Transforming Leadership In Collegiate Admissions

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ABSTRACT

The 21st century has seen the consequences of short-term leadership strategies, and the results have left little certainty, making long-term planning challenging. However, without a globally oriented, long-term, ethical strategy, some closed systems fail to adapt to feedback, risking failure. Universities face this challenge, and long-term planning is particularly troublesome for university admissions departments. To overcome these challenges and build on identified strengths, these departments must undergo self-evaluation and reconsider their leadership decision-making processes. In this study, we assess the operations and needs for stronger decision-making for our service learning partner, a public university's admissions departments. Based on the identified needs, we offer suggestions for ethical decision-making in public collegiate admission offices. We identify needs through SWOT analysis involving an exploration of admissions offices' decision-making challenges. Their strengths and weaknesses as well as the opportunities and threats are explained in the context of internal obstacles and external barriers, respectively. Then we establish a framework for understanding their ethical paradigm. We frame their challenges in the context of the bounds of human capacity for rational and psychological decision-making as well as the influence of politics, a capitalistic society, and technological innovations. From the analysis, we present transformational suggestions based on decision-making strategies that practically address the current leadership decisions faced by the higher education admissions office.

Keywords: Transforming Leadership in Collegiate Admissions; Strategic Planning for Higher Education Admissions Offices

SERVICE LEARNING PARTNER

We selected the admissions and recruitment office at a university to interview and serve. A qualitative survey was prepared that explored the operations of admissions. On February 7, 2011, this survey was used to conduct an interview meeting a key contact in the office about day-to-day decision-making processes and administrative needs. Interviewees recorded answers from representatives from both the University.

THE UNIVERSITY

The University in Alabama is a regionally accredited state supported institution of higher education. It boasts an enrollment of more than 5,000 students from 42 states and 7 countries. One-third of the students are non-Alabama residents and 11 percent are ethnic minorities at this Historically Black College/University. With a student-faculty ratio of 18 to 1, instructors work closely with students, encourage ambition, and challenge students to strive for academic success. The University earned accreditation from the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The University is also accredited by the Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP), the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, the National Association of Schools of Music, the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC), the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy (ACOTE), Commission on

Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs and the Council in Social Work Education. The University offers 47 degree programs including 31 bachelors, 11 master's, two Education Specialist and three doctoral courses of study.

The University's admissions and recruitment office is manned by a director, a recruitment coordinator, six district recruiters, an admission coordinator, three data entry clerks, and a secretary. The office falls under the direction of the vice president of university relations. The department's responsibilities encompass the recruitment and admissions of approximately 1,500 new students each academic year. This service learning partner has also experienced challenges in the administrative admission process, which results in unprocessed applications and lowered admittance rates than desired.

Internal Analysis of the Strengths and Weaknesses

An internal analysis of the University provided insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the institution's admissions office functions. The director and the recruitment coordinator were interviewed to determine the perceived effectiveness and ineffectiveness of current processes and practices within the department.

We identified strengths as the structure of the department and the clearly outlined job specifications as well as the documented and well-communicated mission and goals of the department. Other identified strengths include an open communication system implemented by the current director three months ago. They recently developed and implemented a strategic plan along with an established recruitment process.

The new strategic plan includes a team approach to recruitment that requires pre-event contact and preparation with the high school or target group. It employs a new student follow-up process that provides increased student contact and allows for more accountability on the recruitment side of the operation. As recruiters collect data from various recruiting events, contact information, application status, and other pertinent details of potential students are entered into the recently launched People Soft database management system. This database generates communication alerts for the administrative admissions staff. These communications include social media letters, virtual tours, and requests for application materials.

Although several strengths were identified within the University admissions office, a recurring theme among those interviewed include the weakness created by the new database system and the lack of administrative training and additional resources. The admissions staff executes the process for keying in each application. More than 5,000 applications are processed each year and the three data entry employees are overwhelmed by the new computer system that requires as much as 15 minutes to process a single application. During the fall and spring, major recruiting events add to the workload for this staff, which can more than triple within a few short weeks. This creates a back-log of work in the admissions office.

External Analysis of the Opportunities and Threats

The admissions and recruitment department depends on several external entities, which include high school counselors, recruitment fairs, the developers, supervising departments, as well as the database provider. Each of these groups directly affects the department's ability to accomplish its stated mission and goals.

High school counselors provide the first line of communication with the prospective students. If the relationship with this group lacks positive, open, and fluid communication, then the access to students is greatly restricted. An opportunity exists with this group for cultivating students and beginning the data collection process sooner and faster than historical data reflects. The coordinators of education fairs and their ability and willingness to provide accurate information are also a threat to the operations of the admissions and recruitment office. The data entry staff depends on accurate information coming from these organizers in order to enter the required statistics. Often times additional contact hours are spent with these intermediaries, which increases the admittance time for a potential student.

An additional external threat to the admissions office and others at the university is proration and the subsequent cuts that come from the supervising department. The governor of Alabama has projected 3% proration for this year and an additional cut for next year. This loss in the operating budget will negatively affect the department's ability to execute its strategic plan, including securing additional staffing. A final threat to the department involves the selection of and implementation of the new database system. The staff of the admission department was not a part of the selection and development of the People Soft database system. The staff subsequently did not receive adequate training nor demonstration of the capabilities of the system. This threatens the department's ability to process paperwork in a timely fashion and meet required goals set by the board of trustees.

DECISION-MAKING

Making decisions involves more than just deciding because all decision-making encompasses an ethical dilemma. Ethics in educational institutions emanate from a sense of justice, critique, and care that complement each other to become the ethics of a profession with interests of the students as core (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). As an ethical dilemma, decision-making involves overcoming internal obstacles and external barriers as well as the alignment of the mission or goal of a decision-making body (Brower & Balch, 2005). However, Brower and Balch also insist that decision-making as a transformational leadership process in schools (or educational institutions) is guided by what is best for the institution. They define "what is best for the institution" as the stakeholders' common good, yet decision makers siding with what is best for the institution may be propagating institutional racism or other inadvertent or advertent institutional discrimination (Taylor & Clark, 2009). While these perspectives are not necessarily at odds, we caution against defining decision-making as what is best for the institution. Furthermore, Brower and Balch warn against subjective decision-making (or making decisions with the heart), yet they contradict themselves by advocating that leaders should express care and compassion for those the decision effects. Even though making ethical decisions involves objective analysis, making fact-based decisions, and remaining open to multiple perspectives and information devoid of faith, as Brower and Balch suggested; some decision makers successfully use their faith and heart to guide their decision-making. Therefore, some of Brower and Balch's recommendations, although not inherently wrong, have some flaws. Instead, we suggest remaining open to professional ethics as well as internal (within the institution) and external (outside the institution) feedback, as much as possible, to make sound decisions. The context of decision-making may prevent such elongated contemplation and information gathering because of the time pressures and complexity of the situation, so the strategy depends on the context. Decision-making in educational institutions, therefore, involves overcoming an ethical dilemma either within, outside, or overlapping the boundaries of the institution to do what is best for the students with the backing of a professional community.

The professional community collaborates with decision makers; leaders rarely make decisions alone, yet they represent the decision. Leaders, therefore, act collaboratively, taking into consideration their institutions' stakeholders as well as those stakeholders not directly involved but affected by the decisions. Within the institution, many individuals and their respective discursive communities (upholding professional standards) have a stake in leadership decisions. Because deciding involves collaboration, the human capacity of decision-making by both groups and individuals becomes an important consideration.

HUMAN CAPACITY

Understanding the human capacity of decision-making is paramount to setting forth strong strategies. Individuals have limitations. Humans share common biological, psychological, and social psychological capacities, not to discount the uniqueness and diversity inherent in humans.

Biologically or physically, we have a number of limitations. Some of which are age, health, and appearance. Many people have false stereotypes about age. Brower and Balch (2005) explain that the soul does not age. This important point explains that many older adults contribute amply to their institutions and bring with them a wealth of wisdom. Likewise, younger contributors offer energy and enthusiasm, but some also offer wisdom. Steering clear of age-related stereotypes helps decision makers avoid unduly shutting out the much needed contributions from those of all ages that add value to the institution.

Health, often falsely preconceived to relate to age, influences decision-making. Older adults are not always ailing and younger adults are not always healthy. In fact, older adults live independently with good mental and emotional health (American Psychological Association, 1998). Older adults can capably lead healthy work lives through retirement; therefore, they can actively participate in decision-making processes. Health, however, implies more than just physical ailments, but also psychologically related health. Addictions and stress tend to cloud the mind to harness and sustain good decision-making capacity (Brower & Balch, 2005). Furthermore, addictions and stress both lead to detrimental physical health, thereby debilitating physical decision-making capacities.

Psychologically, we have moods, good intentions, and tendencies to internalize and externalize stress. Mood influences decision-making. People in good moods exhibit more generous behaviors than not (Hogg and Cooper, 2003). Therefore, checking back with people or oneself to confirm or validate decisions or original thoughts helps to clarify true intentions. Irrespective of these fleeting feelings, at the very core of every human being is a good intention. Sometimes that good intention becomes laden by survival thoughts and behaviors, but as Brower and Balch (2005) suggested, labeling people at their core with personality traits is a misnomer. Instead, they explained that describing a person's behavior offers a realistic observable piece of evidence from which to act. With a core of good intention, people share at least one common interest in any work relationship. Brower and Balch explained that the institutions' mission and vision statement embodies these common interests, if those in the organization collaboratively developed the statement. From this co-constructed mission and vision, the institution creates common goals that provide a central point to frame difficult decisions and return to when conflict arises. During such tense moments, people's autonomic nervous system becomes activated, putting their bodies in a "flight or fight" mode, affecting decision-making capacity, especially if prolonged, hence the condition of burnout. Coping mechanisms, such as exercise, eating healthy, and consultation, aid in individual stress management; however, a leader may have stellar coping mechanisms but may not interact with the situation to resolve the conflict provoking such stress, the root of the problem.

Situations provoking stress beget conflict management techniques, as follows: withdrawing/avoiding, smoothing/accommodating, compromising, forcing, collaborating, and confronting/problem solving (Project Management Institute, 2008). The Project Management Body of Knowledge suggested that techniques of confronting or problem solving are usually the best option to deal with conflict. If the conflict is not managed effectively, counterproductive work behaviors result, leading to internalizing (e.g., mentally withdrawing, absences, illness, and tardiness) or externalizing (e.g., sabotage, theft, verbal or physical aggression, and passive aggressiveness) (Spector, 2008). Therefore, education decision makers must acknowledge feelings and proactively address issues through communication and actions to manage the decision-making function.

Social psychologically, we operate in groups in very specific ways that depend on the context of the group and its dynamics. If decision makers realize the ways in which group dynamics influence or persuade decisions, then they can deliberate from an untainted perspective. For this reason, leaders should understand several social psychological phenomena pertinent to decision-making that begins with motivation.

Motivations vary but long-term motivation stems from within and pertain to a sense of fairness, values, expectations, goals, feedback, self-efficacy, needs, and control (Spector, 2008). Brower and Balch (2005) demonstrated that leaders can avoid provoking feelings of unfairness by offering tangible or intangible positive rewards in private and lessen defensive sentiments (or lack of control) by criticizing or reprimanding in private with a witness. Other ideas for motivating others include offering alternatives, working from policy, pointing to precedents, working from values, learning what stakeholders' value and speaking to such values, meeting expectations, considering goals appropriate to the structure and work of the education institution, establishing feedback systems, encouraging risk taking, offering development opportunities, addressing needs, and creating autonomous opportunities. Brower and Balch (2005) exemplified creating autonomous opportunities when they espoused that leaders entrust others by delegating tasks. This sends the message that the leader views everyone in the educational institution as equally important and trusted. Leaders, they explained, entrust others with power or decision-making latitude based on confidence and competence to strengthen the leadership function at the institution.

Besides understanding what motivates people, decision-makers at educational institutions can make strong decisions for the best interests' of students by understanding faulty decision-making that occurs in groups of two or more people. Individuals have a propensity to conform to group decisions (e.g., Asch's conformity), even if that decision has not been confirmed (e.g., Abilene Paradox) and even when clear evidence to the contrary and dissent exists to maintain group cohesion (e.g., groupthink, Janis, 1973). Furthermore, people tend to obey authority figures (e.g., Milgram's obedience) and assume designated roles (e.g., Zimbardo's prison study) to the point of extraordinary or unethical action. People also tend to lose their sense of self or individuation when acting as a group (e.g., bystander affect and de-individuation) to advocate more extreme positions than the average group member when they start from a polarizing point (e.g., group polarization) and choose risky decisions when leaders frame contexts as starting from a loss with the propensity for greater losses if no action is taken (Whyte, 1989). These social psychological concepts and studies contribute to the understanding faulty group decision-making propensities (Hogg & Cooper, 2003).

While humans and groups have limited capacities for decision-making, the environment that surrounds decision makers also influences their capacity. An exploration of that environment reveals how politics, a capitalistic society, and technological innovations shape decision-making options.

POLITICS

Closely related to the human capacity to operate within group dynamics is politics. Merriam-Webster online defines politics as "the art or science of government," concerned with influencing policy, or winning hold over governance (Politics, 2011). In higher education, an important part of gaining control over decision-making functions involves politics. For example, in examining the models three universities employed for implementing best practices of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, Singleton (2006) noted the abundance of political maneuvering to thwart or facilitate such efforts, but what defines political power plays?

Yukl (1989) describes three types of political power used to influence decisions and protect power in an organization: controlling decision tasks or processes, forming coalitions, and co-opting the opposition (as cited in Spector, 2008). Leaders can control decisions by conducting the most influential tasks, serving on pertinent committees, or attending key events. Instead of controlling the process or task directly, leaders can form coalitions, which involves negotiating in a quid pro quo style to achieve desired political outcomes. Another form of negotiating involves empowering the opposition to a degree, as in co-opting. In co-opting the opposition leaders involve members opposed to a desired decision to take part in the decision-making process, making full opposition less desirable for those initially opposed. In all three forms of political power, leaders employ persuasion and negotiation to influence decision-making functions.

Particularly in higher education, politics compose managing interest groups, dealing with personnel politics (pertaining to unions and collective bargaining), balancing strategy implementation with collegiality, leading, implementing policy, and lobbying (Rytmeister, 2007). As with any decision, leaders must act with political sensitivity to both plan and implement changes. This challenge to build momentum around decisions is intensified by changing economic and technological times. To adapt to changing times, university governors need the following skills: "the capacity to engage in critical reflective practice, to be self-sufficient and confident in applying knowledge to new problems, and to act on multiple information inputs and in the interests of diffuse and diverse outcomes" (Rytmeister, 2007, p. 291).

CAPITALISTIC SOCIETY

Capitalism both influences and is influenced by decisions in our educational systems. Our free market economy proffers for-profit organizations to compete with one another for business, find niches on which to capitalize, and promulgate messages to persuade the masses to their enterprising interests. To this extent, educational institutions do the same, but they have an increased ethical responsibility because they serve the public and work with young students. Much of their funding comes from federal, state, and county allocations; therefore, leaders must closely attend to government interests and follow their interests in the form of mandates. Such regulation, often not found in our laissez fair markets, provides controls to ensure that educational institutions

provide services for the best interests of the students. Occasionally and from some perspectives, such tight federal and state regulations do not do what they were intended to do. In such situations, leaders have an obligation to vocalize their concerns as well as to act to secure funding for the betterment of educational service to students, which involves following government regulation to the extent of the enforced mandate—a compromise.

Brower and Balch (2005) urge leaders of educational institutions to reflect on their views of competition and cooperation, arguing that not-for-profit educational institutions struggle in applying competitive capitalism because they have little control over their governance, their demographic characteristics, the inputs and outputs, nor the students they serve. They explain that educational institutions too quickly adopt models that worked well for the for-profit sector. Such adoption sways educational institutions to compete with their counterparts or central governing institutions when they should be cooperating.

Even though Brower and Balch (2005) pointed out that cooperation perpetuates sustained improvement, public educational institutions compete with other public schools as well as other institutions to remain viable and effectively serve students, especially if the school employs innovative means to reach students (Fink, 2000). Cooperating with others to the point of stagnation may be in the best interest of the institutions' viability but not in the students' best interest. Instead, leaders can recognize competitive forces and curb those forces by, for instance, identifying at-risk higher education students by their late enrollment patterns and intervening (Wang & Pilarzyk, 2007). Turning a blind eye to competitive forces would not work to innovate and maintain successful practices.

To reflect the economic realities of competition, we also endorse changing the governance structure of the educational institution to one more responsive and open to feedback. Kenny (2009) explained that the current dynamic economic environment demands that the modern university operates like an enterprise. Responding to this time of rapid change and need for adaptability, he argued for universities to abandon the traditional top-down approach that values efficiency and compliance to transform into a more shared decision-making model that values learning and effectiveness. The shared decision-making model includes and values both management and academic stakeholders (Kenny, 2009). Paradoxically, economic forces in our capitalistic society demand that educational institutions not compete but compromise, innovate, and collaborate, essentially adapting to economic forces.

Besides adapting to capitalist realities, our educational institution also serves to propagate our capitalistic society. In that, our educational system develops our nation's human capital. Often people reiterate this sentiment as rationale for the public investment in education, stating that our students are our future. Our educational system, in reality, plays a major role in an unfair future. This system socially stratifies many students by demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, income, and race), stratifying the classes of people to specialize in societal functions with little equity in social mobility and status (Davis, 2008). Our educational institutions systematize many students into categories that designate their place in life with little option to choose their paths or change their paths. Because of this, many do not perform up to their capability because our education system lacks the capability to harness their potential and lead them to a life where they can continue to contribute to society and develop their potential. This stratification, Davis surmised, results in wasting our nation's human capital. This loss hurts our society, yet transforming decision-making in higher education serves to minimize such losses.

TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS

Not unlike capitalism, technology also influences decision-making and is influenced by decision-making. The need for new technology to allow higher education to adapt to changes has influenced administrators to less rational but more incremental decision-making (Sellers, 2005). Decision makers prefer incrementalism over other strategies to make time limited choices as the rapid pace of technological and innovative practices coinciding with economic changes threatens to outpace long-term planning efforts. For example, Sellers explicated that administrators quickly receive a deluge of information from which to base decisions via technology and avoid rational analysis of all that dynamic information to favor incremental approaches. Technology also influences decision-making capabilities of administrators because their roles inextricably link to their technological capacity by workflow processes, their communication capacity (such as a nonverbal information losses via virtual communication), and their community building capacity (mediated by physical distance) (Sellers, 2005). Furthermore, technology enforces the existing central hierarchy of power, even though paths exist for participatory

input in decisions via technology (Sellers, 2005). To this degree, technology dictates roles, which becomes a problem when the educational institution and its personnel have to adapt to technology instead of the other way around.

To address technology-driven change management in higher education that fails to conceptualize the way end users perceive and need to use the technology (Rooij, 2009), Kemp and Peacock (2003) suggested roundtables as a strategic method to making decisions about technology—end user-driven technological change management. In such, key individual users (such as management as well as representatives of the student and academic communities) discuss, deliberate, and democratically decide on the mission and action plan through structured guidelines and exercises—similar to continuous, ongoing nominal group technique meetings. Kemp and Peacock found success with the method in navigating educational organizations through technological change, especially in increased dialogue and understanding of technological options.

STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING

With much to consider (human capacity, politics, the influence of a capitalistic society, and technology), leaders need a strategy to organize decision-making, such as the aforementioned roundtables strategy. Strategic decision-making involves identifying a model and method, planning the process, and implementing the model and method. Rahman and De Feis (2009) developed an analytical framework for decision-making models and methods based on the time pressure and complexity (in terms of number of variables involved) in the environment.

Using the rational model involves identifying the objective, generating possible alternatives, evaluating those alternatives, and selecting the best one (Schwenk, 1986 as cited in Rahman & De Feis, 2009). The suggested method for accompanying the rational model in environments of low time pressure and complexity is the management science method, which involves the sequential, step-by-step process as stated by Rahman and De Feis:

- Define the problem- Identify alternatives. - Develop some criteria.- Evaluate alternatives (relative to those criteria). - Choose an alternative. - Implement the decision. - Analyze the results.

For conditions of low time pressure and high complexity, Rahman and DeFeis (2009) surmised that leaders apply the incremental model and Delphi method. Managers make a series of pre-determined decisions to extend through a specified duration in the incremental model, sometimes changing the purpose or goals of those decisions after the pre-set duration has expired (Lindholm, 1959). A point person manages the Delphi method by collecting a series of iterative information from a group of experts; the point person synthesizes the collected information and issues subsequent questions based on previous answers (Rahman and De Feis, 2009).

For conditions of high time pressure and low complexity, the boundedly-rational model and nominal group method were espoused. The boundedly-rational model replicates the rational model but acknowledges the cognitive limitations of considering all possible alternatives and outcomes as well as the impossibility of information availability. As for the method, a small group collaborates to brainstorm possible alternatives, discusses those alternatives, and votes by ranking the option from most to least preferred. The decision with the highest score is implemented in this nominal group technique method.

Rahman and De Feis (2009) further explained that in environments with high time pressure and high complexity, decision makers appropriately follow a model involving the most risk of all the aforementioned models, the garbage can model. Because the situation involves acknowledging the dynamic components of the situation to take risky action, they explained that the environmental scanning method is the best alternative (Rahman & De Feis, 2009). They explained that these procedures involve scanning the environment to identify the forces of change, considering the known information and seeking unknown information, and implementing both previously planned and ad hoc solutions.

These decision-making strategies provide an excellent starting point from which to choose the model and method to frame the decision-making process. The best decision-making strategy depends on a combination of the context (e.g., the time pressure and organizational structure), type of decision (e.g., the complexity), and the

decision-making body (e.g., the personalities, expertise, and number of people). For instance, in conditions of high time pressure, high complexity, and a decision-making body of one very intelligent and resourceful person; that individual can successfully execute the rational model and scientific management method. In situations involving high time pressure, high complexity, a flat organizational structure, and centrally-located, expert employees; that group can collaborate to employ the boundedly-rational model with the nominal group technique. As another example, Singleton (2006) explained that many universities operate under a garbage can decision-making model, but in her qualitative analysis a top-down, autocratic, bureaucratic model (with less collaborative input) worked quite effectively to implement the needed reforms for fiduciary accountability. A one-sized analytical framework for strategic decision-making does not fit all.

SUMMARY

Given the knowledge base about decision-making, we revisit the service learning partner's needs. Leaders of the University admissions offices had a team of professionals and support staff that through collaboration had the capacity to make strong decisions about operations, but the structure of each institution precludes those in the departments from making decision about operations (e.g., decision-making latitude over major expenditures, hiring, and criteria for admissions). For instance, the University admissions office will have a difficult time implementing their new strategy if they do not get the funding. If the departments are granted some decision-making capacity through funding, then they can employ individual and group collaborative decision-making through professional discourse, making the most out of their human capacity, to make choices that serve the best interest of the students as well as their institution of higher education.

Not only do leaders understand the importance of managing and facilitating group capacities among internal employees, they also understand the need for influencing those within their institution and beyond, hence politics. Politics becomes important to admissions because proration is an issue at the institution of higher education. The institution lacks the funds to support admissions' operations even though the recruiting side of admissions has the resources needed to recruit more students. The recruitment side generated the students, yet the operations side lacks the resources to support the administrative work of admitting students to the higher education institutions. Even though the admissions offices do not have the staff to support the higher enrollment, the institution needs the revenue generated by the addition of students, given the current state of the collegiate budget; therefore, this power imbues the admissions office bargaining power within the University.

Part of the political negotiating involves technology decisions. The University encountered challenges with their new People Soft enterprise resource program (ERP) as their admissions staff struggled with lack of training and efficiency. Those overseeing the ERP decision-making process and implementation did not collaborate with the users nor address their needs, resulting in a lack of end-user considerations, such as matching the system to tasks performed, efficiencies, and functional training on using the system. The University's admissions office, in particular, lacked input into technology decision-making.

Besides changes in technology, both institutions contend with changes in the economic climate. As mentioned previously, the offices have operated with proration as an ongoing concern for both admissions offices—budgetary concerns abound. As the health of the economy declines, the funding sources for public higher education declines. As appropriations get smaller, governing bodies mandate cuts and hiring freezes. This budget crisis generates interest in forming alliances with businesses and government agencies who have employees that need an education from the University. Also, as mentioned previously, the University's governance has had a burgeoning interest in recruiting students to generate revenue.

To make sense out of all the changes and seeming chaos, leaders of the admissions office employ strategies for decision-making. The University admissions changed their overall strategy as we were conducting this study. Following a bounded-rational model, the office re-vamped the processes for recruitment and admissions. They collaborated using a technique similar to the NGT to make changes in their human capital utilization and overall operations. This strategy worked well for both departments; however, the leadership decisions recently agreed upon are threatened by the changing economic times.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend several strategies for our service learning partner to empower the extent of human capacity, take part in politics while addressing capitalistic forces, and overcome technological issues. We chose a variety of strategies because each of the above focuses intertwine and entail a different context.

To empower the extent of human capacity, we recommend the garbage can model because the declining economy has un-stabilized the budgetary situation, contributing to high time pressures and complexity of the training and hiring processes. Such a situation leaves little room for planning. This environment becomes ripe for the environmental scanning technique (Rahman & De Feis, 2009). Such personnel decisions may involve re-evaluating human capital to match the skill capacity with the job (such as re-structuring, job enlargement, job enrichment, and job re-design), hiring temporary staff, professional development, and other motivational strategies previously suggested that improve performance.

To engage in the politics, we suggest that our service learning partners employ a boundedly-rational model and participate in NGT's (Rahman & De Feis, 2009) or roundtables (Kemp & Peacock, 2003) given the circumstances of high time pressure for the enrollment process turnaround and staffing shortages and low complexity of the compromises that require the attention of internal and external stakeholders. Internally, with human relations personnel, other competitive departments, strategic decision makers, and staff; the admissions offices can co-opt those important influencers in key or high-profile admissions decisions, thereby minimizing impending opposition. Externally, with labor personnel, recruitment fair coordinators, unit partners, and high school counselors, we suggest forming coalitions involving transactional leadership.

Admissions office staff members have a strong position to influence strategic decision makers because the higher education institution relies on admission staff to generate the lost revenue from the economic downturn. Persuasion and negotiation involves reiterating the importance of admissions to that end and expressing the role of admission in improving the economy as more students have access to higher education. If students apply the skills the gain after admittance (which is controlled by admissions) and graduation from the University, then they have a greater capacity to improve the economy as productive members of it. Education has the ability to shape economic forces while improving the social mobility of students, in the best interests of both society and the students.

Overcoming technological issues, involves several parts. One is taking part in the decision-making process for the benefit of end users and operations via roundtable discussions or NGTs. The other encompasses managing a technological office. Leaders can manage their work through technology and manage their office with the prospects of an ever-changing technological world through an incremental approach (Sellers, 2005). This strategy involves planning for a set amount of time with the understanding that the situation may change after that time period. For example, the admissions staff at the University struggle with quickly entering student data. Leaders may find that this issue is tolerable with the current pace of enrollment; however, at a certain point in time, the leader must decide to ramp up training of those staff or hire new employees who already have the needed skills. Higher education admission offices have a unique opportunity to make improvement incrementally.

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