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Abstract

Market principles in higher education seem to have generated a neoliberal awakening. A corollary of such market principles is the need for universities to develop effective strategies that give them competitive advantage. Thus, competitive advantage represents a key construct of neoliberalism, where the focus in this paper is on how university leaders, therefore, make sense of competitive advantage. Based on a comparative and instrumental case study using two close rival universities in England, three sensemaking dilemmas emerge as core elements of how university leaders conceptualize competitive advantage. The first one is about environmental fit or misfit. The second one is about seizing or missing opportunities. The third one is about finding a frame of reference. These dilemmas are valuable as they provide a possibility to understand what competitive advantage means in higher education, where the standard tenets of the concept, such as higher profits, might not always be helpful. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)