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In this age of accountability, external constituents search for a clear definition of institutional effectiveness. Systematically, they ask faculty, students, and in some states, alumni, to take a turn peering into a looking glass hoping to find a reflection that will clarify the effectiveness construct. The purpose of this article is to add to that list the reflection of administrators as related to the criteria they use to define and evaluate quality for the metropolitan university.

Looking in the Looking Glass: How Administrators Define Institutional Effectiveness

As Alice pretended to play chess with Kitty, she came upon a deliciously different twist to enhance the fun of the game. “Let’s pretend that you’re the Red Queen,” she purred to Kitty. But, try as she might, poor Kitty simply could not manipulate her paws into the correct position to duplicate the posture of the Queen. Kitty was sullen. Alice was annoyed. To punish Kitty for such flagrant disobedience, Alice held Kitty to the looking glass and demanded that she look at it to see the reflection of a sulky, uncooperative, disappointing Kitty.

Alice and Kitty peered into the looking glass. As they stared, Alice told Kitty of her thoughts about the looking glass house that existed just to the other side of the glass. She described the first room of the looking glass house for Kitty, a room that looked surprisingly similar to the room in which they were standing. “Of course,” Alice whispered to Kitty, “There is one strange difference between our room and the room just behind the glass—things in the glass house room go the other way!” To illustrate her point, Alice turned Kitty’s head to look at the books in the room just to the other side of the glass. “See,” Alice explained, “The books are something like our books, only the words go the wrong way” (Carroll, 1985).

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The Looking Glass House and Institutional Effectiveness

With apologies to Mr. Carroll for borrowing so loosely from his classic, *Through the Looking Glass*, the story of Alice and Kitty and their adventures through the looking glass house, serve as an excellent allegory for the current adventures of state government and higher education as they move through the house of institutional effectiveness. Throughout the history of higher education in America, state governments and universities have frequently reenacted this scene between Alice and Kitty. The scene has been the same; it is the "person" playing the lead role of Alice that has changed over time. In the beginning, universities played Alice, holding the state to the looking glass. University leaders of yore pressed the state's nose to the reflecting silver demanding to know if the state had an interest in improving the lot of American society by supporting advanced education. As the state pondered the backward reflection, they acquiesced to the demands of universities, slightly, by setting ajar the doors to the state coffers (Rudolph, 1963). As time passed, the relationship changed. Today, it is the state that presses the nose of the sulky higher education system to the shiny surface of the glass (Lyll, 1997). Today it is the university that must contemplate the meaning of the backward image reflected in the glass, to continue to harvest some of the precious, and scarce, resources controlled by the state (Ewell, 1994, Stukel, 1994).

The state continues to demand increasing levels of accountability by higher education for the resources they invest in the academy (Hearn, 1996). This demand for accountability is motivated by a state's desire for evidence from higher education to prove the effectiveness of each institution in accomplishing stated instructional goals. There is no doubt that the concern and demand for institutional effectiveness are here to stay. As evidence of that point, one need only read the continuing proliferation of articles and books on the topic by such authors as Peter Ewell, Trudy Banta, George Kuh, and Thomas Angelo, to name just a few. As further evidence, one need only look at the continued popularity of national conferences such as the American Association for Higher Education annual meeting on assessment and quality.

As the demand for a definition of institutional effectiveness continues, there is evidence building in the literature that the state is willing to systematically hold faculty, students, and alumni to the looking glass to examine the congruency between their educational reflection and the educational requirements of the state. Interestingly, however, there is a paucity of evidence in the literature to indicate that administrators of universities have taken their turn at the looking glass. Administrators are the gatekeepers of information for the academy. They are the resource allocators, the strategic planners, and the day-to-day decision-makers on every university campus, in every state. Without an understanding of their definition of institutional effectiveness, the higher education reflection in the looking glass is not complete.

Method

With the purpose of exploring the administrators' definition of institutional effectiveness, administrators from two metropolitan universities in the southwest met for approximately two hours during the summer and fall of 1997 and engaged in focused

conversations about higher education. Four focus group sessions were conducted on each university campus, with one session for each of the following administrative levels: vice president, associate and assistant vice president, college dean, and department chair. The presidents of both universities shared their ideas about higher education in a personal interview with the researcher. Approximately fifty metropolitan university administrators participated in this study, with four to ten administrators in each focus group session.

At the completion of the focused conversations, the researcher transcribed the audiorecording from each session and analyzed the resulting transcript, searching for clues on attitude about institutional effectiveness. During the search process, auditors external to the purpose of the research also read the transcripts to identify institutional effectiveness clues. The purpose of the auditing process was to ensure the objectivity of the data analysis.

While reading the reflective conversations of these administrators in the following sections, it is important to keep in mind that these are the voices of only a select few. Whereas the focused conversations were conducted with all university administrators holding certain job titles within each university, the conversations took place on only two metropolitan university campuses located in the southwest. These conversations are offered, not as a quantification of reality for generalization to all administrators, but as a guided and detailed exploration of the thoughts of a specific group. Therefore, this research provides an important first step in the construction of a theoretical framework on the administrators' definition of institutional effectiveness.

Looking in the Looking Glass: Conversations with Administrators

Based on the focused conversations with metropolitan university administrators, a theoretical framework defining institutional effectiveness emerged from the data. The theoretical framework included three primary theoretical constructs—landscape, geography, and higher education management. Borrowing from the philosophical investigations of Donald Vandenberg during the 1970s, the landscape and geography constructs in the theoretical framework defined the components of institutional effectiveness as related to the education of students. The higher education management construct described administrator perception of institutional effectiveness by the characteristics of organizational management.

According to Vandenberg (1971), the education process must court both the landscape and geography of students to ensure learning. The landscape of a student embraces all of the characteristics that the student brings to the collegiate experience. Student perceptions of, experiences with, and future plans for the advanced learning experience inform the educational landscape. Whereas the landscape construct envelops the unorganized, even chaotic, realm of student attitudes and understanding of education, the geography construct conforms to the orderly world of fact and universal knowledge. The effective educator recognizes the importance of uniting the originality of the landscape with the abstract order of geography to facilitate effective learning and ensure the transfer of knowledge.

Metropolitan university leaders shared opinions and attitudes about institutional effectiveness for their area and their university that correlated with the philosophical constructs of landscape and geography. Administrators operationally defined the landscape construct with discussions about (a) ensuring student success, (b) understanding student characteristics, (c) improving student learning, and (d) building community on the metropolitan campus. Within the geography construct, administrators shared their attitudes about (a) faculty, (b) advanced knowledge, and (c) the curriculum.

Through the higher education management construct, administrators constitutively defined institutional effectiveness with a discussion on quality management and educational leadership for the metropolitan university (Gall, Borg, and Gall, 1996). Administrators operationalized this constitutive construct with conversations about (a) strategic planning, (b) resource management, and (c) public relations. Finally, these administrators talked specifically of the criteria they use to define institutional effectiveness in both day-to-day management and long-term planning.

Institutional Effectiveness: Landscape

The first glimpse in the institutional effectiveness looking glass reflected an image of metropolitan university administrators concerned with the marriage between the requirements of advanced learning and the educational "lived" experiences of the student. The administrators who shared their reflections on institutional effectiveness consistently talked of the importance of the student in building a quality higher education institution. Collectively, they expressed a desire for a higher education experience that promotes student growth and student learning with one important caveat: the recognition that students must cross the threshold of higher education with some intrinsic desire to grow and some level of academic preparation for advanced learning.

Ensuring Student Success

Administrators acknowledged that student success is not always within the control of the student, and bemoaned the financial drain of college expenses that, for many students, create an important obstacle to success. They recognized the societal forces that place pressure on all individuals to pursue a college degree regardless of academic ability or talent. They also understood that many impressionable students enter higher education and choose a major field of study based on peer pressure, parental pressure, or income-earning goals without regard to life satisfaction or interest, therefore setting themselves up for possible failure.

These administrators talked of the importance to collegiate success for college students to enter the higher education experience ready to learn. This readiness equates to a certain level of academic maturity that administrators believe is within the purview of each student with a little intrinsic motivation, self-discipline, and the realization that college is, after all, an advanced learning experience.

Related to academic readiness, administrators discussed the need for students to identify their long-term goals and use them to remain focused on the learning process. Administrators shared past experiences with too many students who really didn't know what they wanted from the collegiate experience, appearing to "just drift" from one

major to another, one college activity to another, and, even from one college to another without purpose or reason. In many cases, administrators correlated the lack of focus on goals to the lack of academic preparedness—a condition brought about by the inability of K-12 to prepare students for advanced learning. To that end, many administrators in the focus group conversations discussed their desire to develop university-school partnerships to help K-12 meet the challenge of educating the next generation of college students. Because higher education prepares K-12 educators, the administrators accepted some of the responsibility for a floundering precollegiate environment. Because higher education is the recipient of the K-12 product, they also underscored the necessity for improvement.

Finally, they talked about the value of academic advising to college success. Some administrators wanted, in their ideal university, an advising system that begins with pretesting students for aptitude and learning ability—an advising system that eliminates the “cookie-cutter” approach. As one department chair stated, “it is a part of our job, at the very beginning, to try to understand where these students are so that we know how far we can take them and in what direction.”

Understanding Student Characteristics

As discussed by these metropolitan university leaders, advising in contemporary higher education has become increasingly critical in serving the function of engaging students who are academically distanced from the higher education process. Students today are challenged by innumerable life-roles and lifestyle demands. Administrators lamented the passing of days of yore when students could immerse themselves full-time in the academic stream.

Because of the part-time nature of student learning, even for those students who are enrolled full-time, students are detached from the learning process. One dean called this detachment the “absence-of-the-mind” syndrome. Furthermore, because of time constraints, students struggle to find the motivation to excel. To solve this problem, administrators talked of their desire to find a way to admit only those students who demonstrate a motivation to embrace advanced learning. As stated by administrators, college is not for everyone. But, for these administrators, it should be for those who have the ambition and the drive to succeed.

Related to this discussion, administrators recognized the gatekeeper role they play in determining who will and who will not enter the ivory halls of the academy. They acknowledged their role in deciding who will have access to the institution and, therefore, who will have “access through the institution” to a better life. Some administrators wanted the gates of higher education flung wide to allow all who have the desire and ambition to enter. Others, however, stressed a concern for a higher education institution that admits students whom they can not possibly serve. Still others shared an opinion that open access to higher education is not in the best interest of society. “If we lower the barriers, accept everybody and keep everybody, then we are not producing what is needed for this society.”

Regardless of the selectivity of the admissions process, most agreed that once the student arrives at the door of the academy, it becomes the administrators’ job to pro-

vide a student-oriented environment. As one vice-president stated, "Basically, regardless of what anyone says, this institution is here for the student!" These administrators wanted a student-centered environment for a variety of reasons, but the most compelling reason for a student-oriented campus is to improve the student-university bond and, hopefully, improve retention. According to another vice-president, "We are simply losing too many opportunities for people to be really successful in life."

Developing mentoring relationships for students was one strategy proposed by administrators to improve student retention, who talked of developing formal mentoring programs to encourage faculty-to-student, administrator-to-student, and student-to-student mentoring. They talked of an effective institution as one with a resource structure that would allow faculty and staff the time to develop informal mentoring relationships with students.

Improving Learning

Related to the issue of mentoring, the administrators spoke of learning enhanced with individual attention and individual instruction. They preferred to design educational programs and services that would allow faculty and students the time and motivation to engage in one-on-one learning, postulating that the more individual the instruction, the more "powership" the learner has over the learning process.

With this type of power, administrators believed that students would develop a love for learning similar to that they felt themselves. They presumed that power would help students realize the value and importance of lifelong learning. They wanted students to recognize that "what they have is not a product. It is a degree. It is a process that we give them that is really important to their continued learning health." And they postulated that without this power, student learning would not improve regardless of the technology employed by faculty in the classroom.

Administrators also shared their ideas about the nature of learning. Most seemed to agree that learning does not happen in the same manner for all students; that an effective institution provides diverse learning opportunities for students' diverse learning needs. Regardless of the learning method employed and the offering of individual learning techniques, however, many shared the opinion that the effective institution recognizes the difference between a student's immediate desire to get a job and their longer-term desire for learning. "I have always said that students have short-term goals and long-term goals. Their short-term goal is to get a job. Their long-term goal is that they would like to have an education. Unfortunately, students are consumed by their short-term goal from economic necessity."

Building Community

College success, the academically distanced, mentoring, and the power of learning all fold into the final construct defining institutional effectiveness of community. Administrators talked of helping the academically distanced find a bond with the university similar to the traditional "living and learning" model of the residential college by way of building community, and of providing incentives to encourage student involve-

ment, both in the classroom and on campus, and of the value of building community among faculty to serve as a role model for student community growth. Mostly, however, they talked of the need to develop a nurturing environment that promotes a student-to-university bond. “Sometimes I wonder: Do we care? If we do care, then in all of this process there has to be some effort to create a bond among the students, as well as a bond with the university.”

Institutional Effectiveness: Geography

The geography theoretical construct represents all of the components of advanced learning involved in the dissemination, transfer, and construction of knowledge. If landscape reflects the soul of the campus, then geography incorporates the mind.

Faculty

While sharing their thoughts on the effective metropolitan university and the geography of learning, administrators talked primarily of the importance of faculty. During their discussions, administrators emphasized the skills needed by faculty to ensure an effective institution. They voiced their opinions concerning the value of hiring faculty who demonstrate attitudes that are congruent with the university mission and goals, and engaged in a debate on the age-old issue of research versus teaching. And they expressed the desire to develop an educational structure that would allow faculty more time to spend with students.

From the conversations, a list of desired faculty skills and talents emerged for the effective university. According to one administrator, “They have to be good communicators.” A second added to the list, “If we want a quality university, then we must have the best faculty, not only in terms of scholarly achievement, but also in terms of people skills.” They also talked of the need to have faculty who are passionate about teaching, a community of scholars who share a high level of enthusiasm for their discipline and the knowledge within that discipline.

These leaders also recognized the consequences of a professoriate who are educated within a discipline, but who are not schooled in the practice of educating. According to a vice-president, “You know, we could put a lot of money in brick and mortar. But I really think it is time to pour more money into instruction.”

As they reflected on quality teaching, they shared their opinions about the importance of time spent with students. Some offered the idea that faculty, themselves, are the loudest proponents of getting more time to spend with students. “They always say, ‘We want more time. We want time with our students.’ For people who don’t have it all, the one thing they want most is time with students!” Other administrators believed that the problem of little time rests on the shoulders of academically distanced students. “The students at my university generally are rushed and are unable to spend much of their personal time with our professors.”

They also debated the value of teaching versus research. As would be expected from a group of educational leaders, consensus was never reached as to the appropriate balance of research to teaching for any effective university. As one stated, “Now,

in order to be a good teacher, we have to be scholars. We must understand our own field. But don't turn that around and say 'I teach so that I can research.' "

Advanced Knowledge

As they discussed the importance of quality faculty and teaching skills, they also talked about the characteristics of knowledge in a university, debated the importance of knowledge creation through research, and agreed on the value of knowledge discovery in broadening student horizons. They dreamed of students who come to the university with an intrinsic curiosity about knowledge and learning, students who recognize the importance of studying to complete their role in the transfer-of-knowledge partnership.

Whereas most administrators dreamed of a transfer process that facilitates the development of critical thinking skills for all students at all levels, they also recognized the constraints placed on undergraduate education preventing that development. "Knowledge has expanded enormously in almost every field in the past 30 years; we are faced, at the undergraduate level, with just so much more to teach."

In the discussion of the knowledge explosion, several administrators shared a repugnance for the contemporary university structure that separates knowledge into a variety of different disciplines and departments. "As the university exploded as an industry, we atomized knowledge. We broke knowledge down into the smallest pieces and we gave it names—physics, math, English. And then we further broke it down into a bunch of credits. And then we wrapped those credits in a box and called it a degree. We don't really create or nurture educated people. We fill up boxes. Along the way, I think we lost what knowledge is really about because we lost the inner connectivity of knowledge."

Curriculum

If the purpose of higher education is embedded in knowledge, then the curriculum is the vehicle for fulfilling that purpose. For the administrators engaged in this conversation, the quality of the curriculum is an important consideration. They spoke of the value to an effective institution of a curriculum that is world class, sufficiently comprehensive to address the diverse interests of students, and that offers students a variety of educational experiences and opportunities. Just as they professed the value of a professoriate with attitudes congruent with the university mission, they also underscored the importance of a curriculum designed to achieve university goals and objectives. They talked of the holistic value of the general education core in preparing students for their major, and also talked of the importance of the major in helping students' "transition to the future."

In most of the discussions about the curriculum, the one topic that seemed always to take center stage was the debate about instrumental education. Is the college experience about job training or life preparation? Some leaders seemed to agree with an instrumental focus on higher education, whereas others preferred a liberal arts focus. Regardless of their attitude toward instrumental education, however, they all agreed that instrumentalism is a fact of life in higher education because of student and industry demand. According to one dean, "When I talk to students and I look at the reality, college is a place to go to learn how to do a job, period."

Even though they recognized the reality of instrumentalism in higher education and in the curriculum, many lamented the loss of an educational process that transformed the mind instead of transforming the vocation. As stated by one, “Our curriculum today is much more narrowly focused so that students do know how to do a job when they graduate. But they don’t know why they do it. And they don’t know the ethics behind what they do.”

Institutional Effectiveness: Higher Education Management

Whereas the landscape and geography constructs in the theoretical framework represent the abstract components of an advanced education, the higher education management construct defines the concrete aspects of quality.

Strategic Planning

According to these administrators, one criterion in the definition of institutional effectiveness relates to the ability of the institution to develop a mission that is clear and focused, a mission that informs the design of goals and objectives for the university and each department housed within it. Critically important to the development of a mission for the university is the commitment by university constituents to a mission that is sufficiently specific in focus to effectively and efficiently allocate resources. “I think that we are very reluctant in higher education to garden, to weed out, to realize that we can’t be all things to all people. There simply are not enough resources to be all. Consequently, we water and feed and nurture some mediocre programs that are not quality.”

In the strategic planning process, they talked of the need to construct a flexible organization structure that supports and nurtures individual professional goals. Related to that, administrators wanted to incorporate the ability to provide support for student and faculty success in any planning process. As many stated, their primary responsibility is to make the work of faculty and students more effective, more efficient, and more productive.

Administrators warned other university planners to become sensitive to trends that have an influence on the future of higher education. They talked of changes in the consumer, competitive, and political environments for the higher education process and stressed the importance of recognizing changes in student demographics that motivate students to adopt consumer-oriented criteria in determining the return on their investment. “What do our students want today? Quality and convenience! Those are very important to contemporary students.” Administrators encouraged university constituents to build partnerships within the competitive and political environment to maintain market and resource share.

Resource Management

As stated earlier, an important outcome of strategic planning is the improved effectiveness of resource allocation within the higher education institution. When these administrators talked of resources, they spoke primarily of the importance of effective management of the time, human, and technology resources, and their consensus was

that the most important resource for a university is that of time. Administrators wanted to offer faculty more time to teach and they wanted to give students more time to learn.

Related to the management of human resources, they wanted the ability to hire talent that provides the most value for the institution, and they emphasized the significance of bringing valuable talent to the table and then demonstrating a respect for that talent. Interestingly, they also talked of the technological resource from a human resource perspective. According to one senior administrator, "From a technology standpoint, you strive to give faculty the tools to help them teach. You strive to give administrators tools that will help them make decisions. It is just a tool. All we are trying to do is to get the tools in the hands of people."

Public Relations

With all of this said, administrators stressed the value of the public relations function for all institutions, and they thought that universities must do a better job of communicating the positives of higher education to constituents. According to one, "Our graduates are the ones who build the chips, the technology, and the coding for the chips. We taught them to do that. Now they are teaching the rest of the country with the media we helped them to invent. But at the university we haven't communicated that message yet."

As these educational leaders stated, the first step in developing a quality communication process is first to define the purpose and the mission of the higher education institution. Then, they argued, the tone and message of the communication are dictated by that mission. They want higher education institutions to communicate the complex themes of advanced learning to all constituents and a message that would, primarily, inform all consumers of the value of higher education beyond vocational training. Administrators believed that they are an important link in the communication of institutional quality to internal and external constituents and saw themselves as the public relations agents for their institution.

Institutional Effectiveness

At the end of each focus group conversation, participants were asked, "At the end of the day, how do you evaluate the effectiveness of your area?" In response, they talked of personal goals achieved, professional goals accomplished, and institutional goals delivered. One department chair said, simply, "Successful day? Nothing blew up!"

Finally, in summarizing institutional effectiveness, one department chair postulated, "If we are talking about institutional effectiveness, I guess I would like to think that a faculty is effective to the extent to which they have rendered themselves superfluous to the students by the end of the course of study, and that administration will be effective to the extent which they enable teachers to become superfluous to the students."

Conclusion

The metropolitan university administrators in this discussion shared a common theoretical framework about institutional effectiveness that included a focus on the originality of the student's landscape, the abstract order of the knowledge geography,

and the concrete issues of higher education management. Within the student landscape, they expressed a concern about the challenges of engaging students who are academically distanced from the higher education process, with the result that this student population is a classroom experience fettered by an absence-of-the-mind syndrome. Administrators believe that an effective institution of advanced learning remains sensitive to the challenges of the academically distanced and designs educational programs and services that encourage learners to adopt a certain level of power over their own learning process, a power that promotes lifelong learning. And, to encourage power over learning, both formal and informal strategies must be included to promote mentoring relationships and to build community on the university campus.

The definitions of institutional effectiveness for these administrators include criteria that relate to improving the mind, or geography, of the university, and, the components of the university mind include the faculty, curriculum, and transfer of knowledge. Therefore, an effective institution hires faculty who enjoy working with students and who consider teaching a priority, recognize the need to school a content-trained faculty in the practice of educating students, and, more importantly, develop strategies that allow faculty the time to offer students individualized attention. They bemoaned a knowledge environment that separates knowledge into small, autonomous units with territorial walls and fortresses built around each unit. They underscored the importance to the effective institution of designing strategies to tear down those walls and help students find the interconnectivity of knowledge.

In the concrete world of higher education management, administrators defined institutional effectiveness by the clarity and specificity of the university mission, and valued a mission that provides university constituents with a mooring and a sense of purpose during stormy weather, but one that is flexible enough to allow the academy to ebb and flow in synch with changes in the consumer, competitive, and political tide. To accommodate this adaptability, they believe, the effective institution places high value on the importance of resource management with a special emphasis on the management of time, human, and technological resources.

When Alice and Kitty peered into the looking glass, they saw a reflection that was puzzling. As they focused on the things in the room reflected back to them, they were perplexed by the backward nature of the reflection. In Carroll's story, Alice and Kitty were more interested in the context of the reflection in the looking glass as opposed to the content of their own reflection. Whereas metropolitan university administrators may puzzle over the backward reflection of state demands for accountability, the content of their own reflection appears to be focused on a clear definition of institutional quality.

Suggested Readings

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