To Improve the Academy

Professional and Organizational Development
Network in Higher Education

1-1-1991

What Every Faculty Development Professional Needs to Know about Higher Education

Daniel R. Rice

Rice, Daniel R., "What Every Faculty Development Professional Needs to Know about Higher Education" (1991). *To Improve the Academy.* Paper 226.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/podimproveacad/226

What Every Faculty Development Professional Needs to Know about Higher Education

Daniel R. Rice

University of North Dakota

Introduction

Many faculty development professionals come to their work from faculty ranks and are relatively unfamiliar with the organizational dynamics and structures in higher education. In addition, many faculty development professionals have not taken formal course work in higher education administration. These informational gaps may take their toll. While knowledge of effective teaching, curriculum development, and professional development are of critical importance to the effective operation of a faculty development program, program success, and even survival as a faculty development professional, may depend upon how well one understands the larger organization and how it functions.

The discussion presented here describes a framework that can be useful in helping one understand organizational complexity. And, equally important, it illustrates the application of the framework in typical situations the faculty development professional will face in learning how to be effective in higher education. The particular framework discussed in this article was developed by Bolman and Deal (1984) and has been identified by others (Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum, 1989; Birnbaum, 1989) as a valuable tool for those who wish to exercise leadership in higher education.

Four Frames or Perspectives.

After an analysis of the literature of organizational theory, Bolman and Deal concluded that the various approaches to understanding organizations could be placed within four basic frames or perspectives. These frames represent the major approaches to organizational theory and research. The labels Bolman and Deal provided were the *structural* frame, the *human resources* frame, the *political* frame, and the *symbolic* frame.

The Structural Frame. Structures are the formal elements of organizations, and are depicted on organizational charts. Structures include the functions of, and lines of authority for, positions and the formal rules and procedures that prescribe how members of organizations are to function. Early examples of the structural approach are the works of Frederick W. Taylor (1911), often called the founder of scientific management, and Max Weber (1947), the sociologist who used the concepts of bureaucracy and hierarchy to describe the organizations that were developing during the industrial revolution. The structural approach emphasizes efficiency and rational decision making. Reorganization is regarded as the solution to most problems.

The Human Resources Frame. Those who developed the human resources frame did so, in part, in reaction to the limitations of the structural frame. The human resources approach reminded us that organizations are inhabited by people and that organizations function better when one attends to the needs of people. One who most influenced the development of the human resources approach was Abraham Maslow (1970), whose hierarchy of needs provided a means for understanding the nature and dynamics of human needs. Maslow's work has been very popular in training programs for teachers and educational administrators. Douglas McGregor (1960) studied the attitudes of managers toward employees and identified a negative perspective (Theory X) and a positive perspective (Theory Y). Frederick Herzberg (1966) attempted to discern what factors contributed to worker satisfaction and discovered that factors such as salary and working conditions contributed to dissatisfaction, but contributed little to satisfaction. On the other hand, factors such as sense of achievement and level of responsibility contributed significantly to satisfaction. Chris Argyris (1957, 1964) emphasized human motivation and morale, training programs to enhance human relations skills, and worker participation in decision making.

The Political Frame. Those who developed the political approach questioned some of the assumptions of the earlier approaches. To them, complex organizations include various interest groups, and such groups naturally attempt to further their particular interests. The clash of different

interests produces conflict, and conflict may lead to negotiations and compromise which, in turn, produce more or less acceptable decisions. These dynamics, rather than the rational approach of the structural frame or the focus on positive relationships in the human resources frame, seem to characterize much of organizational life. Baldridge (1971) studied the uses of power and conflict by students and faculty on campuses during the 1960s and 1970s. Those who utilize the political approach focus on power, the formation of coalitions, and the dynamics involved in the distribution of scarce resources.

The Symbolic Frame. Proponents of the symbolic frame moved even further from the rational approach than did the proponents of the human resources or political frames. From the perspective of the symbolic frame, understanding the event itself was not as important as the meanings ascribed to the event. Clark (1972) described the organizational saga as a means by which participants gave meaning to their experience and understood events. Organizations were understood to be inhabited by heroes, about whom stories were told. Traditions and rituals developed as ways of celebrating important events and elaborating the organizational culture. Cohen and March (1974) observed that ambiguity seemed to be a common experience in organizational life and that the rational model of decision making was not adhered to by many administrators in spite of their claims to the contrary. Schein (1985) developed a comprehensive discussion of the nature of organizational cultures and concluded that those cultures are often very resilient, especially at the deeper levels. Kuh and Whitt (1988) described the complex nature of organizational cultures and suggested strategies for actually analyzing them. Chaffee and Tierney (1988) have applied the cultural approach to case studies of seven institutions of higher education. Three cultural dimensions (structure, environment, and values) were described and related to three additional concepts (time, space, and communications). Finally, Chaffee and Tierney described three organizational strategies (linear, adaptive, and interpretive) that interface with the three dimensions of culture.

Those who utilize the symbolic frame pay special attention to the elements of organizational cultures, typically values, traditions, and symbols, especially as those define meaning within the culture.

Application of the Frames

A brief application of each frame to higher education illustrates how useful the frames are in understanding organizational issues in faculty development.

The Structural Frame. Old Historic University was planning to develop a new focus on teaching excellence. The planning committee was discussing where to locate the program within the University. Some committee members thought that funds could simply be allocated to the deans and that they would carry out the new emphasis on teaching. Others argued that there should be a new structure that would be charged with the focus on teaching. The committee finally agreed upon the latter strategy.

The next question was where to locate the new structure. The University already had an office of research with a director who had strong academic credentials and reported directly to the academic vice president. Some favored simply expanding that office to include the teaching focus. One argument for this approach was that it would be economical. Others favored the development of a new, free-standing program that would serve as a counter-balance to the emphasis on research. Those who favored this position explained that it was essential to have the teaching office placed at the same level as the research office within the organizational structure and to have a director for that office reporting directly to the academic vice president. The question was, does the placement of the new program within the university structure make any difference? However the question is resolved, one thing is certain: Where the program is located within the university structure will have consequences.

If the new program had been combined with the research office, which was an established and well-funded unit, the new program might have been overshadowed and overwhelmed. That decision would have placed the teaching program in a weaker structural position. The director of the teaching program would have had to report to an administrator within the new office which would have placed that program a layer lower in the structure of the university, away from the academic vice president. The closer one's unit is to the "top" of the organizational chart, the more authority one can exercise in the typical hierarchial organization.

The Human Resources Frame. Dean Vestige at Old Guard College decided it was time to plan a faculty development program. He called together two of his most trusted department chairpersons and they designed a program that seemed just right for Old Guard. Dean Vestige briefly discussed the plan with the president just to be sure he approved. At the next faculty meeting the new plan was announced.

Two years later, Dean Vestige wondered why the program had never really taken hold. He saw Dean Collegial, from a nearby college, at a regional meeting and asked her how their faculty development program was doing. "Rather well," was the reply. "Our faculty committee took nearly a year to

develop the program, but it was worth it," she said. "They are really enthusiastic."

Dean Vestige had failed to understand that participation in planning and decision making is essential for any group to take ownership of a program. He lacked one of the most important insights emerging from the human resources frame.

Participation in decision making increases the morale of anyone in an organization, but is especially important to professionals. Faculty view themselves as highly autonomous and believe they deserve to be consulted about matters that have a direct bearing upon their work.

Another insight of the human relations frame is that people are motivated by achievement. As program administrators, we sometimes forget that participation of faculty in the development of new program initiatives gives them a sense of achievement, just as it does for us.

The Political Frame. Dr. Diligent had worked for several years to build an excellent faculty development program at the university. However, when the state economy entered an economic recession, the campus faced severe budget reductions. Although Diligent had provided many helpful programs for faculty, he had generally ignored the deans and had a very limited relationship with the academic vice president and president. When decisions were being made about where to take the budget reductions, the deans protected their turf, and the academic vice president accepted their recommendations.

Diligent sank back in his chair as he read the memo from the vice president stating that Diligent's office would be eliminated at the conclusion of the current academic year. Of course, the memo continued, his good work was much appreciated, and he could return to his academic department to teach. "All those years of work down the drain," thought Diligent. "Thank goodness I have tenure or I would be out on the street!" He had learned a lesson the difficult way. Good work alone is not enough to survive in higher education.

Decisions about levels of funding and continuation of programs are made by those who have the power and influence, and those decisions take place within a political process. Knowing how to be connected with that process and how to develop political support for one's program can make all the difference.

If Diligent had worked more closely with the deans, the power base of the program would have been expanded. Input from the deans could have been sought when particular projects were being considered. Diligent could have made an appointment at the beginning of the academic year and

discussed matters of mutual concern with each dean. In addition, he should have sought the advice of the vice president on especially important or sensitive issues and kept him or her well informed of the activity and successes of the faculty development program. Efforts should have been made to ensure that the faculty development program had high visibility and support on campus. Frequent announcements in the campus newsletter would have helped. Program participation by faculty should have reflected as many academic departments and colleges as possible, rather than having been concentrated in just a few. These are a few of the strategies which Diligent might have employed from the political frame.

The Symbolic Frame. Dr. Astute was appointed Director for Teaching Excellence for a school of medicine. She spent the first several weeks on the job taking stock of the school, the students, the faculty, and the administrators. She was especially intent on discovering the important values of the culture of the school. It became increasingly clear that the school had a lengthy, well established, and honored tradition of placing research at the apex of its values. The most significant rewards and recognition went to those who were successful in the research arena. Institutional resources were heavily dedicated to research, and the rhetoric of the school, as expressed in official publications, as well as in informal ways, lauded the school's research accomplishments. Teaching, on the other hand, seemed to be a neglected and, in some ways, a peripheral activity. Dr. Astute concluded that a frontal assault on this culture would be ineffective and probably counterproductive.

After much thought and discussion with colleagues in other but similar situations, she decided upon a strategy. She would attempt to tie teaching issues to the research interests of the faculty. In that way she could attach her goal of improving teaching to the firmly held values of the faculty, especially the senior faculty. She also selected and developed materials for her office that emphasized the research on effective teaching and the ways in which teaching and research could be mutually reinforcing. She initiated a monthly forum with the academic chairpersons to discuss *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (Boyer, 1990), a report from the Carnegie Foundation suggesting a new definition for scholarship.

Dr. Astute understood that values are often deeply embedded in an organizational culture and are resistant to change. She also knew that if she could link teaching to the firmly embedded value given to scholarly research, she might find the faculty more receptive. Further, Dr. Astute realized that it is vital to pay attention to important symbols in the organization. Finally, she was aware that the academic chairpersons were very respected leaders in the school of medicine and that their participation in her program would send a

positive signal to other faculty in the organization. In short, Dr. Astute recognized the importance of understanding the organizational culture of her academic unit and she effectively utilized that understanding as a vehicle for enhancing her chances for success.

Conclusion

The cases presented here have illustrated the benefits of the ability to approach important issues in our organizations from each of the four frames, as well as some of the perils when one does not have that ability. The *structural frame* enables us to recognize the implications of faculty development program placement within the structure of the college or university. The *human resources frame* enables us to recognize the importance of issues of human motivation and morale as they relate to the success of a faculty development program. The *political frame* enables us to recognize the importance of power and the need to build coalitions that can be utilized to support a faculty development program when the program must compete for scarce institutional resources. The *symbolic frame* enables us to recognize the importance of values, traditions, rituals, and heroes as those elements of organizational cultures shape attitudes toward and participation in a faculty development program. Those who are serious about leading a successful faculty development program would do well to become familiar with the valuable literature on organizational behavior. The works referenced in this article are recommended as a basic reading list.

During these challenging times, faculty development programs deserve to be led by professionals who are both experts in the field and who are astute about how higher education organizations function. The success and survival of our programs may hang in the balance.

References

Argyris, C. (1957). *Personality and organization.* New York: Harper & Row.

Argyris, C. (1964). *Integrating the individual and the organization.* New York: Wiley.

Baldridge, J. (1971). *Power and conflict in the university.* New York: Wiley.

Bensimon, E., Neumann, A., & Birnbaum, R. (1989). *Making sense of administrative leadership: The "L" word in higher education.* (ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 1). Washington, DC: Association for the Study of Higher Education.

Birnbaum, R. (1989). *How colleges work.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bolman, L., & Deal, T. (1984). *Modern approaches to understanding and managing organizations.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Boyer, E. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities for the professoriate*. Princeton: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Chaffee, E., & Tierney, M. (1988). *Collegiate culture and leadership strategy*. New York: Macmillan.

Clark, B. (1972). The organizational sage in higher education. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 17*, 178-184.

Cohen, M., & March, J. (1974). *Leadership and ambiguity: The American college president*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Herzberg, F. (1966). *Work and the nature of man*. Cleveland, Ohio: World.

Kuh, G., & Whitt, E. (1988). *The invisible tapestry: Culture in American colleges and universities*. (ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 1). Washington, DC: Association for the Study of Higher Education.

Maslow, A. (1970). *Motivation and personality*. (2nd ed.). New York: Harper & Row.

McGregor, D. (1960). *The human side of enterprise*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Schein, E. (1985). *Organizational culture and leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Taylor, F. (1911). *The principles of scientific management*. New York: Harper & Row.

Weber, M. (1947). *The theory of social and economic organization*. (T. Parsons, Trans.). New York: Free Press.