsson, 2002). Critical approaches warn about undesirable evolutions promoted by new forms of organizations which, from a Foucauldian perspective, are seen as deploying increasingly bureaucratic and sophisticated systems of surveillance which amounts to treating academics as 'knowledge workers' or mere instruments (Parker & Jary, 1995). There are two options open to professional academics: to submit or to resist, to collude or to resent (Chandler, Barry & Clark, 2002; Clark, 1998; Symon, Buehring, Johnson & Cassell, 2008). Academics are seen as advocating political and moral causes, sustaining self-interest while blaming threats on academic freedom or on diversity generated by current organizational rationalization (Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Nedeva & Boden, 2006; Power, 1997; Sauder & Espeland, 2009; Tuchman, 2009).

There is a corollary linked to the influence of macro-deterministic theories of change. It underlines why diversity in fields such as organizational studies is neglected in the research agenda. Universities are considered as passive agencies. Globalization is assumed to be driven by incentives and supervised by remote control processes developed by external bodies and assumed to apply to all local actors. All stakeholders in a given domain thereby refer to an identical body of normative and cognitive standards that supposedly builds an iron cage and imposes one single model for anyone wishing to attain or preserve quality. Each institution is required to adapt to the implicit requirements bound up with the embedded definition of quality. Local differentiation here would be fatal. In order to survive and win recognition and all its attendant resources, each university has to copy 'the best', i.e. the organizations ranked at the top in a given league table, giving rise to identical practices in all local spheres within a relatively short period of time.

A third reason for neglecting diversity as an issue for empirical research is methodological. Observation emphasizes discursive elements, formal structures and procedures, and top-down decision-making processes. It assumes that in institutions and organizations implementation follows and complies, that a single university functions internally as an integrated hierarchy or as an undifferentiated system, and that what happens daily inside each of its black-boxed subunits is more or less in line with the visions, wills and discourses of the upper echelons. More in-depth case studies and comparative approaches may be required to check such assumptions, for instance by exploring differences between the campus administration level and subunits such as departments. Academics' power to deal with potentially adverse situations imposed by management is a facet largely underestimated by the social science-based literature referring to agency–principal theories (Sousa, de Nijs & Hendriks, 2010). A diversity hypothesis should also compare various disciplines, in humanities and social sciences as well as in formal sciences and sciences dealing with nature (Musselin, 2001). For instance, many examples of the globalization syndrome are based on studies of professional schools such as business schools. Few refer to hard science cases. Each discipline may deal to some extent in its own manner with additional resources and constraints provided by the new indicator-based visions of quality. Therefore each university, depending on its own disciplinary mix, has to manage some kind of reorganization, raising the question of how to rebuild sustainable internal cohesion within the institution and across its numerous subunits.

While global standards have sent a massive shock wave throughout the academic community, does this standardization of criteria really lead inexorably to organizational convergence and to

imitation? Recent research describing the persisting differences between national systems would appear to cast doubt on this (Musselin, 2005a, 2005b; Paradeise, Reale, Goastellec & Bleiklie, 2009; Bleiklie, Enders, Lepori & Musselin, 2011). Although an *ex post* assessment of Western European higher education reforms would seem to indicate that there is a common trend, the degree of advance, the speed and processes used to deploy the reforms, as well as the manner in which they have been taken up, all vary enormously. There is a world of difference between the early, systematic and relentless deployment of processes linking pay and performance measurement in the UK from the mid-1980s on, and the disjointed incremental approach that has accompanied developments in France or Switzerland through the mid-2000s. In all countries, academic institutions have produced and assimilated recent reforms in their own manner, depending on historical power relationships between centres and peripheries, professional and managerial actors, and academic disciplines, either seizing upon the available reforms as new development resources, or putting up with them as constraints. Ultimately, while the academic landscape has definitely changed, the picture is one of intra- and international diversities, a long way from the homogeneity postulate carried by convergence theory.

To distance itself from the rhetoric of internationalization and globalization about systems' evolution and change (Sorge, 2006), this paper considers the level not of countries but of single universities. It therefore also tests the diversity hypothesis and its sustainability. For this purpose, it draws upon two sociological concepts, which together provide a fruitful analytical framework to describe and analyse the dynamics of surviving and emerging diversity concerning the definition of academic quality and outcomes, the processes of its production: the concept of recognition (Merton, 1973) and the concept of local order (March, 1962).

Academic Recognition

An accurate definition of what academic quality means and implies provides a solid starter. In a seminal article written in 1960, Robert Merton, the founder of the sociology of science, stresses the ambiguity of the word 'recognition' (Merton, 1973), which leads him to distinguish two dimensions of academic quality: one he names instrumental, another he defines as honorific.

The instrumental dimension directs attention toward:

> ways of detecting potential 'excellence' and of doing so early enough to help potentiality become actuality … [Therefore] it calls for research on means of identifying talent … [that helps] identifying the principal current obstacles [to its identification] … and to discover the kinds of human and organizational environments that help bring out kinds of creativity that are socially valued. (Merton, 1973, pp. 419–420)

It enhances quality as an attribute of a person or of an institution. Instrumental recognition designates the processes that build quality of academic institutions by creating and managing opportunities that enable them to nurture and realize their potential. This raises a number of stimulating questions. Which type of human and organizational or functional environment facilitates socially valued creativity, especially in terms of scientific inventiveness and training? Which kinds of qualities, which resources, which positioning of activities or production functions are accessible in a given institutional environment, and which organizational processes do academics and administrators adopt and value in institutional management and its components?

> Provisionally distinct from the instrumental sense of recognition, although ultimately connected with it, the honorific sense of recognition refers to the high evaluation of positive accomplishments chiefly through

> the public and private institutions of a society. In this aspect, recognition looks to the rewarding of achievement … [with the hypothesis that] certain kinds of reward systems will, more than others, give life to the industry of men engaged in currently unpopular but culturally consequential work. (Merton, 1973, pp. 420–421)

It designates the processes for leveraging the activities in the institutional and market contexts in which a specific university, department, or member of the faculty is present and embedded. The honorific dimension of recognition can also be defined as a measure of status. Identifying the status-related dimension of quality points up key questions. Which stakeholders – especially external stakeholders – define the sources of value and quality for a given university and its components (Whitley, 2011)? What types of performance do they refer to, and how do they justify the policies and concrete actions deployed by their managers and members?

Merton made reputation the key status-attainment criterion that enables quality or talent as expressed by scientific achievements to be showcased, rewarded materially and symbolically, and the skills of academics to be identified. Alongside social reputation-based judgements *stricto sensu* that predominated and enjoyed a virtual hegemony through to the end of the twentieth century, the early twenty-first century witnessed the emergence of 'excellence-based' judgements which, as mentioned above, rest on exogenous analysis of performance based on a variety of indicators. Thus Merton did not distinguish between 'reputation' and 'excellence' because they had not yet been differentiated. Inasmuch as two forms of quality judgement currently coexist, it is important nowadays to find the words to contrast them. Therefore it seems relevant from now on to use the generic term of '(high) quality' to name what Merton names 'excellence', to define as 'reputation' the evanescent evaluation of 'high quality' ('many of us are persuaded that we *know* what we mean by excellence and would prefer not to be asked to explain'; Merton, 1973, p. 422). We should restrict the use of the word 'excellence' to the sense of 'a formalized evaluation of quality' it has nowadays taken on all over the world. Thus, excellence will designate hereafter high quality as it is measured by a set of analytic indicators, an approach Merton considered with reluctance as early as 1960: 'perhaps there are better ways of identifying these qualities of excellence … Perhaps the pedestrian labors of armies of psychologists and statisticians will, in the end, lead nowhere' (Merton, 1973, p. 423).

While Merton's approach linking organizational measures and social judgements still remains a very valid heuristic opening, the two highly differentiated styles of quality recognition – reputation (Karpik, 1989, 1996; Musselin & Paradeise, 2005) and excellence – that coexist nowadays may not be superimposed upon each other, as shown in Table 1 below. The one referred to as 'reputation' is contextual and synthetic, the other named as 'excellence' is acontextual and analytical.

Excellence harnesses analytical tools that underpin an economic value judgement based on quasi-prices measured by indicators. Reputational judgements are based on varied, synthetic and often implicit social and contextual evaluations. Unlike excellence-based judgements, reputation-based judgements do not penetrate the black boxes of training and research institutes. They draw upon common knowledge in use in specific social spheres as a global subjective evaluation conveyed by the selectivity of recruitment, the quality of academic personnel and training, student placement in the job market, etc. They are heavily influenced by the history and geography that have forged an institution's image and popularity. The extent to which they are rooted in geographically and socially situated representations accounts largely for the inertia accompanying these reputational judgements at local level. Thence, for instance in France, the comparative reputation of the elitist *Grandes Écoles* and the universities is virtually unaffected by their actual research performance measured by indicators: representations are self-reinforcing, judgements are much more ascriptive than acquisitive.

Table 1. From reputation to excellence: types of judgment systems.

	REPUTATION Social evaluation	EXCELLENCE Expert evaluation
Judgment	Synthetic	Analytical
	Linked to the image or brand awareness	Based on actual production outcomes
Instrumentation	Implicit	Explicit
	Social networks	A basket of indicators
	Contextual	A-contextual
Differences	Cardinal	Ordinal
	Non-comparable	Comparable
Producers-emitters	Several	Many
	Civil society at large	States, public and private agencies, associations, media, etc.
Impact	Complex	Direct
Logic or register	Ascriptive	Acquisitive

Being not merely contextual but cardinal, reputation does not compare institutions or persons: it tells who or what is good or bad, not what is better or worse.

Reputation-based judgements differ significantly from excellence-based judgements. The latter rank the entities evaluated on an ordinal or numerical scale that frees the quality evaluation process from the mediation of local or national social networks by providing an acontextual sphere of reference. The outcome of the measurement process then becomes the gospel for decision making, by offering an instrumentally rational and impersonal solution that assists students in their university choices or supervising institutions in allocating funds to departments. The analytical nature of excellence-based judgements makes them the preferred tools for new rationalizing institutional management and governance (Porter, 1995; Whitley & Gläser, 2007).

Observation suggests that the generalized use of calibration of various indicators plays an increasing role in deciding the winners and losers in the competition for resources. The champions of excellence share common perceptions of higher education and research standards that employ a highly recognizable theory of action underpinning a radically new way of thinking and of governing higher education and research policy, and of rewarding the success and sanctioning the failure of organizations (Popp Berman, 2012). For good or ill, they wish to do away with brand-driven images and benefits that are not directly corroborated by measures of excellence. They replace them with judgements solidly rooted in objectively identified, internationally comparable performance measures. Consequently, excellence-based measurement aims to break the reputation-based mindsets still dominant in many countries. To focus on the contrasts as well as on any complementarity between excellence and reputation-based evaluation criteria opens a fruitful perspective.

A Theoretical Status for Local Orders

Breaking with commonly held views is no easy feat. Listening to the fears and criticisms so often expressed in academic circles gives the impression that the game is already up: academia is in thrall to standardization-driven globalization that has already had a major effect on other spheres of economic and public activity. This is supposed to be amply borne out by social science research highlighting the massive use of evaluation, management and certification instruments and indicators by corporations as well as by public agencies.

In order to break from this all-powerful status of the global, the local needs to be rehabilitated. Diversity of academic organization strategies and ways of functioning have to be put back on the research agenda. Assumptions need to be tested empirically without prejudging institutional trajectories. An adequate theoretical perspective is required to analyse how local institutions actually position themselves in their day-to-day management vis-a-vis the global. Are they passive agents subject to the demands of an active principal, or more or less autonomous actors faced with certain constraints when mobilizing resources in their environment to serve their own ends?

In its second theoretical contribution this paper draws upon contributions made by organizational sociologists.

A university is an entity of differentiated components whose actions are reflections of power dynamics. To understand the productive performance of academic departments, James March develops the concept of local order (March, 1962). It enables us to grasp the workings of the management and *modus operandi* of groups that produce and disseminate knowledge in American universities (Cohen et al., 1972). Thus it focuses on the instrumental dimension that characterizes the work of organizing resources (de Terssac, 1992) rather than on incentives per se. It endorses the hypothesis that universities and their components should be considered as potential meso-level order and action levels. The same holds true when considering universities within their national systems of higher education. Treating the local sphere as a specific arena for understanding how social order is constructed makes it possible to break free from the all-pervasive global or one-size-fits-all standard. When a meso-level sphere does not align itself with the demands of the global or societal sphere, it is not just to be considered as the passive victim of constraints arising from its past, shackled by the constraints of its immediate environment, that resists in an irrational, possibly even suicidal, manner because too many path-dependent organizational processes induce dysfunctional consequences.

This text explores an alternative hypothesis. When considered as potentially autonomous actors, universities and their components interpret societal evolutions, manage the conflicts between different approaches to which they are subjected on a day-to-day basis strategically, building up their resources by leveraging different, extremely diverse environments at different times (Serow, 2000). The basic tenet of such an approach is that resources are built up by concrete organizational arrangements that affect performance processes and levels. Conversely, the major cognitive transformation resulting from the new impersonal and disembodied excellence-based criteria affects organizational work and arrangements. A local order may, under certain circumstances, incorporate the changes arising from the global standardization process while at the same time getting these to fit with the organizational arrangements, cognitive processes and values that it uses for taking action and making decisions, as well as with the criteria for success its members advocate and deploy.

Local orders are forged by acts and non-acts, and may be approached in terms of the fit between decisions taken at various levels of higher education systems, most of which do not simply follow on mechanically from one another. They express themselves according to a series of perspectives that are differently valued by the actors: serving the local community, supplying the regional and national job market, being ranked as an international scientific body, taking care of good teaching or simply continuing to do their own thing, etc. They harness the two facets of academic quality. Such facets are complementary and distinct at the same time, and are not necessarily conjoined by a simple correlative relationship.

As a result, a university functions like a loosely coupled system (Weick, 1976) or as a pluralist entity (Stark, 2009) made up of highly differentiated components whose actions reflect various power dynamics. Its institutional resources are built up by concrete and opportunistic arrangements that affect its organizational performance at each level and across most of its components. Thus, instrumental quality is a collective outcome of organizational instrumentation and socially regulated order.

Local orders matter because universities – and the components within them – appropriate the incentive system in their own way: they stand as proactive actors. Thus, although they face the same rules and incentives, they may follow quite diverse and specific routes in terms of ambition, strategic positioning and administrative model. While the isomorphism hypothesis takes incentive patterns as generating hierarchies and ordinal judgements, so that non-conformity is considered a symptom of unfitness or irrational resistance to change, the polymorphism hypothesis looks on incentives as fuelling diversification (cardinal judgement) rather than inducing isomorphism through stimulus–response patterns. Even a pioneer of sociological institutionalism such as John Meyer (Meyer & Scott, 1983), while clearly approaching globalization as the top-down diffusion of global templates, pays attention to local agents: they are supposed to inform and enact the templates (Drori, Meyer & Hwang, 2006). The emerging position on standardization that sees standards as moral and cognitive ideals which inform and influence future-oriented action (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006/1991; Lorenz, 2001; Suchman 1995) also makes it plausible that standardization according to a global hierarchical institutional order may coexist with diversity. Our argument provides a clear theoretical basis for understanding current organizational diversity in higher education institutions and strategies, by identifying four ideal-typical institutional profiles[1] catching the various ways in which universities are affected by excellence-based measures, in accordance with how they handle the balance between reputation and excellence in each of their components.

Testing the Framework

The conceptual and analytical framework presented in this paper has been developed during a research programme entitled 'Prest/Ence – From reputation to excellence: the building of academic quality'. Funded by the French Agence Nationale de la Recherche, this project covers 27 departments and professional schools in higher education. They are located in four countries – France, Italy, Switzerland and the United States. They are active in three broad scientific fields that differ in terms of student and faculty labour markets and epistemological status – chemistry, history and management. The project also studies in-depth three business schools in the People's Republic of China. The cases selected – two per discipline in each country – are generally speaking considered as belonging to the upper strata of universities in terms of national or international image, reputation and rank.

Comparability is primarily ensured by a common data collection pattern that puts a strong emphasis on anchoring norms and values in actual behaviours and practices.

Qualitative techniques are used to gather and analyse data collected by semi-structured in-depth interviews with administrators at the top of the university as well as faculty, administrators, staff and doctoral students – about 20 per case with an average length of 90 minutes each – in the departments or schools, and observation or shadowing of committee sessions or social events. Interviews and other sources help to show how the resources of a department are generated, and how they are managed and allocated inside it, according to which formal and informal rules and norms and for which purpose. The aim is to study the formal and informal organizational processes that influence the division of labour and the mode of cooperation regarding research, training and administration. Content analysis is built inductively throughout the process of interview analysis (Becker, 1970). Themes extracted allow a high level of comparability from one department to another.

Hard data are collected using various documents to frame the activity of the department or school within its university in terms of resources and constraints of various sorts: composition and demographic dynamics of the faculty by age and status, rules and processes of recruitment, promotion; number of students by level, selectivity and attrition rates; curricula, connected research

groups and programmes; space, budgets of various origins and equipment available, etc. Finally, regarding faculty members, CV data are collected during interviews and by extensive data mining in websites. Basic descriptive statistics are used to make sense of departments' or schools' structural patterns. Network analysis techniques are used to map research networks as well as social links. The information is based on the analysis of a database of standardized CVs developed for the purpose of the project.

The data gathered are used to feed three complementary information sets for each department or school. The first one describes local organizational patterns at the level of a department or a school as well as governance arrangements that link them to the university and the academic profession at large. The second one identifies actual networks faculty members may have developed both within and outside the university environment, whether professional communities or funding agencies, as well as with other parts of the university to which they belong, such as the presidency, central support units or other departments and research laboratories. The last one detects the cognitive frames, values and norms that guide individual and collective choices and actions.

Positioning Strategies: A Typology

The dual concept of local order and quality-based assessments gives rise to key considerations that have not been the subject of much empirical research. To what extent do reputation-based and excellence-based evaluations currently overlap, and how does the degree of overlap vary between countries and universities and across disciplines? Can the instrumental and honorific dimensions of quality be reconciled on heterogeneous scales ranging from international recognition for research to national job markets or contributions to the local community?

By plotting the two dimensions of the honorific dimension of quality against each other, four ideal types of institutional positioning emerge, allowing the complete exploration of the distribution of universities and university subunits in the reputation/excellence space relating endogenous and exogenous valuations of quality (see Figure 1).

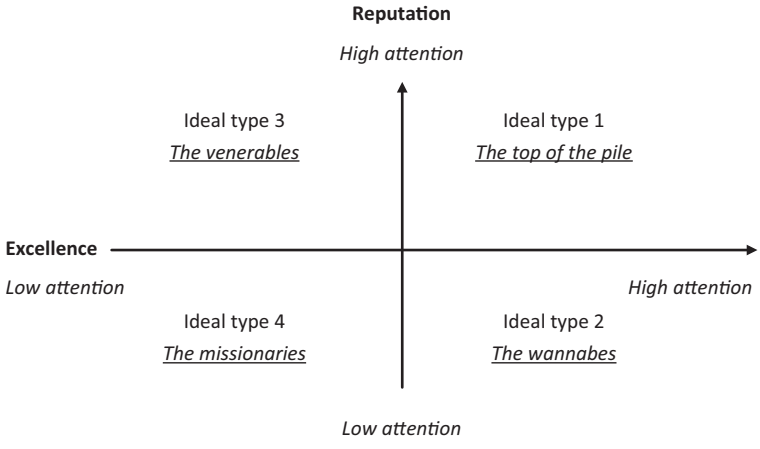


Figure 1. A typology of institutions based on the importance attached to status-related dimensions of quality.

The Top of the Pile

This group comprises institutions with extremely high reputations that also rank at or near the top according to all excellence-based indicators. These universities pay very close attention to their reputation and their excellence. They belong to an elite that serves as the academic model and ultimate reference for their competitors. They are recognized as the best in their fields. They are taken as national if not as international benchmarks – institutions such as the Zürich Federal Institute of Technology, Oxford University, Harvard University and the University of Heidelberg – to name a few. They are invariably ranked at or near the very top of most international league tables for excellence, regardless of the scales or criteria applied, and their exact rank varies little from year to year over decades: the *Times Higher Education* for instance consistently ranked the same universities among the top 11 from 2003 – the year when the ranking was created – to 2011. A retrospective look (Johnson, 1970) shows that American universities which appeared in this selective club in 2011 were already at the top of national rankings in 1964 and even long before.

Institutions at the top of the pile behave like agile elephants. They anticipate or rapidly adapt to new developments in quality-based assessments and developments among their key 'customers' by juggling between basic and applied research, providing training at various levels, or engaging in disinterested as well as in commercial leveraging of their products. Their leadership seems to be safe and protected by a sort of ongoing benefit that they reap from their situation. They are prestigious and excellent in equal measure, paragons of academic virtue.

Even when new forms of evaluation are emerging, they seem not to have to make any major effort to stay at the top of the status-related pyramid. While they do have their educational outcomes and research performances evaluated by external stakeholders, they also pay attention to the manner in which they endogenously produce and maintain the quality sources that underpin their reputation and excellence. Their agility benefits from the long-lasting effects of diverse material and institutional resources consolidating their internal instrumental quality. They can focus at length on developing and enhancing their already efficient internal institutional arrangements and, therefore, forge a virtuous circle in which their instrumental quality bolsters their status-related quality. Nevertheless, even though they comply with the dual demands of reputation and standardized excellence in terms of their products, i.e. publications, training and academic environment, each possesses its own specific characteristics.

The Wannabes

The wannabes comprise two types of universities. There are those that have attained a genuine local or national reputation but are invisible on the radars of international rankings. The others have never had much visibility in terms of reputation but try to take advantage of the increasing role played by formal 'excellence' assessment to make their way upwards and challenge long-established reputations by opposing formal performance evidence (Porter, 1995; Tuchman, 2009).

Wannabes do not show up in international league tables for various reasons: they are too small, do not focus sufficiently on publishing, have insufficient exposure for their offerings, the teaching staff is not cosmopolitan enough, have a low degree of international attractiveness, etc. They just do not chime with international standardized indicators for measuring excellence. What they formerly valued has become worthless from this new perspective: they concentrated on the needs of their students in teaching, and on relations with professional spheres, on publishing textbooks, essays and analytical works rather than articles for international research journals, etc. What they used not to consider as meaningful become signals of insufficient performance. They failed to monitor the

degree of internationalization of the academic body, gender balance, salaries at graduate students' placement, etc.

Examples of such higher education and research institutions are many. Gay Tuchman (2009) names as wannabe an anonymous second-tier university of the US West Coast. Although not a low-level school, it is not prestigious and develops a proactive policy to gain status by improving its position on excellence rankings. Other examples suggest that such a strategic positioning is also currently at work in many other countries. The University of Manchester is a merger of two formerly independent institutions – Victoria University and the Institute of Sciences and Technologies – in order to achieve a major ambition: to join the ranks of the 25 best research universities in the world by 2015, and therefore compete with Oxford, Cambridge and the best universities of the London area. Its new critical mass in terms of excellence has allowed it to move up more than 50 places in the Shanghai rankings in a few years. An independent business school like HEC Paris, which until the 1990s enjoyed a reputation for national leadership, has undertaken a spectacular change in its strategic priorities within a very few years and fulfilled its ambition to reach the top of the European league of business schools.

Wannabes seek to build up a national reputation or to convert it into international excellence by exhibiting their worth on the scales of excellence; they try to play in the major league. Their ambition is to become visibly successful quickly despite facing tough national or global competition. Unlike the establishments at the top of the pile, they deploy radical rebuilding strategies that involve clean breaks with their past. By focusing all of their attention on excellence, they show more concern with the external recognition of their offerings than with guidelines dictating content. They outsource their research policy to bodies such as international rankings, top-rated professional journals, academic professions and associations or highly influential funding institutions whose thematic guidelines and selection criteria they adopt and imitate. They develop a sort of cherry-picking organizational model. They align their offerings with the institutions at the top of the pile.

The Venerables

Like the wannabes, venerables enjoy a considerable local reputation. As academic missionaries, they are loathe to play the full excellence game, which they deem to be absurd and dangerous, given the singular nature of all academic institutions. French universities resulting from the split of the Sorbonne after 1968 and many *Grandes Écoles* offer a whole range of fascinating examples of such a profile. These institutions collectively express disdain, sometimes even arrogance, towards the very notion of excellence, as well as fierce resistance toward reforms launched by the French state aiming, among other things, at improving the visibility of its national universities in international rankings.

Venerables mock wannabes, whom they despise as *nouveaux riches* seeking to win status within a larger arena by converting their reputation into excellence or by exhibiting excellence from scratch. Venerables behave like an established aristocracy whose reputation reflects intrinsic worth based on a legacy of past glory carefully preserved by the wisdom of their academic body. While they are well aware of the exogenous criteria driving comparisons between establishments, they remain splendidly aloof or overtly hostile. They live in a world of incommensurables (Espeland & Sauder, 2007), deem such comparisons to be simply illegitimate and dislike the way they undermine their own institutional integrity.

They counter the bean-counting logic of the uninitiated – journalists, bureaucrats, international institutions, etc. – with the capital of a reputation built around the preservation of a collegial

approach to producing knowledge of a high quality which they consider to be intangible. The initiation rites for new entrants to the exclusive club that comprises the academic community, where each colleague recognizes his peers and outsiders are kept at a distance, ensure peaceful coexistence and cooperation between equals rather than the competition that is rife in the world of the wannabes. Venerable institutions are socially regulated by the elective affinities between elites who are as disdainful of conventional academic ideas and of the vulgarity of competition as they are confident of the intrinsic value of their products, such as publications, courses and diplomas. They give little thought to how relevant their content is to life outside their institutions. Unlike wannabes, who bend over backwards to meet all excellence-related criteria, venerables are resolutely attached to an offering whose worth they, and they alone, feel qualified to judge. They attempt to counter the fallout from any policies likely to challenge their traditional pre-eminence in their field, particularly the introduction of performance analysis tools that could undermine their status and ability to sustain their social networks.

The Missionaries

Missionaries stand against the very notion of reputation and denounce the principle of excellence as a danger. They take an egalitarian view of public service and, more broadly, of universities' third mission – the creation of wealth (Laredo, 2007) – which is carried out by a staff whose members are subject to the same status and regulations. They pretend that the same type of services – among which teaching is particularly valued – should be offered by all universities in a spirit of selflessness. Western Europe contains a great number of such institutions, many of them created from scratch from the 1970s on, or integrated with universities, such as the British polytechnics, to expedite the higher mass education policies as part of the development of the welfare state.

Missionaries share a common idea or dream with venerables: that the pursuit of excellence based on impersonal and acontextual criteria is sheer nonsense. But while venerables argue that the nature of knowledge production requires a specific orientation that does not fit in, missionaries build their reluctance much more on another argument: in their view, competition for excellence intensifies costly competition in exchange for dubious social benefits, increasing inequality and de-legitimizing education and knowledge as public goods. For the academics who have dedicated themselves to promoting the democratization of higher education, the notion that reputation should polarize institutions and academics is an exotic, possibly deadly, threat. Not without good reason, missionaries explain reputational status differences between universities as consequences of exogenous variables such as geographical location and the degree of social selectivity in student recruitment that model both the image of a university and the performance of its students. Consequently they consider that notions such as reputation and excellence ultimately say little and are particularly unfair to the intrinsic quality of their own contributions as academics.

Their discourses sing the praises of the continuity of the public service nature of higher education. They refuse, for instance, to consider professional courses or undergraduate teaching as separate vocations or as the dirty work of academia, and reject the idea that doing research and publishing may be the ultimate ambitions of an academic and give access to the height of prestige. Therefore missionaries insist on the importance of not downgrading any institution by using measures that increase the disparity between resources allocated to 'non-rankable' public service missions. This leaves them reluctant to use evaluation and financing processes based on a heteronomous evaluation of their production that fails to take account of the different missions undertaken by academics based on the type of staff and students they recruit and to whom they strive to tailor their offerings.

Matching Quality Dimensions

Is institutional quality actually linked to specific *modus operandi*? Do internal organizational and governance arrangements differ according to their focal points and does their physical and institutional environment allow them to focus on excellence and reputation? It is plausible that positioning strategies may either be bolstered or be hampered by organizational patterns and internal governance arrangements that enable or prevent a university from focusing on either dimension of quality. Organizations are tyrannical in mid- and long-term perspective because they are social and organizational *ensembles* (Michaud & Thoenig, 2003). They are caught up in cognitive, cultural and normative posturing that confers on them a variable sensitivity and responsiveness to the changes taking place in the environments in which they operate. They may experience virtuous or vicious circles according to their ability to arrange resources and generate faculty and staff contributions to collective capital in line with their strategic ambitions and discourses.

It is worth exploring the ways in which organizational patterns and governance arrangements shape institutional ambitions in a mid- and long-term perspective. This section will match quality-based types described above with their organizational conditions for action (see Figure 2).

Social Capitalism

Universities at the top of the pile are able to pursue strategies that give high strategic priority to both excellence and reputation. They combine three features. They benefit from a strong academic power base that derives from highly decentralized resources and decision-making capacities at the level of their internal components such as departments, colleges or faculty. Solid institutional governance rules and norms shared by all their components allocate authority and legitimacy to the final decision makers, despite the fact that they function as heterarchic political systems (Stark, 2009). These shared rules and norms also provide good protection – and therefore autonomy – from the pressures of external stakeholders. The managerial staff of these universities also reaches a high level of professionalism. The literature (see for instance Cole, 2009; Douglass, 2000; Hofstader & Metzger, 1955; Keller & Keller, 2001) illustrates this at length.

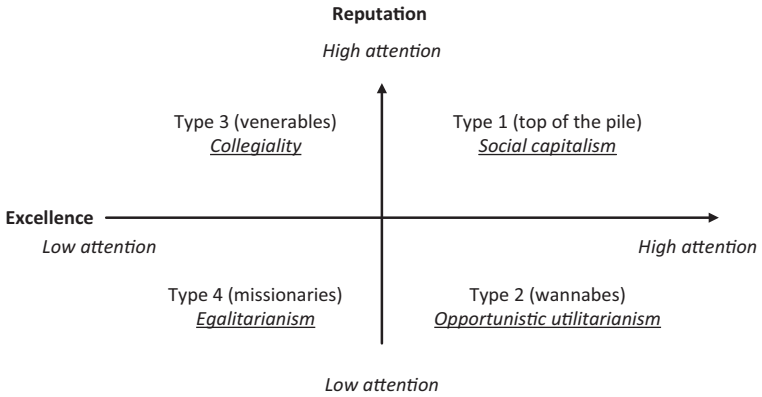


Figure 2. A typology of the organizational instrumentation of institutions related to the importance they attach to status-related dimensions of quality.

As of today, and when compared with universities that are not paying marked attention to excellence and to reputation, top institutions evidence a *modus operandi* that is close to the organic bureaucracy-type of organization (Burns & Stalker, 1961). Nevertheless, to characterize them as such or as loosely coupled systems whose goals are ambiguous, and which deal with multiple constituencies and departmental baronies, and in which staff support is disconnected from the faculty, does not provide sufficiently strong argument to deduce that such a model explains their success, though this has been suggested, for instance, for the hegemony of top US research universities in the twentieth century (Diamond & Graham, 1997). What makes the difference must derive from other capabilities. In terms of organizational instrumentation, top-of-the-pile universities draw their strength from their massive social capital in so far as it provides a key asset to build and sustain a productive tension at a very high level between different, ostensibly conflicting, spheres: professional and administrative on the one hand, individual and collective on the other. This capability enables them to deal successfully with serious challenges, for instance, to resist better than others the damage caused by serious cuts in outside funding or internal governance crises (Paradeise & Thoenig, 2012).

Top institutions experience a strong drive for administrative rationalization that uses all-embracing modern management techniques harnessing different skills, processes and procedures ranging from external communications to procurement, and including research programmes and course administration, financial management control and fundraising from various public sources, alumni, national and international public bodies and corporations. Nevertheless this administrative rationalization has to cope with the academic voice built into long-lasting internal governance processes that safeguard the primary legitimacy of the academic sphere, its representatives and its references in terms of quality definition and ideals. These professional standards are explicitly incorporated into the organization, and are bandied about in key debating forums at all levels.

All these characteristics make it possible for top organizations to avoid more than others the common bureaucratic scourges such as rampant centralization or silo effects. They contain the risk that the organization's 'internal clients' will lose their grip over its management horizon. Recourse to procedures and demands for regulatory compliance do not preclude the development of an institutional culture at all levels. Shared and often implicit rules regulate the room for manoeuvre and the content of roles vis-a-vis the centre – the presidency of the institution – and the grass roots – the individual departments and research centres – as well as between the administrative and academic spheres. Internal social regulation is legitimate because it is based on norms and rules that underpin shared knowledge and space for common interpretation of situations. University members, whether faculty or administrative staff, know how far they can go without going too far. When they misjudge this, strong internal forces remind them of the boundaries they should not cross. They share identical action-oriented languages or cognitive frameworks, they reason in similar ways when facing problems. In other words, mutual trust is a normal part of organizational life.

A strong pressure to act collectively is at work across the different components, departments, research centres and members of the academic corps. For instance, being part of an institution from the top echelons offers a key resource, namely, a recognized brand. But conversely it entails what is both a moral duty to contribute to the collective good and a condition for getting tenure or promotion: to produce a result that, aside from formal obligations, is based on a shared perception of quality of outcomes, whether in research, education or the third mission. Such a moral requirement to act collectively lies at the heart of socialization. Social capital is a common good whose preservation and expansion underpin the duty of individual components not to behave like free riders. Members share the duty to enhance and co-manage a community of interests embodied in the university. This pooling process is maintained by practical rules that make sense to the academic

corps. They provide and socially regulate the acceptable ways, means and criteria for building a shared vision of outcome value whatever the field, of research subsidies allocation, of chair creation, or how to build the reputation of the institution.

Instrumentation bolsters collective values through the myriad forms they take at the micro-organizational level. Apart from considerations of formal status, they multiply the opportunities for internal social interaction – discussion breaks in the corridor or by the coffee machine, informal meetings with candidates for a given position, open seminars, etc. They foster the development of communities with many shared interests, inside a specific discipline but also, and – it makes quite a difference – across various disciplines. Partial overlap and duplication between different components temper the effects of mutual avoidance that would stem from excessively silo-bound disciplines or exclusive appropriation of certain topics. Initiatives to create new departments or research centres are considered normal and healthy. They are not underhandedly manoeuvring hidden agendas and politicking at the top levels of the organization. Looking after students' future careers is part of the normal contribution of each staff member. Irreverence is accepted and even rewarded, provided that it is deemed to be a constructive part of the internal debating process.

Opportunistic Utilitarianism

Wannabes strive to base their strategies on the demands embedded in excellence indicators used by leading international ranking organizations in their field. They pour all their energy and resources into boosting their performances according to the standards laid down by the league tables, by restructuring their academic body, redesigning their internal division of labour between research and teaching, and by developing financial incentives for publishing in top, internationally recognized research journals. They pay much attention to the proportion of non-locals or non-nationals among their academic teaching staff and students, to gender parity, and to their rate of placement and the success of their alumni in job markets. As a priority they try to capture authors who publish in international, A-rated academic journals to improve their publication record. They merge with other academic institutions to exhibit a better graduate output and a higher publication performance. They 'buy' stars on the international market, such as Nobel Prize award winners, even for very short annual stays on their campus.

This relentless drive requires forceful internal leadership. Not much attention is given to its impact on the establishment as an institution when opportunities occur to implement it. Such a strategy requires major institutional rearrangements such as the centralization of strategic power in the hands of the presidency at the risk of academic collegiality. It may induce great damage on the *affectio societatis*, or sense of a shared purpose, by disorientating an established academic staff whose work and experience appear abruptly outmoded in light of the new priorities driven by excellence. The plethora of tasks that they had willingly undertaken in a spirit of institutional investment and cooperation, such as administration, course development or relations with businesses and alumni, are from now on side-lined by the all-consuming goals of boosting publication output and citation rates. As an organization, when turning wannabe, a venerable is facing a dilemma: having to choose between the pursuit of excellence at the risk of undermining the foundation of its quality, and the destruction of a culture based on reputation at the risk of an excessive time lag in generating the excellence that is indispensable to its advance.

Wannabes allocate top attention to excellence by harnessing a type of instrumental organization whose leitmotiv, utilitarianism, aims to align their components along this conception of quality. Utilitarianism influences the content of the educational programmes they offer as well as the behaviours of their individual faculty members: a set of direct or indirect financial stimuli encourage individual contributions to the objectives of excellence as laid down by outside evaluation and ranking agencies.

Collective performance is measured as the sum of all certified individual outputs. Rather than professionally talented teachers, they aim to hire knowledge workers dedicated to the specialized function of publishing high-ranked papers (Schein, 1970). Academic research management is ideologically and in practice close to knowledge management (Sousa & Hendriks, 2008). Faculty members are procured on the market, and not farmed inside. They go back to the marketplace if the deal is deemed unsatisfactory, either because the university judges their performance too poor, especially regarding publications, or because more favourable salaries and better work conditions are offered elsewhere. Institutional loyalty does not extend beyond the terms of the employment contract.

Research activities aim to boost individual and collective scores that define the market value of the university and those that contribute to it. The ultimate purpose of knowledge is less important than publication ratings and numbers. For instance, in some professional schools such as business schools, relevance does not really matter, relatively speaking (Thoenig, 1982). Instrumentation registers performance on an ex-post basis while it does not stimulate inventiveness ex ante. Leveraging normal science prevails over scientific exploration. Multidisciplinary approaches are even considered in some cases, in humanities and social sciences as well as professional schools and earth sciences, as acts of indiscipline because they put productivity at risk (Paradeise et al., 2012). Other traditional missions in higher education such as lecturing, managing research teams and departments, or heading specific programmes are neither seriously rewarded nor really sought by academics.

Opportunistic utilitarianism is based on the premise that any academic institution is manageable like a kit, by reducing academic output to market commodities; individual interests build the collective good, thanks to individualistic behaviour of staff driven by short-term material success. Bureaucratization is underpinned by an increased centralization of power and legitimized by an authoritarian culture that permeates the academic ethos. Increasingly, top-down constraints make it possible to deploy a relentless drive towards the new horizon of excellence. Strategy becomes the preserve of top administrators. It is assumed to be deployable in a discretionary manner if this is deemed necessary.

The intermediate components between top management and individual professors have little independence as decision-making bodies. Nor do they matter much as debating forums or identity references. They play a minor role as social regulation arenas. They function merely as nodes in an administrative management process, controlled from the centre and subordinated to the objective of boosting the ranking in league tables of excellence year after year. Sociability counts for little. Faculty may as well work out of their office, or even have their activity incorporated into an outside institution, provided that their output is accounted for internally.

Opportunistic utilitarianism subordinates the professional sphere to the organizational sphere. Formally it resembles a mechanistic or bureaucratic organization model: a high degree of task specialization, a marked standardization process, the use of planning systems as well as elaborate administrative structures (Burns & Stalker, 1961). Nevertheless bureaucratization does not imply a lack of reactivity. Wannabes put together ad hoc solutions as and when the internal destruction wreaked by cherry-picking affects the establishment's social fabric and offering. For example, the permanent faculty being depleted by publication incentives are replaced, including for high-level core courses, by professional part-time lecturers who, for some reason – boosting their professional image, recruiting bright students, sharing experiences, etc. – do not mind being part of the journey towards excellence and the social status linked to the brand of the institution.

Collegiality at any Cost

Venerables pay very special attention to the honorific capital that their reputation provides. Their organizational instrumentation draws heavily on the model of professional bureaucracy (Mintzberg,

1979). The overall institution is perceived as the sum of self-sufficient parts distinct from the administrative line of command and entrusted to the care of a benevolent chair, a *primus inter pares* or first among equals. Department chairs and administrative heads have very little influence and poor hierarchical legitimacy over developing or imposing overall strategy. They exercise their functions according to 'a rule of least power' (Karpik, 1995) that attenuates the extrinsic organizational constraints weighing on members by drawing upon the function played by implicit trust in relations between peers. Administrative and support services form a separate organizational hierarchy and a world apart that is considered to be a subaltern function staffed by good and loyal employees who know where they stand. So the organization is conceived as a receptacle deployed primarily if not exclusively to serve its members' reputation rather than as a proactive principle driving a collective dynamic.

Taking initiatives within the organization is in principle a course of action raising suspicion unless it serves shared collective purposes. Debating, putting one's cards on the table, explicitly formulating differences concerning institutional perspectives or the organization of resources, bargaining, are all forms of inappropriate manners. De facto what is considered as a strategy looks closer to the culmination of organizational forms accumulated over time, regarding the division of labour between and within components, procedures, rents of various sorts, and material as well as symbolic privileges. It favours a distributive policy that tends to preserve vested positions. Resource allocations are based on acquired rank, reputation and status. They may be increased through academics' own contributions to the organizational segment over which they preside. Dependence upon resources and tradition is lessened by local informal and ad hoc arrangements. In a way, administering an organization consists primarily of incident management.

Academics' reputations are derived first and foremost from the scientific discipline of which they are members. The benchmark community is mainly supra-local or cosmopolitan. It extends far beyond the formal boundaries of the university or any one of its components. It is the scope and quality of the professional outside networks rather than the membership of the local institution that give visibility and power inside the institution. In addition to being cosmopolitan, collegiality is also mixed with corporatism. The reputation of a community and its members derives in large part from the degree of exclusivity of the control it exercises over the selection, training, placement and careers of its members throughout their lives, and from its ability to impose distinguishing social and professional criteria in its domain at both national and international levels.

In fact, venerables as specific institutions outsource their human resource management, scientific policies and definitions of relevance and excellence to third parties, namely, outside professional bodies. This type of university is basically a host structure, a local community agency managed mostly in disciplinary silos. Each profession or discipline is governed by inherently intractable criteria in terms of the type of research or courses provided, or the social regulation of its members. The local institution is dependent from and trusts the ability of the professionals present in its midst to promote its image and reputation in larger external arenas to which it does not have access. This does not imply that the reputation of such professional communities is not at all dependent on the reputation of these institutions. This explains why disciplinary communities try to gain a foothold in the most prestigious places, using resources such as political connections, for instance, with influential governmental decision makers. In other terms, they resist any change that could have an impact on the image of the institutions in which they are established.

As a guiding principle for action, collegiality facilitates some form of alliance between the local and the cosmopolitan, and between the establishment and the profession. A group of peers controls

governance by importing external standards of legitimate power, such as length of service and grade. And different professional communities find a way to coexist by not imposing uniform, rigid criteria for arbitrating between them.

In France, for instance, this *noblesse d'Etat* as described by Bourdieu (1989) is quite resistant to changes in the allocation of public resources that may decrease the inequalities between the *Grandes Écoles* and the public universities. Two of its major power resources are challenged by evaluation-based funding processes: access to political power by tight and very active alumni networks linking top political levels of the state, economic leaders and higher education institutions, and increasing competition for funds (Paradeise & Laredo, 2010). Institutions well endowed 'by heritage' have to face the burden of complying with the requests of comparative performances and ranking metrics.

Egalitarianism as the Reference Point

Missionaries do not rank reputation nor even excellence as the main aim of their activities. They focus on a variety of other matters.

At first glance, as with venerables, missionaries regard organizational demands as subordinate to a professional mindset. Management techniques are relatively underdeveloped and are not given great importance. Hierarchical authority is weak: in fact it is suspect in principle. The organization is a juxtaposition of specialized silos. Each of them covers a specific domain that differentiates components. Direct and spontaneous inter-component cooperation is very poor. Coordination generates high transaction costs. Each component tends to define its own expertise or domain as an essential mission for the collective group in the name of normative arguments. Apart from tinkering at the margins, the central hierarchy struggles to arbitrate between different missions. Strategic changes are perceived as a source of major risk. As with the venerables, missionaries experience difficulties when redeploying resources on the basis of strategic trade-offs and compromises, especially when such adjustments are interpreted as potential major infringements of the professional values which their faculties share. Members tend to use common resources in a relatively careless, opportunistic manner. Everybody's tacit goal is to keep on doing what he or she already does. Components evolve in a context of emotionally loaded power relationships that veer between trust and mistrust. This generates relatively opaque forms of decision making. Collective action is subject to centrifugal forces.

In fact the organizational aim of the missionaries is quite similar to an organized anarchy model (Cohen, March & Olsen, 1972; Stevens & Williams, 1988). It exhibits properties such as problematic goals, unclear technologies and fluid participation. This type of model is therefore different from the professional bureaucracy that characterizes the local orders of the venerable ideal type. Whereas the latter derive their reputation from exogenous sources grounded in their members' affiliation to professions with a strong supra-local presence, missionaries' priorities are endogenous to their own institution, building ad hoc knowledge and diffusing solutions in local functional networks. It is only within their own local institutions that these academic staff members are recognized as experts. Their power is linked to their control of locally important functions for a given mission. Their experience and status cannot be easily transferred to other settings. The mobility rate between different knowledge domains and academic institutions remains quite low. Missionaries are strongly embedded in localism.

The weakness of collective governance precludes the spontaneous emergence of any strong bargaining process that would be tolerated by mutual consent. Universities of this type have difficulty building rationales to back the internal legitimacy of decision processes. If ordinary decisions

conform to the 'garbage can model', the life of such establishments is punctuated by value clashes within various strata of the academic body. Some members may want to promote a stronger separation based on contributions to research and teaching missions, while the others claim their attachment to public service of higher education and research, where values are shared by all and where there is no distinction between elite and rank-and-file colleagues. Consequently organizational change reinforces internal disconnections. Even though some of the components of a missionary university or department may be integrated within larger networks, there is still a major obstacle to keeping pace with the new learning and research demands which are evolving in society. Each faculty member does not share resources or network relationships with anyone else. Each defines their understanding of what might be a solution for the group as a whole. Each has a private agenda. Egalitarianism provides the normative reference for instrumentation. It gives everyone equal priority of treatment, even though subtle or informal differences may creep in as the allocation processes in use do not specifically refer to formal selection criteria – as if one priority was as important as another – while allowing for the perpetuation of specialized niches accorded a large degree of de facto functional autonomy.

Table 2 synthesizes the characteristics of the four types of local orders described above. Each local order mobilizes a specific type of organizational instrumentation. It also models specific statuses and roles for its academics and management staffs as well as how they handle their relationships. Social exchange in each type is based on regulation sources that ensure different types of dominant outcomes.

An Analytical Use of Typologies

The emergence of 'excellence' as a new quality measure puts strong pressure on all universities to achieve and implement new organizational ideals. The typology presented above may suggest that

Table 2. Honorific and instrumental dimensions of academic quality.

	Top of the pile	Wannabes	Venerables	Missionaries
Organizational instrumentation model	Organic bureaucracy	Mechanistic bureaucracy	Professional bureaucracy	Organized anarchy
Status of academics	++ Academics	- Knowledge workers	++ Academics	- Educators
Role of management	++ Highly valued	++ Highly valued	- Not valued	- Not valued
Relationship between managers and academics	Check and balance	Managers dominate academics	Academics dominate managers	Poor management, academics are left alone
Social regulation vector in the academia	Social capitalism	Opportunistic utilitarianism	Collegiality	Egalitarianism
Social pressure to perform individually	++	++	+	+ / -
Dominant outcomes	Research (and education)	Research	Research (and education)	Education

++ Very important, + Rather important, - Minor importance, -- Not important

tensions between two quality regimes fuel a process of narrowing down the actual profiles of organizations under observation with the consequence of decreasing the level of diversity among them. This trend would imply that the inescapable challenge of excellence will have won the war against other organizational ideals or/and will impose an organizational type that all universities can imitate. Field work does not provide any conclusive evidence that more uniformity is the only (and a mechanical) trend actually at work, that for instance all venerables and all missionaries are on the way to being disqualified as full members of higher education, or that the wannabe ideal type becomes the hegemonic reference. The emergence and triumph of global excellence standards do not mean that they generate the same impacts everywhere, and therefore that former organizational types are vanishing.

Two arguments may explain why such an iron law of conformity does not make sense. All universities may not share an identical vision of what is worth aiming for in higher education. Positioning a university in a sustainable manner requires complex internal institutional arrangements that cannot be summed up into a single ideal type. To reprocess the political or social injunctions imposed by society and or the economy, universities depend on the distribution of power across their various components, departments and schools, and between academics and managers. Internal hybridity is one of the unintended outcomes of academic excellence.

Ideal Types and Real Life: How Much of a Challenge is Excellence?

Universities as power arenas: excellence as a concern. One argument about higher education institutions is linked to the fact that standards of excellence are challenging most universities, at least indirectly. External stakeholders controlling access to key resources for the academic world become more and more active and influential, as already mentioned. This is the case, for instance, with higher education public policies throughout the world. Universities cannot ignore them and fail to react in one way or another. Nevertheless, the norms such policies refer to do not commend themselves to institutions and even to other outside stakeholders such as labour markets and students' families in a mechanistic manner.

The high social inertia of reputation judgements often remains a key resource that venerables mobilize to resist the norms of the excellence quality regime. For instance, 'Sorbonne' remains a magically attractive label for families and students from France and abroad, even though there is no longer such a thing as 'la Sorbonne' – it was split into several autonomous universities in the 1970s. There are at least three of them and, whatever their actual research potential, organization and educational supply, they compete rather successfully to preserve the shared reputation (University Sorbonne Nouvelle, University Paris-Sorbonne, University Pantheon-Sorbonne). Reputation or reputation-based judgement may provide a long-lasting academic quality brand for some venerable universities, while the excellence regime provides a key resource to challengers that try to become much more visible on the radars of higher education, either at the national or international level.

The way excellence judgements impact on reputation judgements is very different across universities. Universities at the top of the pile benefit from both, reinforcing each other. Observation of the three other types suggests that there currently exists no evidence of co-variation between excellence and reputation. This means that quality as measured by excellence judgements is simply a way to express it as evaluated by reputation. Each belongs to a specific quality regime.

Therefore it is not certain that compliance with the excellence regime as encouraged by public policy narratives and tools will overcome resistance, indifference or the inability of universities to move in that direction. Much depends on the power resources that institutions which resist or

ignore the new regime may mobilize and on any lasting impact excellence regimes may have on reformulations of higher education and research public policies. The internal dynamics that universities may implement as complex organizations in response to the challenge of excellence have to be considered as major independent variables.

Ideal types and hybrids: the emergence of a quality regime. Ideal types usually do not exist in their pure state in the real world. To some extent each university is a hybrid set-up. Analytically the reference to ideal types does not imply that all components of an organization are identical from top to bottom and across its various subunits. Universities look like highly complex institutions, comprising several layers of governance and authority – the presidency, colleges and professional schools, departments – and often many disciplines, fields and jurisdictions – natural sciences, humanities, social sciences, whether applied or pure, and staffed by academics and administrative professionals. This is why our research has approached the field by in-depth analysis of specific disciplinary departments and research institutes as well as colleges and professional schools, complemented by interviews with the academics in charge at the top and middle levels of executive tasks, such as provosts, deans, chairs and legislative bodies such as senates and department assemblies. A university and even a college or school may evidence many differences across its components. And as various disciplines may not share identical indices of quality (Lamont, 2009), it may well happen that a university department refers to its own endogenous definition of quality, independent of the standards used by other departments if not by the profession at large, and coexist with other subunits that fully subcontract quality judgements to exogenous parties such as professional associations and international rankers. For example, the University of California, Berkeley, exhibits some striking differences at its subunit level. For instance, a department in the humanities which is ranked academically at the very top internationally constructs its own quality references even when they are in opposition to the standards dominating the discipline internationally. Another component of the campus, a professional school, does quite the opposite. Well-known but not ranked at the very top nationally and internationally, it subcontracts its quality judgements to external parties.

While examples of the internal heterogeneity of positioning are not uncommon, preliminary observation suggests that their coexistence inside the same organization does not necessarily generate disruptive or centrifugal consequences for the organization as a whole, for its own governance capacity and for the judgements expressed by outside stakeholders. For instance, a specific department or school may not be considered as relevant to run its own academic quality production according to the norms that are widely shared at the campus level as well as by most of the other subunits. To sustain such a deviant posture and to gain some legitimacy of its own, it has to evidence strong and convincing arguments. Such is the case when a school, just to mention one example, generates massive revenues from outside donors and becomes a profit center which surpluses it, wishes to attract and retain academic stars that otherwise would not join the campus. In return the department or school has to negotiate with university bodies, trading such autonomy to benefits for the university and making the inner unorthodox quality regime acceptable in the eyes of the other components and the presidency.

Changes in Quality Regimes and University Dynamics

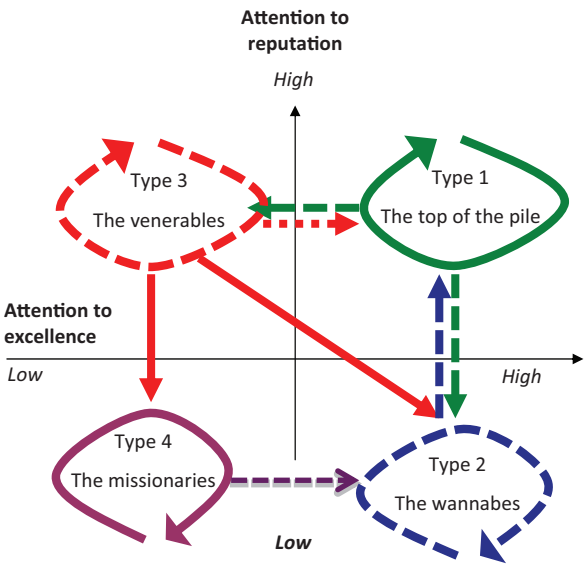
Key organizational and governance properties of the four types are synthesized in Table 2 above. It describes universities and their subunits such as colleges, departments and professional schools from a static point of view. Nevertheless it also provides a useful tool to explore change dynamics. For instance, it helps to answer research questions about which organizational and governance

changes are likely to occur in venerable or missionary universities trying to stabilize or upgrade their position on indicators of excellence in the wider context of the increasing pressure of performance indicators on funding. Conversely, it identifies some of the risks they may face by not doing so. A related matter is to understand what conditions are required for universities at the top of the pile to maintain their virtuous circles as conditions for sustaining their quality in terms of both reputation and excellence.

The typology in terms of ideal types makes it possible to test the hypothesis that patterns of change in specific universities are determined neither by random dynamics, path-dependencies nor all sorts of iron cages that would narrow the room to manoeuvre for actors, to the point of bringing them to identical visions and implementation instruments. Hence the question remains open about the way change dynamics pan out for the various types. Figure 3 explores such paths and identifies some of the available narrow change corridors.

One may deduce from Figure 3 that all universities sitting at the top of the pile are in the medium term exposed to the risk of being outranked by new competitors. Allocating less attention to the fit between the reputation and excellence dimensions of their outcomes, they may become either closer to the venerable type (should they lose contact with the issue of displaying excellence), or become closer to the wannabe type (should they harm the institutional bases of their performance in terms of reputation and excellence). Nevertheless, as explained above, their stability is quite impressive. They seem untouchable, their performance being self-sustaining, as if this elite would be able to protect if not strengthen its returns in terms of reputation and excellence. This may be so even when competition gets tougher and outside evaluations accelerate.

Universities at the top of the pile to a great degree set the baseline for all universities. To a large extent, their hegemonic domination stems from the fact that they set up the quality standards for their competitors while being protected by very effective entry barriers. They also take



Continuous line: high probability

Discontinuous line: low probability

Figure 3. Possible paths of evolution.

advantage of their long-standing institutional richness to maintain their advantage, eventually benefiting from a Matthew effect (Merton, 1968) in a winner-takes-all process (Frank & Cook, 1995).

But their domination does not simply result from their dominant position. Their organizational and governance patterns have developed homeostatic properties that help them reproduce themselves while adapting to their changing environment. Even when a really top university faces the risk of being outranked academically, for instance, as a consequence of academic resistance by some of its senior faculty, the obsolescence of its division of labour, or shrinking budgets, it shows a remarkably swift capacity to redesign new and more competitive frameworks for regenerating sub-disciplines, research agendas, educational offers and collaboration with outside third parties such as business firms. This has been the case at the University of California, Berkeley, when exposed to a radical shift in approaches to biological science (Koshland, Park & Taylor, 1998–1999) or reacting to the fiscal crisis in California by winning major international grants such as a British Petroleum project in 2007. Another example is provided by Maria Nedeva with respect to a university sarcastically named the 'University of Infinite Wisdom' – apparently one of the very top British institutions – that had already in the early 1990s increased cooperation with firms as a source of revenue, becoming a major contributor to industrial development in the field of biosciences as well as gaining a strong position in the best journals, thus winning on all counts (Nedeva, 2008). Finally, one distinctive capacity of top-of-the-pile universities is their integrative ability to generate, in a short time, positive effects between their various missions or outcome facets such as education, research and third missions, not just adding one more silo to an already partitioned organization.

Does the stability in reputation and excellence of the very top universities mean that they are unreachable, so that universities which do not belong to their type hang on in vain when trying policies to upgrade excellence? Conversely, venerables as well as missionaries may seem to be caught between Scylla and Charybdis, set either to disappear into the realm of what might be called mediocrity or to impoverish the substance that built their reputation by actively striving towards excellence. The road to replicate and outrank top universities is very long and risky. Competitors face institutions that take advantage of their long-standing institutional richness to maintain their distinction. Venerables and missionaries may be tempted or pressed to take the perilous shortcut of concentrating authority and strategic design in the hands of their administrators (Tuchman, 2009). This is the case for many good universities of the second tier: while not members of the elite, they dream of joining the club, sometimes obsessively. This may imply that candidates wanting to join the very top league often just try to imitate what the top league members have already achieved.

Wannabes try hard to join the top, excellence being measured and rankings being published in a competitive context that is very short-term oriented. Examples of wannabe proactive strategic postures and instrumentation like those mentioned above raise at least three serious concerns: the true chance of making it to the very top, the mid-term sustainability of their instrumentation, and their contribution to science. Wannabes experience serious handicaps, which threaten most of them with remaining trapped in a cul-de-sac.

First, if the difficulty of climbing the rankings is linked to the efficient self-defence the very top league mobilizes to retain its leadership position, they are also victims of the fact that wannabes compete in the same race as other wannabes adopting similar strategies, the efforts of each cancelling the efforts of the others.

Second, a wannabe approach is not easy to implement because the universities adopting it experience difficulties in obtaining a strong and positive commitment from their own members. Focused

on the search for excellence in rankings, they are tempted to adopt an instrumentation set that favours short-term publication, including hiring outside mercenaries and a human resource style based on individual incentives to the detriment of their *affectio societatis*. Their faculty members often describe them as uneasy places to live an academic lifestyle, in spite of the material resources they provide, and they show little loyalty to the institution while emphasizing their own value as defined by labour markets. As compared with the agile elephants that top universities are, wannabes may look more like fragile gazelles. The faster they run to reach the top, the less they may build up a sustainable instrumentation. Lasting academic quality, whether based on reputation or excellence, requires solid internal instrumentation, time to build and farm distinctive collective human and epistemic capital. Being much in the hands of outside academic labour markets may help achieve quick wins, but may also jeopardize lasting institutional excellence.

A third issue raised by wannabes relates to the way they cover knowledge production. To achieve professional excellence rapidly, they choose to invest and specialize in a few disciplines or niches. This may generate two consequences. They focus on a rather narrow set of excellence criteria and may become blind to the relevance of their publication and education outcomes. They favour mono-disciplinary research programmes and approaches. They encourage scholars' scientific conformity and sectors in research where returns in terms of publication are more rapid than others. By comparison, top universities cover a much wider set of disciplines, so that they are able to maintain for a long time top positions in terms of excellence as well as in terms of reputation. Indeed, even in the best universities, faculty members may fear to lose their footing in many fields, such as history – which does not contribute much to publication scores as measured by international indexes – or fields or subfields – where publication is slow because processes cannot be standardized as readily as in other sectors. The strength of the academic body combined with the belief of university authorities that comprehensiveness is key to maintaining a top ranking may push the university or one of its components to withdraw from certain disciplines.

What change processes may venerable as well as missionary types of higher education institutions actually consider?

Not joining the competitive dynamics of academic excellence may become a major risk for venerables, leading to a steady decline as compared with the top of the pile, and even in the medium term becoming mere missionaries. With the reputation capital they had acquired in the past facing erosion, they may give priority to seeking gains in excellence-based quality. In such a case, change requires moving from a collegial to a strong or authoritarian leadership style. Should they succeed in imposing and implementing such a change internally, such a strategic positioning revolution would not be obvious and might generate positive consequences because it is so likely to create a counter-intuitive effect. The radical instrumentation changes adopted by venerables to produce a radical turnaround is likely to modify some of their key characteristics such as faculty and management composition, governance and formal structures, with strong impacts on their educational and research practices. In other words, the route that venerables may follow to join the top of the pile is neither direct nor safe. Most of the time they paradoxically adopt a wannabe type of positioning and instrumentation to do so and encounter the same dangers as all institutions of that type. Once having become close to wannabe universities, they may remain in that uncomfortable position.

For the missionaries the risk is of remaining stuck where they were. Their level of reputation is low and their level of excellence at best average. Except in exceptional circumstances, such as the important reforms that were set up in several Western European countries at the turn of the twenty-first century, their access to additional and alternative outside resources based on demonstrating excellence is limited. Their organizational instrumentation does not favour radical changes. They may be able to serve a training mission towards the local community in a better way and improve their research as

measured by currently dominant evaluation standards, in particular in terms of measures and visibility. Nevertheless such a route is not easy to travel. Their internal organizational forces give birth to a homeostasis that tends to bring them back to their initial position. For instance, they favour recruits who do not necessarily fit the designs adjusted to their research ambitions. They also make it difficult to reach decisions in due time to be efficient in their institutional environment. Therefore they do not build enough resources to counter their lack of reputation, even though some of their components may succeed in taking advantage of new opportunities. Their ambition is not really recognized and remains very loosely supported by internal organization. They are cornered.

Conclusion

Quantitative indexes and ordinal rankings ignoring local and contextual specificities characterize excellence-based judgements of academic quality. If excellence is so widely diffused, and has become a major challenge universities are facing, it is because it is considered as relevant and instrumental by an implicit coalition between two main non-academic groups of stakeholders. Markets and hierarchies play a major role in the allocation of resources to the universities. Public authorities, job markets, donors, students and their families largely refer to judgements of excellence when granting subsidies, hiring employees, choosing the beneficiaries of their gifts or applying for an education programme. Excellence standards become relevant for the academic world because outside actors take them as criteria for their own decisions, which means that the access of universities to resources is increasingly dependent on an externally defined set of judgements and meanings of quality.

Excellence induces several collateral consequences. The first is that universities, their colleges, professional schools, research centres and educational departments all have to consider, willingly or not, a logic of quality in which publications matter as much if not more than education, for generating resources – money, buildings, equipment, academics, students, etc. Ex post performance, and not ex ante reputation, pushes them to play the role of proactive operators. Reputation-based rents and community service do not suffice.

A second consequence is the strong impact excellence standards have on what academic quality means and who is in control of its definition and assessment. Exogenous parties and processes – professions, rankers, steering and evaluation bodies, etc. – are predominantly in charge. Even more relevant is the fact that a dynamic is at work that decouples the attention given to the content or relevance of what is produced in terms of education and knowledge, and the interest or attention allocated to the signals – number of articles, status of the journals in which they are published, number of citations, etc.

A third consequence is linked to the university's public face considered as a multidimensional property based on a mix between political authority and economic authority (Bozeman, 1987). While their institutional status may matter, gradual transformations are at work in most universities, whether private or public. Public universities in many countries receive decreasing unconditional financial support from their steering public authorities, given lasting deficits of the public budgets, and have to find other sources of public and private money. But conversely, all universities as organizations are public in a way. Whether by hierarchical means or through market processes, political authorities have effects on some of their behaviours and processes whatever their formal status, public or private. Excellence standards are not homogenous across countries. In France, for example, the reforms enacted by state authorities have granted more autonomy to the public higher education institutions – which used to be steered by a centralized bureaucratic apparatus – and at the same time set up a series of new national

bodies in charge of steering academic quality via funds and evaluation processes making use of excellence-based standards. The consequence has been to change the mix. These agencies are less constrained by political authority but exercise more economic and institutional control over public universities – in terms of fund-raising and assessment– while public or semi-private *Grandes Écoles* become more constrained by political authority – for instance, by experiencing strong incentives for enforcing the Bologna criteria for degrees and curricula or by getting more research funds from state bodies (Paradeise et al., 2009). Another aspect to consider is the fact that economic authority is increasing in a massive way, firms subcontracting some of their R&D projects to academic research centres and funding chairs, in particular in top-of-the-pile and wannabe institutions.

This paper also argues that local orders still matter, despite the emergence of global standards aimed at defining academic quality whether at a national or international level. Standardization does not imply homogeneity. Diversity is still possible. Nevertheless the emergence of the excellence regime reformulates some patterns.

While it seems obvious that identical criteria and references are spreading in higher education and research institutions, and ordinal rankings increase competition and fluidity, single institutions appropriate them for their own positioning and with reference to their internal instrumentation.

The paper defines a typology and several grids based on the attention allocated to the impact of the dual quality regimes currently prevailing in higher education and research local orders. It lists organizational measures and components which govern the production of quality in university or academic circles. It highlights the affinities between quality regimes, organizational instrumentations and governance styles. It also proposes a few evolving scenarios underlining the tyranny of organizational logics in action and the barriers that limit mobility between types in the stratified system of higher education and research.

It is the common fate of universities, colleges and professional schools to have to build processes and find arrangements to integrate and achieve some sustainable compatibility level between heterogeneous resources, functions, outcomes and knowledge fields. As strategic actors they operate in contexts that involve multiple quality assessors such as students, employers, academic professions, faculty markets and funding agencies. Which types of solutions and compromises they achieve, and with what consequences for their quality for outside stakeholders as well as academics, are relevant items for organizational knowledge as well as for society.

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Note

1 ‘An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena’ (Weber, 1904/1949). Comparative empirical studies may benefit from these ‘one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct’.

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