

# From Governance to Curriculum: Educational Transformation in a Multi-University Network

Impactful staff development across 17 universities



# Overview

1. Intro
2. The organisational framework: The network
3. Three areas of transformation – overview
4. Area of transformation: Curriculum
5. Area of transformation: Strategy
6. Area of transformation: Governance
7. Conclusion

# The organisational framework: The network



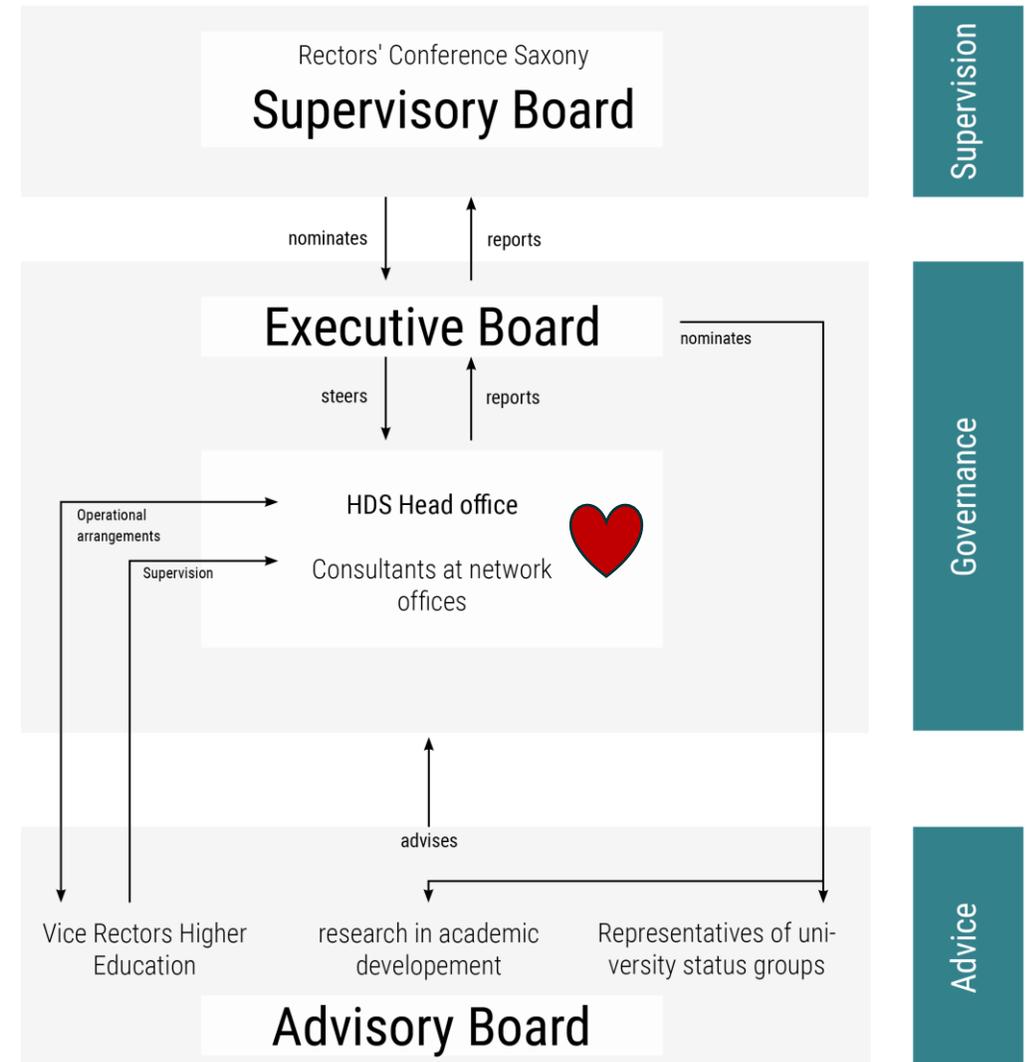


## structure

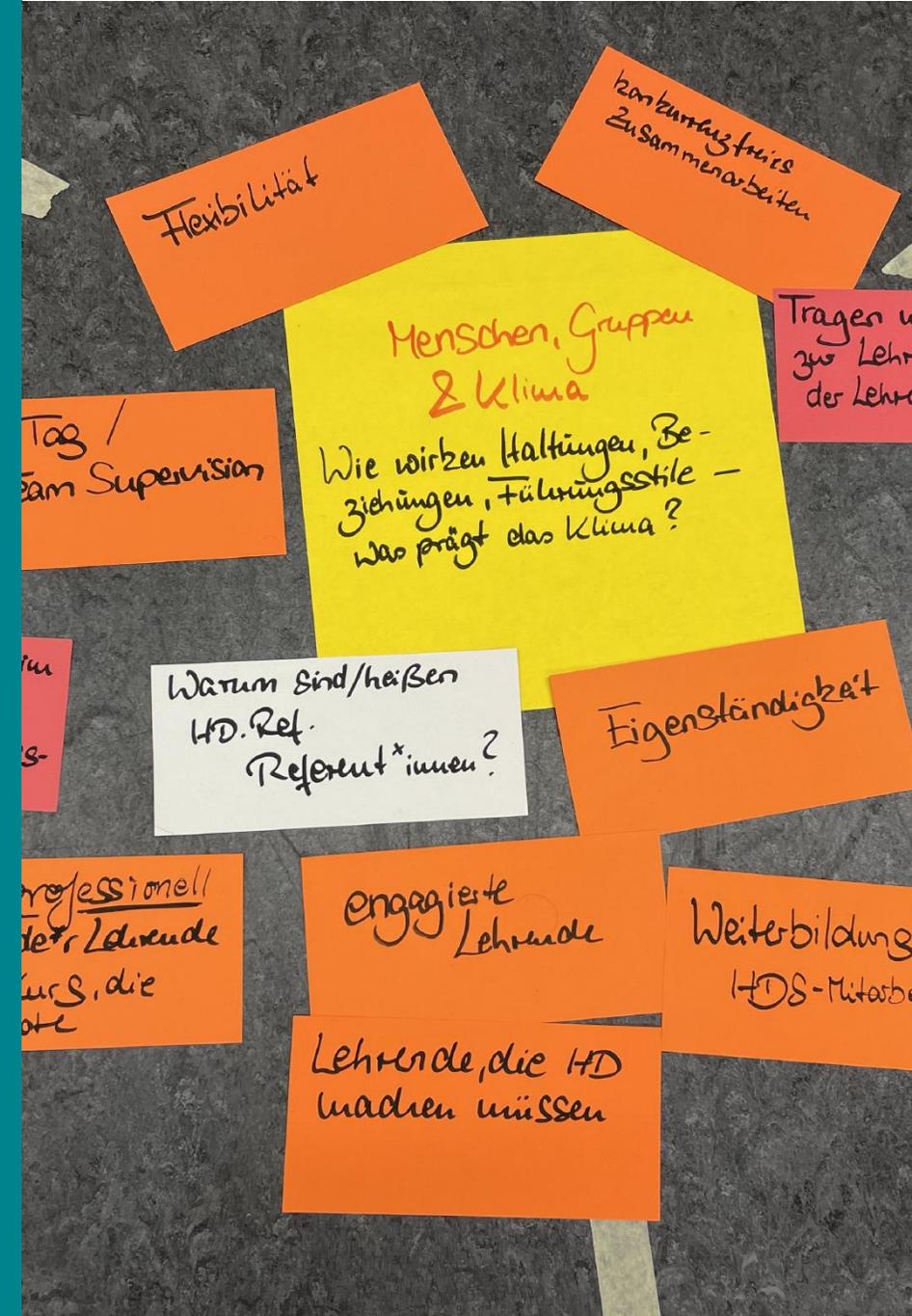
- Founded in 2009 as a cross-university central institution for promoting teaching quality
- Operated as a joint central organisation by 15+2 partner universities in Saxony, funded by the 'Zukunftsvertrags Studium und Lehre stärken' programme, administratively affiliated with the University of Leipzig
- 32 employees (as of 31 December 2025) at the partner universities (2/3) and in the office in Leipzig (1/3)
- Academic development and teaching and learning enhancement for approximately 15,000 university teachers

direction

## HDS Governance Model



# Why is traditional staff development no longer sufficient?



- Increasing complexity (digitalisation, social responsibility, heterogeneity)
- Fragmentation of initiatives
- Need for systemic staff and teaching development in Higher Education

# Three areas of transformation – overview



<b>Field</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Focus</b>
Governance	Model	Structure & Responsibility
Strategy	Perspective	Orientation & Priorities
Curriculum	Development & Process	Implementation & Culture

# Curriculum





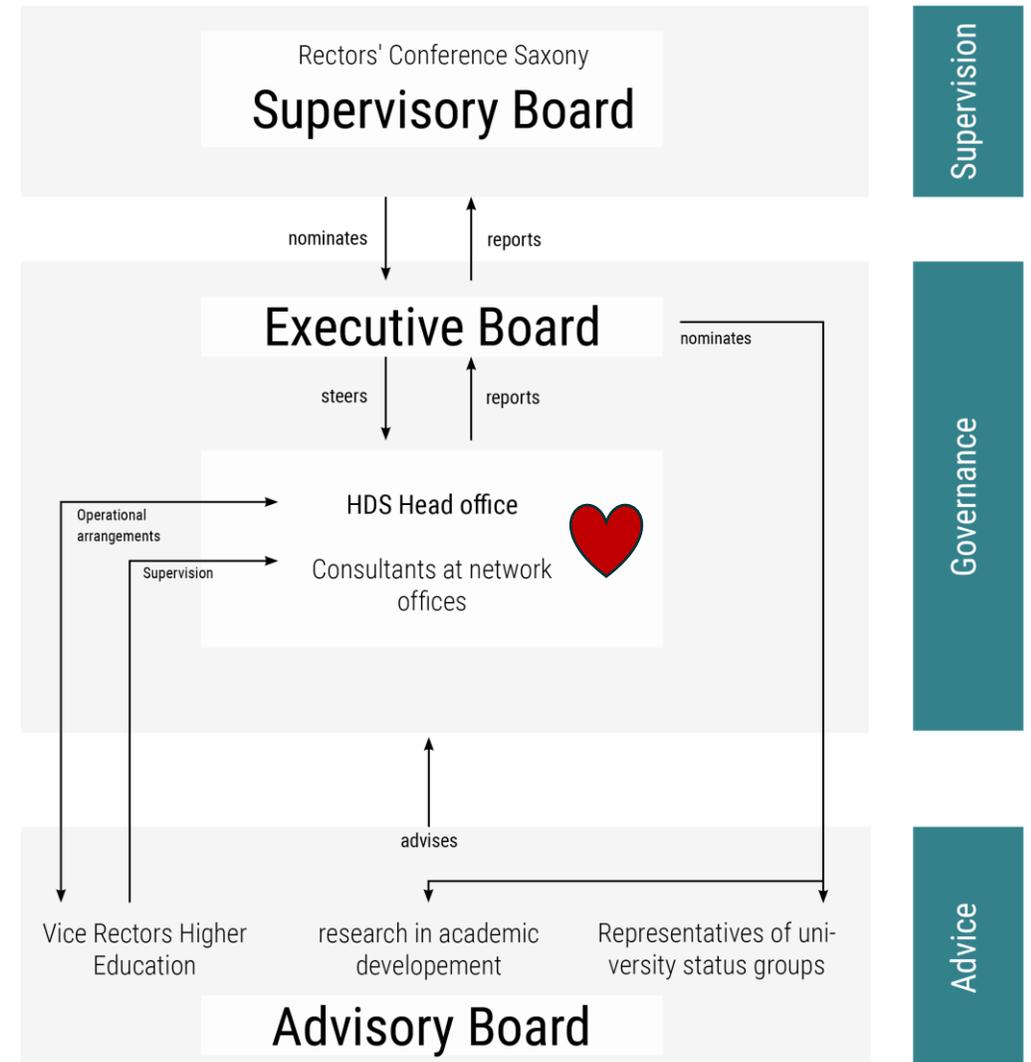
<b>Field</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Focus</b>
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CURRICULUM:

PROCESS (IMPLEMENTATION, CULTURE,  
PRACTICE) → ENABLES ACTION AND  
CHANGE

## HDS Governance Model





# Curriculum Development

*participatory curriculum development process as a key strategic intervention*

- Bovill (2020) emphasises that co-creation improves the engagement of teachers and learners and the quality of results
- Cousin (2008) uses the concept of threshold concepts to show that deep learning requires learning processes to be designed from the perspective of those involved
- Healey, Flint & Harrington (2014) emphasise the effectiveness of partnerships in which learners are equally involved in teaching developments
- Reynolds & Trehan (2000) point to the importance of participatory reflection for sustainable change within academic structure

(Sekyra et al. 2025)

# Curriculum Development

*Combination of strategic measures and practical formats*

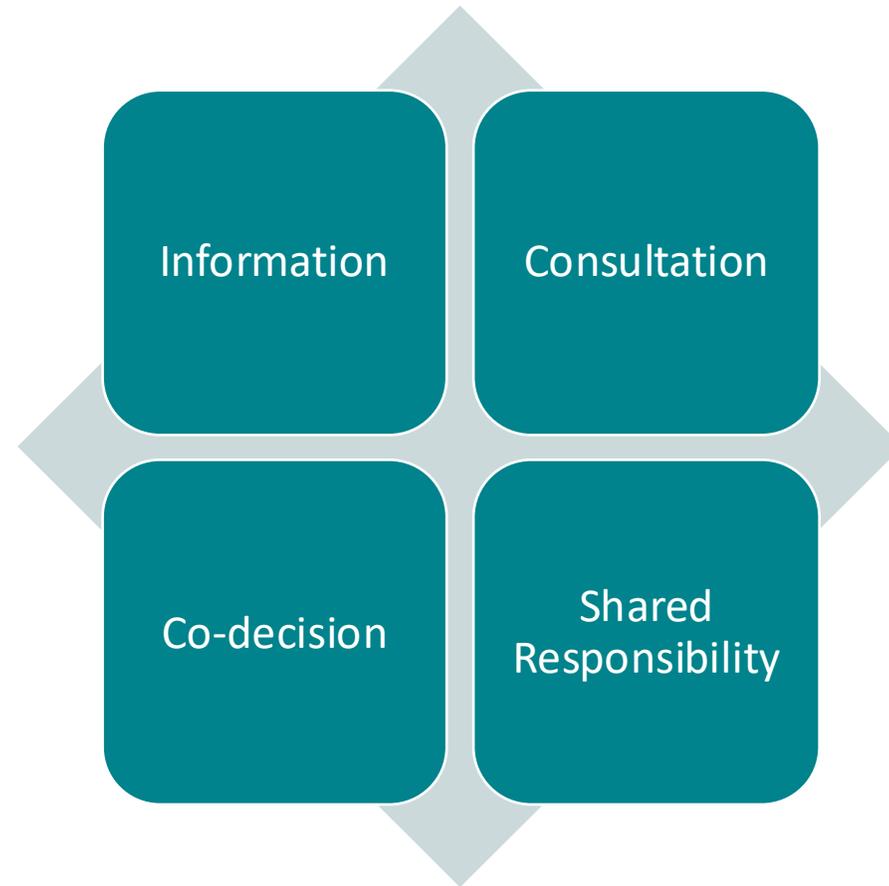
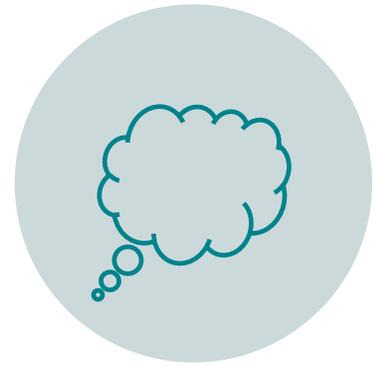


- In-house working groups to assess needs
- Workshop formats and pilot projects enabled dialogue-based feedback with participating HDS employees
- Persona work with students promoted needs-oriented design,
- multi-perspective data analyses created an empirical basis,
- Critical Friend Meetings brought in external expertise
- Transparent communication strengthened traceability and identification

(Sekyra et al. 2025)

# Curriculum Development

*Models of graduated participation according to Gabriel-Schärer and Lechner (2016) and Lüttringhaus (2000, 2003)*



# Curriculum Development

## *Key points*

- Participatory process since 2022
- Reform of the certificate programme

## *Learning*

- Competence-oriented learning objectives
- Scholarly attitude
- Micro teaching, peer feedback, learning portfolio



CURRICULUM:

PROCESS  
(IMPLEMENTATION,  
CULTURE, PRACTICE) →  
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Why it is important for staff development?

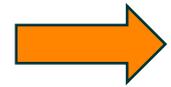
Individual development + collective teaching culture,  
Professional development  
Learning as a reflective practice



<b>Field</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Focus</b>
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# Strategy





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STRATEGY:

PERSPECTIVE (ORIENTATION, PRIORITIES,  
ALIGNMENT)

→ PROVIDES DIRECTION AND MEANING



# Strategic Perspective

*3-year reflection cycles*

Currently under consideration by the Executive Board: 'Development Strategy 2026–2029'

Identity of the HDS	People, groups & climate	Strategy & programmes	Structure	Agencies	Processes & procedures	Physical resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What do we stand for?</li><li>• What is our contribution, our purpose, our self-image?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How do attitudes, relationships and leadership styles work – and what shapes the climate?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How do we shape our long-term orientation – economically, culturally and socially?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How are tasks, decision-making processes and responsibilities regulated?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Who does what specifically – with which roles and interfaces?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How does the work actually proceed – formally and informally?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What material conditions are needed for good work?</li></ul>

# Strategic Perspective

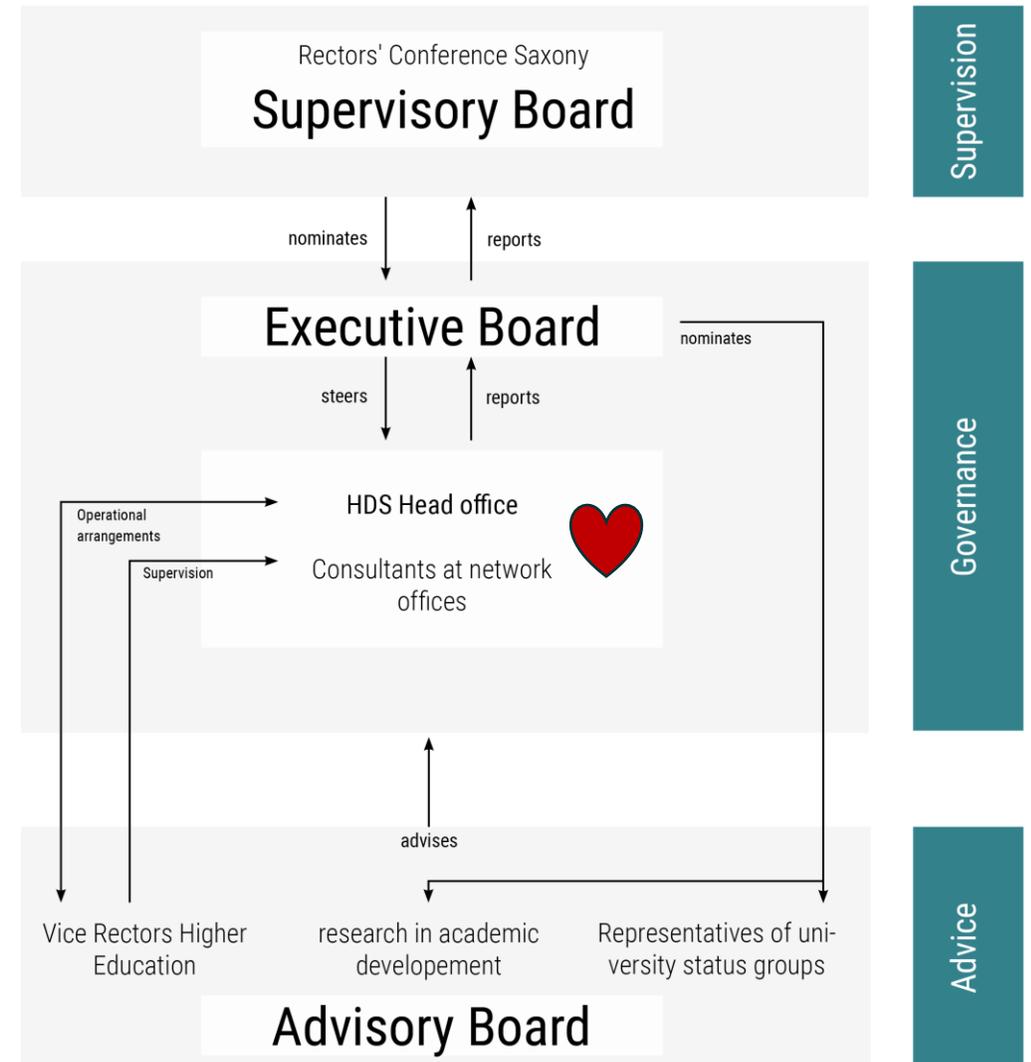
*3-year reflection cycles*

Strategy &  
programmes

‘Between 2026 and 2029, HDS will evolve from a primarily programme-driven support structure to a strategically effective co-creator of teaching development and higher education transformation – under conditions of scarce resources, heterogeneous needs and accelerated technological change (especially generative AI).’



## HDS Governance Model



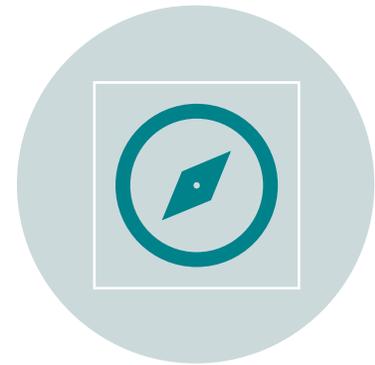
# Strategic Perspective

## *Key points*

- No rigid strategy
- 3-year reflection cycles

## *Learning*

- Common orientation framework
- Negotiation of priorities
- Response to social trends



STRATEGY:

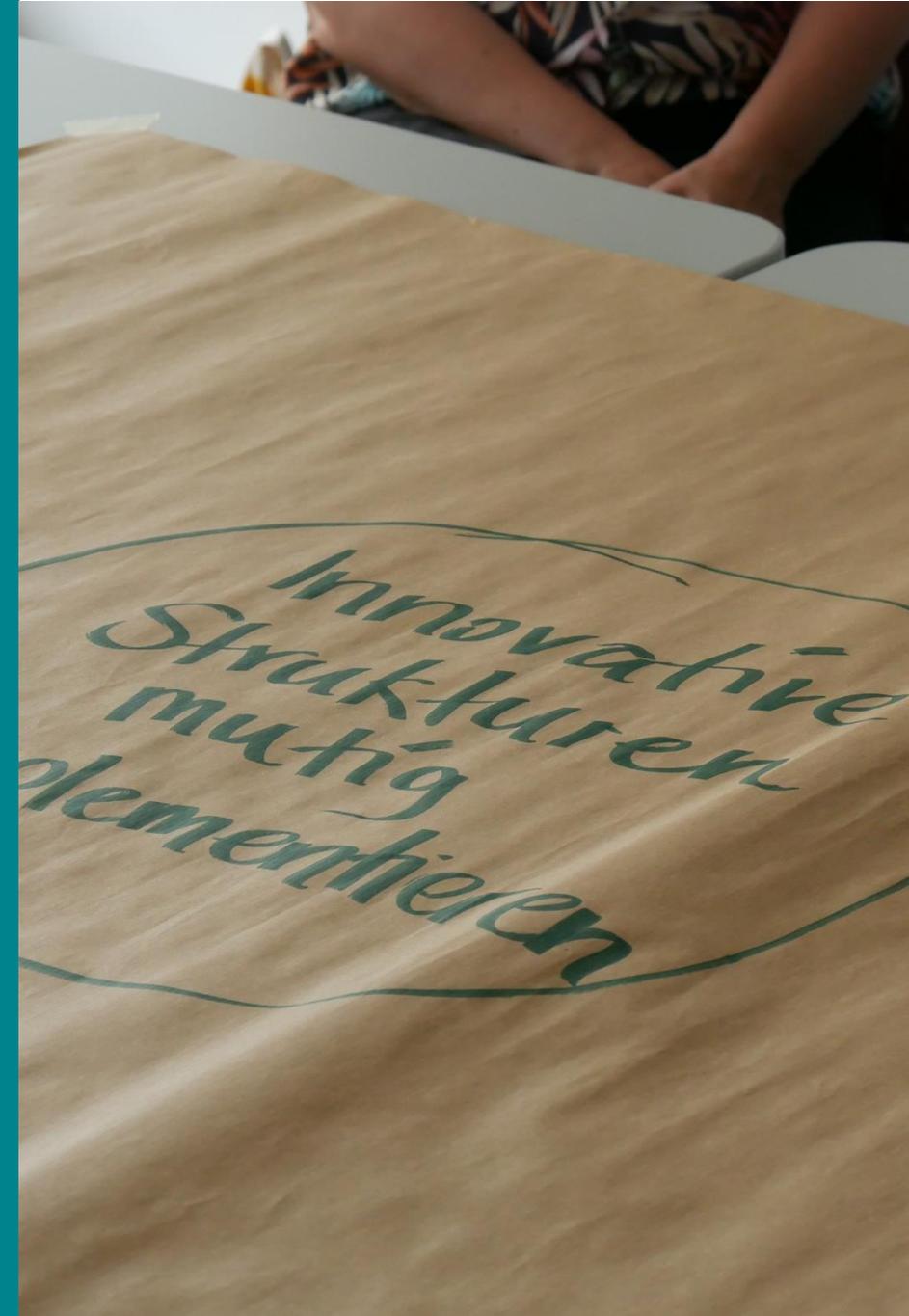
PERSPECTIVE  
(ORIENTATION,  
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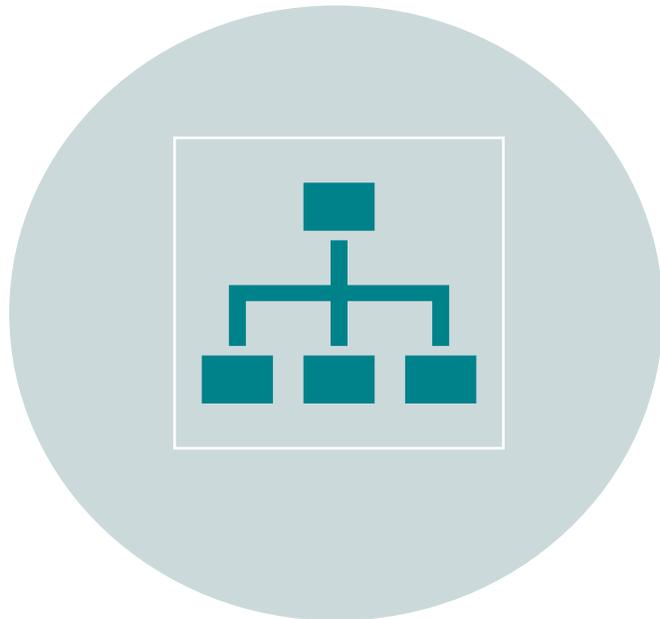
→ PROVIDES  
DIRECTION AND  
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**Strategy → collective thinking space, not just a planning tool**

	<b>Field</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Focus</b>
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# Governance-Model





GOVERNANCE:

MODEL (STRUCTURE, RESPONSIBILITY,  
COORDINATION)

→ CREATES RELIABILITY AND FRAMEWORK



# Aspects of the ideal type of governance form Networks

## *A bit of theory*

- The importance of **institutional anchoring** and **reliable framework agreements** as the basis for sustainable cooperation in networks should not be underestimated.
- **Equal participation** of all partners and the **contribution of different strengths** increase the reach and effectiveness of networks (cf. Winde et al. 2017).
- Success factors for cooperation in networks: **a common overarching goal**, structural and cultural similarities, **trust** and targeted **communication** (cf. Pohlenz et al. 2024).

# HDS interview series

## *Empirical data*

- Empirical data: 6 guided interviews (3 employees, 3 board members) 2024, all with experience from the transition phase to the current HDS governance
- Evaluation based on strengths, weaknesses/challenges and opportunities (practice-based evaluation perspective)

## HDS interview series

### *Some key findings: Strengths*

- Change in perception: significantly increased awareness and recognition of HDS in the higher education landscape
- Governance strengths: stable, professional structure with clear responsibilities, balanced involvement of the supervisory board, executive board, board of trustees and administrative office
- Network strengths: pooled expertise, transparent communication, closer cooperation while strengthening decentralised proximity to teachers

## HDS interview series

*Some key findings: Weaknesses – Challenges*

- Weaknesses: staff turnover in committees, high teaching loads at the start of network positions, lack of positions for cross-cutting issues (e.g. SDG, democracy education)
- Challenges: complex governance transition (2020–2022) with uncertainties, high communication needs and sometimes diverging university interests

## HDS interview series

*Some key findings: Opportunities – Future Focus*

- Opportunities: stronger integration of universities with the HDS, utilisation of the multiple roles of vice-rectors for agility and rethinking of processes
- Future focus: sustainable communication and relationship building as a key lever for a learning, adaptable network

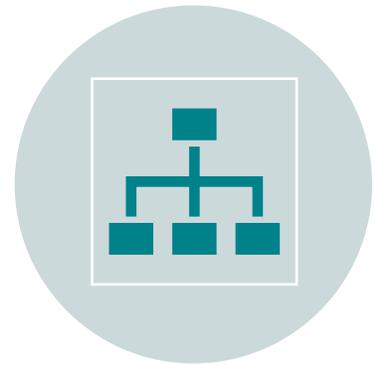
# Governance-Model

## *Key points*

- Balance between centralised and decentralised
- Transparency
- Clearly defined roles
- Contractual stability

## *Learning*

- Governance as an enabler for staff development
- Trust as a resource



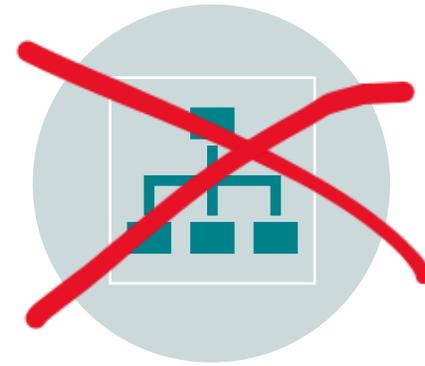
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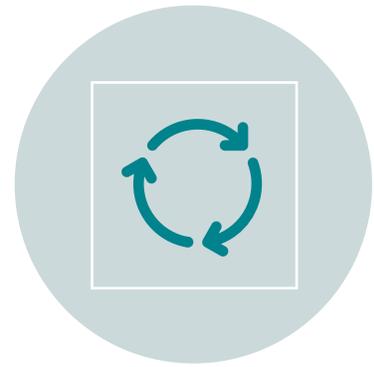
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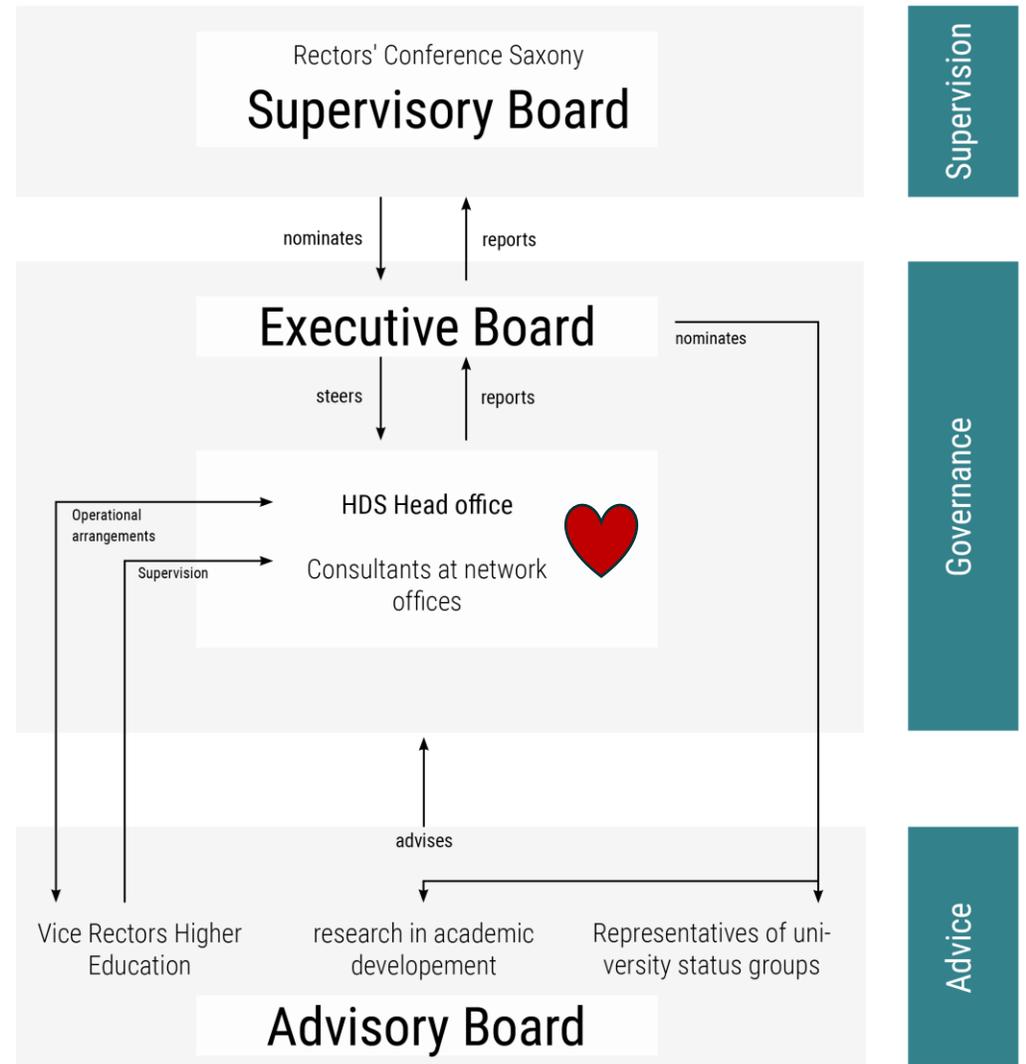


GOVERNANCE:

MODEL  
(STRUCTURE,  
RESPONSIBILITY,  
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→ CREATES  
RELIABILITY AND  
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## HDS Governance Model



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Transformation does not result from a single measure, but rather from the interplay of structure, direction and practice.



# Learnings & Challenges

- Complexity management
- Negotiation processes
- Addressing loyalty conflicts
- Time & communication
- Tensions between autonomy & coordination
- Enduring disruptions due to differing experiences at universities and within the network
- high acceptance
- sustainable impact
- cultural change

Governance creates the framework,  
strategy gives direction,  
curriculum enables transformation.



## Transfer & Discussion Questions

1. How do we balance structure and flexibility?
2. How do we keep staff development future-oriented?
3. How does curriculum promote collective transformation?
4. Wie viel Struktur braucht Innovation?



Thank you very much for your attention.

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# Fotos

Slide 2: <https://www.concerti.de/vermishtes/reise-tipp-goerlitz-und-grenzregion-zu-polen/>

Slide 5, 9, 13, 22, 32: HDS