Managing a Private Community College
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The framework for managing and operating a private college differs in some significant ways in Hong Kong and in the United States, especially in financing, governance, and accreditation matters. On the other hand, there are a number key of issues that are similar. Perhaps most importantly, the basic principles of leading organizations translate across the spectrum and the globe.

It is true that in the U.S., community colleges are generally publicly supported. Tuition/fees are lower than those of the four-year institutions, in order to provide greater access to students who may not otherwise be able to attend college. The subsidy is usually provided by the state, derived from taxpayer revenues. Many of the students attend part-time, often are older than most college students, and delicately balance school, work, and family obligations. This open access to anyone who might benefit from the education inherently brings a higher failure rate as well. Consequent to the public role in financing these institutions, the college administration is involved in state legislative politics in order to continually promote policy-makers' support. Accreditation is provided by the same regional agencies that accredit the large public and private four-year colleges and universities. Community colleges are governed by public Boards, some of which are appointed, usually by the state's Governor, and others which are locally elected. Students qualify for federal or state financial aid, and many take advantage of this benefit. These students may be pursuing certificates, for work readiness, or degrees, either for work readiness or for transfer to four-year colleges and universities. As states suffer economic hardships, all of public higher education is experiencing a decline in revenues per student full-time equivalent (FTE).

U.S. private colleges, especially in the two-year sector, are generally classified as either nonprofit or for-profit operations, with the latter being much more prevalent in the two-year sector. They offer certificates and associates degrees, though usually not the transfer-oriented Associate of Arts or Associate of Science. In general, the for-profit colleges have much higher tuition and fees, which generate most of the revenue for the institution. These institutions are generally career-education-oriented and owned by large corporations, though some have individual owners. Students may qualify for state (depending on the state) and federal financial aid if the college or school is accredited. While some of the private colleges are accredited by the regional agencies that accredit the public colleges and universities, most are accredited by other, national agencies, as regional accreditation requires public governance or at least substantial public representation in governance, which most private institutions do not have. Accreditation is critical to transfer of credit. In general, only those institutions that have regional accreditation can offer their

students transferrable degrees. Currently, these colleges are being more carefully scrutinized as to their quality and fiduciary practices.

Hong Kong is in the challenging, though enviable situation of building new institutions, new facilities, new staffs, and new opportunities. Growing or start-up operations require a different set of skills than maintaining or incrementally growing institutions. Leaders are engaged in setting the vision, finding, inspiring, and training the highest caliber of talent, and competing for human and capital resources. This all occurs, as stated, at a time when many U.S. institutions are losing resources.

While these differences are notable, there are many similarities between the two-year or sub-degree sector institutions in Hong Kong and in the U.S. First, all of these institutions have been created to extend access to a greater number of students. In both instances, public policy is a driver of this extended opportunity. For both, the articulation of credit with top-tier universities presents a number of challenges. The background and preparation of the students may vary, even within an institution.

One of the most important similarities is that leaders of community colleges and universities alike, world-wide, are preparing students for an unprecedented open world. As Hong Kong implements and the U.S. reinvigorates and redefines General Education, all institutions must reevaluate their role in educating students for a global economy in a dynamic information age. Generally, higher education leadership has traditionally come from the ranks of the professoriate. And certainly few institutional leaders have been trained to lead in the world that these new graduates will face. No longer must students simply memorize facts, figures and dates. But more than ever, students must articulate and interpret, evaluate and synthesize. How can leaders provide the inspiration for their staffs to redefine the enterprise while assuring the quality and integrity of their actions?

Leaders of community colleges have a broad range of responsibilities. Like the circus performer who spins plates atop long poles, the leaders are running up and down the rows, trying to keep all plates in motion, attending to those that wobble. The demands of keeping the day-to-day operations moving forward can infringe on the needed time to plan and to envision the future.

The following categories of responsibility are offered for consideration, though they are not comprehensive and not rank-ordered. Each category not only could serve but has served as the topic for countless papers, articles, and books.

- Building an effective team
- Devising and executing a business plan
- Creating, articulating, and inspiring vision
- Securing appropriate approvals, for facilities, operations, and academic programs

- Allocating resources
- Managing expenditures
- Assuring instructional quality
- Assuring fiduciary responsibility
- Raising financial support
- Communicating internally and externally
- Developing staff
- Meeting student, family, government, and public expectations
- Managing culture
- Data-based decision-making
- Sustaining momentum
- Fostering creativity and entrepreneurship
- Responding to changing job markets

Some of these responsibilities change dramatically as the institution grows, and the complexities, while neither greater or lesser, are different. As worldwide communication and economic interdependence grow, the factors that affect the management of organizations become increasingly similar. Although cultural nuances matter, organizations across the globe are affected by a similar set of drivers: world competitiveness; educational access; labor market/labor force mismatches; economic interdependency.

Clearly, leaders must have industry knowledge, financial acumen, political skills and insights, management abilities, and decision-making capacity. However, in the short space of this paper, perhaps it is most relevant to focus on four important concepts that have impact on all aspects of the leadership role:

- Communicating a vision--internally and externally
- Building an effective team
- Managing Culture
- Employing data-based decision-making

COMMUNICATING A VISION--INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY

Po Chung and Saimond Ip, in *The First 10 Yards* (2010), set forth a model, "The 5 Dynamics of Entrepreneurship," wherein they present a concise graphic on the keys to a successful start-up operation: "Product/service"; "Garage team"; "Culture/environment"; and "Management tools". These four components circle the "Founder's Personal Operating System" (POS). Chung and Ip use the metaphor of the computer to explain the dynamics of leadership. They share the concept that the founder, or in the case of this paper, the leader, must have a desirable set of attributes. It is critical that the leader connects with others in order to influence them. As the leader's POS connects with that of others, energy circulates throughout the system, just as it does in a computer network. As the authors state, "We collect data, process information, analyze situations, make decisions, solve problems, get

things done through other people, and we motivate, think, talk, move, act and behave." Chung and Ip note that in the early stages of an organization, all of the players are putting their trust in the entrepreneur.

According to an article in *Forbes* (23 July 2011) by Steve Denning, leaders must "come with a clear vision of where you want the organization to go and promulgate that vision rapidly and forcefully with leadership storytelling." He further encourages leaders to "communicate horizontally in conversations and stories, not through top-down commands." In addition to sharing the vision and story, managers must put in place the management tools that will "cement the behavioral changes…."

In talking with leaders across the spectrum of higher education and experience, one finds that few were prepared for the responsibilities they assumed. Leaders live in a fishbowl. One of the greatest surprises as a person ascends an organizational ladder is the degree to which he or she gives up privacy. It becomes more and more difficult to manage messages, as any thought voiced or physical expression is interpreted by others. It is no longer appropriate to casually "think out loud" unless the goal is an intentional one, perhaps to stimulate discussion or consideration.

Leaders are responsible for internal and external messaging as well. Passion must inform the articulation of the vision, as the top leadership is charged with the responsibility of attracting and retaining resources, talent, and clients. External messaging, though consistent with internal, is usually not the same, in tone or in emphasis. Leaders are well advised to engage experienced people in message review.

BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE TEAM

The most important decisions made by a leader, in this author's opinion, are the decisions regarding the organization's team members. A mediocre idea can lead to a great result with great staff in place. Even a great idea cannot survive if set in the hands of perhaps well-meaning but ineffective team members.

Leading and managing an institution of higher education in a time of dramatic change is a far different challenge than what most leaders experience. Whether one is building a new institution or growing an existing one, securing funding, planning and building new facilities, or seeking required approvals, the complexity and interactions among all of these responsibilities require prime organizational skills. Arguably, the most important task of any leader is to build a high-performing team.

There is a great deal of literature on team performance, on creating, inspiring, and maintain high-energy, high-creativity teams. Katzenbach and Smith (1994, 2003) studied cases of businesses and their successes. They conclude that high performance teams have the following characteristics:

- A deeper sense of purpose

- Relatively more ambitious performance goals than other teams
- "Complete" work approaches
- Mutual accountability
- Complementary skills/interchangeable skill sets

According to Chung and Ip, within the 5 Dynamics of Entrepreneurship, a critical component is the "Garage Team," which they describe as a scalable, multi-tasking team, with self-motivating team members. These members must be enthusiastic and focused on their jobs. They must also be intrinsically engaged in the work.

In MIT Professor Peter Senge's 1990 book, *The Fifth Discipline,* the author describes the leader as a designer, who has a sweeping influence over the organization (341): "…the leaders' task is designing the learning processes whereby people throughout the organization can deal productively with the critical issues they face, and develop their mastery in the learning disciplines" (345). Senge's emphasis is on systems thinking, whereby the entire organization is managed as an interrelated network, calling for continually learning team members.

In his classic work, *Groupthink* (1982), Irving Janis presents critical cases from U.S. history—fiascoes--that demonstrate how group decision-making can be flawed when groups are not properly assembled and managed. His examples include the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in World War II, which the U.S. failed to anticipate, the Russian Bay of Pigs invasion, the escalation of the Vietnam War, the U.S. failed hostage rescue in Iran, and the U.S. space shuttle Challenger disaster. These U.S. fiascoes provide apt examples for a worldwide audience.

In short, groupthink is a by-product of group dysfunction. Leadership groups that are characterized by a lack of complementary skills, or by a strong culture of overarching allegiance to the leader, or by a dearth of opportunities for opinion expression or by weak ethical norms usually cannot lead organizations to true success. As Janis writes, and as paraphrased below, there are eight symptoms of groupthink that can occur in highly cohesive groups:

- Illusion of invulnerability
- Collective rationalization
- Belief in inherent morality
- Stereotyped views of those outside of the group
- Direct pressure within the group on dissenters
- Self-censorship that inhibits the expression of doubts
- Illusion of unanimity and assumptions of total agreement
- Self-appointed mindguards who ward off non-supportive views

An effective leader must be mindful of the critical importance of building a team of individuals who are emboldened to dissent, while being loyal to and clearly believing in and articulating the vision for the organization. At this time of radical

change in higher education in Hong Kong, with the implementation of 3-3-4 and General Education, a new focus on pathways for students, and a dramatic expansion of the sector, the leadership patterns must keep pace with the vision for the future.

Denning (2011) defines the role of managers as "enablers of self-organizing teams" who "draw upon the full capabilities of the talented staff." Clearly, he is not advocating a top-down approach. Rather, the effective leader in the 21st century must build and support a team that is entrepreneurial and creative. In order to do so, the leader must create an environment in which calculated risk-taking is not only allowed, but encouraged and supported. This means that failure, indeed, is an option, but that each failure is a learning experience that can lead to future success.

MANAGING CULTURE

At a time of rapid change, the ability to skillfully manage organizational culture is one of the most important tools for leaders. Even the most enthusiastic team, from the top levels to the front line, can easily feel threatened by rapid change and cling to the familiar. Effective leaders learn how to move their organizations forward by honoring the past but effectively inspiring staff to create the future.

Denning, in *Forbes,* notes that "Changing an organization's culture is one of the most difficult leadership challenges." As he further explains, "…an organization's culture comprises an interlocking set of goals, roles, processes, values, communications practices, attitudes and assumptions." These "elements fit together as an [sic] mutually reinforcing system and combine to prevent any attempt to change it." He talks about the "organizational tools for changing minds" as Leadership Tools (Inspiration), Management Tools (Information), and Power Tools (Intimidation). In sum, Deming says that leaders mistakenly try to use Power Tools when they should be using Leadership Tools.

Organizations are complex systems, led by formal and informal leadership. Formal leaders occupy a particular position on the organizational chart, generally sit in notable offices and have perquisites that others in the organization do not enjoy. The informal leaders, however, do not derive their power from their positions. They are the influencers, the folks whom others watch and listen to for cues on appropriate responses. Failure to engage these informal leaders can ensure a mismanagement of culture and likely failure to achieve the organization's goals.

EMPLOYING DATA-BASED DECISION-MAKING

As leaders seek to build capacity within their organizations, they often neglect allocating resources to measure their organizational effectiveness. This is especially true in higher education. Traditionally, organizational output has been measured by inputs: lectures, recitations, study sessions, laboratory hours--in all, time on tasks.

Although students have been measured by grades and exams, budgets have been established and allocated, and faculty have been measured by evaluations, the overall institutional effectiveness has seldom been evaluated across multiple domains.

Marsh, et al., discuss data-driven decision-making (DDDM) in a RAND Occasional Paper. While they focus on primary and secondary education, a number of their points are salient to the post-secondary sector. The authors state that DDDM does not necessarily mean that data will be used to drive decisions, though that is the purported goal. Further, it is clear that using data will not necessarily improve decision-making. The issues are far more complex.

Perhaps more appropriate for consideration by the sub-degree sector, as new institutions are created or continuing institutions undergo incredible growth, is the consideration of a new roadmap for data collection and institutional evaluation. What will be the multiple measures upon which success can be judged? Unlike the research institutions, international ranking is not an appropriate measure. However, graduates' success in their career fields and employer feedback/satisfaction may offer data that guide institutional goals and objectives.

Furthermore, institutions need to devise objective criteria by which to judge new and continuing programs, efforts, and initiatives. In keeping with the development of policy, the development of programs can be assessed according to a life cycle. The policy process was outlined in 1983 by Dorsey and deLeon as follows:

- Initiation
- Estimation
- Selection
- Implementation
- Evaluation
- Termination

In the first stage, *Initiation*, ideas are generated to address a problem or opportunity. *Estimation* is the process of determining risks, costs, and benefits. During *Selection,* the actions to be taken are defined and responsibility is assigned. *Implementation* of the selected option follows. In many organizations, this is the end of the process.

However, in data-driven organizations, the following two steps are outlined at the beginning of the process. *Evaluation* requires that the organization's leaders thoughtfully and honestly ask whether or not a program or initiative is successful. Finally, *Termination* involves the adjustment of programs or policies or organizational structures or discontinuance if warranted.

IN CONCLUSION

W. Edwards Deming (1900-1993) is well known for his work in Japan in the 1950s. An electrical engineer, statistician and professor, he taught top management how to use statistical knowledge to improve organizational performance. An Institute in the U.S. now bears his name and promotes his thinking, though he was better known and regarded in Japan for most of his life than in his native America. In a letter in 1958, he criticizes his own education:

> If I might make some criticism of education as it fell to my lot in college, the criticism would be that too much time was spent on so-called practical work. My field was electrical engineering, and I know of course that there have meanwhile been changes in education for engineers, but I will voice the criticism nonetheless. We spent too much time in manipulating tools of one kind or another -- chipping, filing, hacking, sawing, gluing, and learning various arts and trade such as mechanical drawing and descriptive geometry. What we should have been doing was to spend more time on electrodynamics, thermodynamics, mathematics, English, French, German and basic subjects like economics, which I had to fill in later.

Managing a private community college requires a broad set of skills, knowledge, and abilities. In this time of dramatic change, worldwide, leadership requires imagination, knowledge, dedication, inspiration, passion, stamina, and not-so-common sense. Students will not only face but lead a world far different from the one that preceded. Community college leaders will help define that world by preparing their students to meet the challenges that await them.

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