The Seven S Framework and Its Use As An Assessment Tool

Mary Versteck

Introduction

In the last decade community college administrators have been con-fronted with problems which have forced reevaluation of program and management practices. For example, although the community college sector has not been greatly affected by the 18 to 24 year old population, it has not remained totally unscathed. Its enrollments have stabilized and even dropped (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1987) in certain states. Additional problems faced by the community college include: the great number of remedial students, the preponderance of part-time faculty and the role of collective bargaining units.

As community college administrators have sought solutions to these problems, as well as responding to legislators' calls for accountability, they have turned to the private sector to borrow management tech-niques. These techniques have included: Management by Objectives, (MBO), Program Planning and Budgeting System (PPBS), and master planning. Unfortunately, they have borrowed these procedures in a piecemeal fashion so that their utility is limited. This approach does not provide the practitioner with a comprehensive way of thinking about his/her organization, a holistic way that could guide the admin-istrator with organizational problem solving.

It is the purpose of this paper, then, to describe a comprehensive guide, based on the Seven S Framework of Pascale and Athos (1981), and to apply this framework to the community college demonstrating how it can be used to solve exemplar problems from those cited above.

Dr. Versteck is Associate Dean and Assistant Professor in the School of Education at Pace University. She holds a doctorate in higher education administration from Teachers College, Columbia University.

She has held several positions in institutions of higher education including faculty member and department chair at Broward Community College in Florida.

In addition, the original framework has been reinterpreted to include a philosophical understanding for each of the seven components (Table 1) since an emphasis on philosophy is one of the major lessons of Japanese-style management.

Table 1
The reinterpreted Seven S Framework

Seven S's	Description	Reinterpretation
Superordinate Goals	Significant meanings/ guiding concepts that an organization imbues in its members	What it means to be a community college
Strategy	Plan or course of action leading to the allocation of a firm's scarce resources	Transmitting that meaning to the community; Community involved in creation of new meanings
Structure	Characterization of the organizational chart	(Flat/group); Shared understanding of the meaning of the work
Systems	Proceduralized reports and routinized processes	(By-product of structure); Shared responsibility for problem solving
Staff	Demographic description of important personnel categories	Match between employees and the meaning of the work
Style	Characterization of how managers behave in achieving goals; cultural style	Meaning-as-lived
Skills	Distinctive capabilities of key personnel or the firm as a whole	Ability to attend to the meaning of work in all areas; Balancing Seven S's

Additional lessons to be gleaned from Japanese-style management include an emphasis on the group for problem solving, concern for the consumer and concern for the employee. These values are incorporated within the framework.

The Framework

Superordinate Goals

Superordinate goals embody the philosophy of the institution and serve as the beacon keeping the institution on course. They are the most important of the Seven S's and describe what it means to be a particular type of institution. They permeate each of the other six organizational components. The hallmark of well-constructed superordinate goals are their significance, durability, and achievability (Pascale & Athos, 1981).

For the community college practitioner, then, questions like: What does it mean to be a community college? What are its superordinate goals? must be answered. In order to describe the superordinate goals of the community college one must consider its mission which is generally understood to be teaching and community service in an open access institution. The administrator needs to ascertain if the goals of teaching and community service in an open access institution are significant, durable and achievable. For most community colleges an examination of these goals will lead to a re-affirmation, for some however, serious questions about the burden of "open access" are sure to emerge. In either case, a clear sense of the mission is critical since that influences the other six organizational components.

Strategy

Strategy is the use of scarce resources in a planned way in order to meet identified goals. Assuming the superordinate goals of the community college are those designated previously, the community college administrator must now consider whether the community college has been effective in transmitting these goals to the public. He/she may look to such indicators as enrollments and demographic descriptions of students to ascertain the effectiveness of the strategy. That is, are they serving the population they want to serve?

Structure

Structure refers to the characteristics of the organizational chart. In a Japanese-style organization the emphasis is on a flat structure or a decentralized structure which relies on the group to problem solve and make recommendations. Structure is important because it influences communication patterns (systems).

If the superordinate goals of the community college are teaching and community service within an open access institution, it is critical that the structure of the institution enable them to be communicated, understood, and shared among the board or president and the faculty and students. If the structure prohibits this communication then the Board or president becomes the psychological owner of the superordinate goals with the faculty and students left to find their own meaning. This is antithetical to the Japanese-style organization which stresses the critical role played by the superordinate goals and which is continually searching for ways to communicate those goals to its employees in order that they might find meaning through their work.

In addition, when one talks about structure within an institution of higher education one must consider the faculty governance and committee structures. These sub-structures may be analogous to quality circle groups or other group problem solving structures in the Japanese-style organization.

Systems

The systems of an organization are a by-product of its structure, and essentially refer to communication. Systems are characterized by Pascale and Athos (1981) as hard copy (reports) or meeting formats. What is significant about communications is the degree to which the reports are shared and the degree to which the employees are included in meetings as well as the degree to which they contribute to problem solving.

Through emphasis on the group, the Japanese-style organization fosters communication as a way to note and solve problems and, in addition, as a way to continually highlight the superordinate goals. In the Japanese-style organization there is an attempt to decrease any sense of "us/them" while building shared responsibility for problem solving both among managers and workers.

Staff

Pascale and Athos (1981) describe the staff component as demographic descriptions of important personnel categories as well as the hiring and training of staff.

Japanese-style corporations are very concerned about their superordinate goals and, hence, seek employees who can subscribe to the goals of the organization. The ability of the employee to "fit in" is at least as important as his/her credentials. In addition, the Japanese-style corporation offers extensive training programs to their employees with much of the training revolving around discussions of the superordinate goals.

How does this apply to the community college? If it is critical to hire employees who fit in, then the prospective employee must understand what it means to work in a particular environment. In the case of the community college one must consider what it means to work in an institution that values teaching and community service and describes itself as an open access institution.

Style

Style refers to the cultural composition of the organization, that is, the environment within which cultural meanings are expressed. If the superordinate goals of the community college are teaching and community service, style refers to the methods used to achieve the goals and the manner in which the methods are applied. How does the institution "live" its meaning?

Skills

The final S is that of Skills. Pascale and Athos (1981) describe the skills of the Japanese-style manager as the ability to view the organization from a broad stance as a unit comprised of components of the Seven S Framework. Each component is influenced by the superordinate goals. In addition, the framing of organizational questions and the solutions to organizational problems must attend to the balance between the technical and the philosophical aspects of the organization.

To illustrate how knowledge of the framework can help administrators formulate questions and identify the source of organizational

problems, it is appropriate to select two problems as exemplars: remediation and collective bargaining.

The Remediation Problem

The remediation problem is one which might evidence itself to the administrator in the following way: (a) faculty complaints about the quality of the students and (b) the quality of faculty teaching in response to the perceived deficiencies of the students.

The problem of poorly prepared students has been cited as a major cause of concern by community college faculty and one of the major contributors to low faculty morale (Cohen & Brawer, 1982). As the community college assumes a greater role in the remediation of post secondary students, this places a greater demand on the faculty. In part, this may serve to explain why they "feel more like high school teachers than college teachers" (Maeroff, 1985, p. 36).

What has the faculty's response to this problem been? Richard C. Richardson writing in an issue of *Change* (1985) describes the results of a study he completed on the teaching of critical literacy in the community college. He notes that,

> Institutional characteristics and policies influenced the ways in which faculty and students approached the learning process. [The policies] . . . including nonpunitive grading and the absence of standards for progress [have] produced increased access as measured by rates of participation, but declining rates of achievement . . . (p. 46).

He describes faculty teaching by a process he refers to as "bitting" (p. 45). Bitting, according to Richardson, is an attempt to lower the teaching level in order to meet the disparate levels of preparation among students. It involves providing the student with pieces of information which they are expected to use ultimately to respond to multiple choice tests. It also includes very little "texting" (p. 45) which Richardson describes as teaching in a more holistic way in which students are expected to read their books in order to gain a more complete understanding of their work and to practice their critical literacy skills.

If an administrator were presented with these problems: (a) faculty complaints about poorly prepared students and (b) faculty teaching to the "lowest common denominator," it might be useful to review the

Seven S Framework in order to pinpoint the cause and think about solutions.

Superordinate Goals–Since the problem appears to be rooted in the poor preparation of the students, one must ask if the college is serving a population which is within the scope of its mission? Since the mission is teaching in an open access institution, then this population is perfectly acceptable. To serve poorly prepared students as well as outstanding students is what it means to be a community college.

Strategy–Has the college been successful, then, in attracting the type of clientele that it is designed to serve? Yes. The mission of the community college is to serve all students and to its credit, these students have been reached and recruited effectively.

Structure–Is there a relationship between the structure of this institution and this problem? Is there a unit of this college which has been identified to serve this population, namely, a Learning Resource Center (LRC)? Was the decision to establish this unit a shared decision? How is the LRC being used? Is the LRC viewed as a place where students can remove skill and knowledge deficiencies?

To whom does the LRC staff report: the Academic Dean, a Dean for Student Services or both? Is there a dotted line relationship between the LRC and the academic departments? The most effective use of a LRC is in conjunction with the academic departments so the structure needs to enhance this affiliation.

Systems–Does the structure lead to oral and written communications between the academic departments and the LRC's? What are the topics of these communications? Are departments other than English and math included in these communications so that all faculty are aware of the problem and involved in finding solutions? Have the LRC staff educated faculty about their role in remediation? Specifically, simply referring a student for remedial work is not sufficient. An approach akin to "Writing Across the Curriculum" in which faculty in all academic areas assign papers to students, give them feedback on content and grammar, and encourage "re-writes" appears to be the most effective.

Have these discussions included what it means to serve poorly prepared students? Everyone must participate in the solution not only the LRC staff. To serve remedial students means that the entire institution serves them in whatever way is most helpful.

Staff–Is there an adequate number of staff persons in the LRC (obviously within budgetary constraints)? Is the institution hiring new faculty who understand that poorly prepared students are a population

the institution serves and who understands what it means to work with this population? Do they understand that they may be responsible for assigning papers, correcting them and allowing for re-writes?

Can the LRC staff help train faculty to recognize remedial problems and refer them to the LRC? In addition, can the English faculty or the LRC staff train other faculty members to help students understand the grammatical errors on their papers so that they might improve on re-writes?

Style—How are faculty currently teaching? If they are "bitting" rather than "texting," can they be made aware of this? Faculty must understand that teaching to the "lowest common denominator" is not helpful. What appears to be helpful may involve additional time spent with the student outside of class on study skills or advisement issues. Again, this is what it means to work in a community college.

Skills—The skills needed to solve this problem include the ability on the part of the manager (probably the Academic Dean) to enhance communication between the LRC and the faculty (structure/systems), remind the faculty that the institution does, in fact, serve this population (superordinate goals) and what that means for them (staff). In addition, the manager must support the LRC in a monetary way (strategy).

This problem seems to reside mainly in the structure, systems and staff areas but it is helpful, nonetheless, for the administrator to run through the entire checklist formulating solutions that take account of both the technical issues and the superordinate goals.

Collective Bargaining

The growth of unions within the community college has increased steadily. Community colleges more than any other type of higher education institution have chosen collective bargaining representation. Data collected by Joseph Hankin (1975) suggest that approximately half of all community college instructors are covered by collective bargaining agreements.

The process leading to unionization is one in which originally the community college president was viewed as a paternalistic figure but changed to become " ... a more formalized, impersonal pattern of interaction, denying whatever vestige of collegiality the staff in community colleges might have aspired to ... faculty involvement in

institutional decision making, managerial authority, and campus communication were impaired" (Cohen & Brawer, 1982, p. 119).

An article in the *New York Times* (1985) summarizes the situation. Based on Ernest Boyer's work, *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America*, it notes that while professors overwhelmingly feel good about their colleges, when asked about their administrators, two-thirds rate them "fair" or "poor," describing them as "somewhat" or "very" autocratic. The article goes on to say,

> More than half also believe that when faculty members become administrators they lose sight of what it means to be a teacher and to do research. There appears to be an inherent tension between the demands of academic administration and faculty values and traditions (p. 37).

Finally, it is critical to note that the community college has weak faculty senates and fewer committees than either the liberal arts institution or the research institution (Baldridge et al., 1978) suggesting a low level of faculty participation in decision making and an institution characterized by "administrative dominance" (Mortimer & McConnell, 1977).

If the community college administrator is presented with the scenario described above, how can he/she use the Seven S Framework as a helpful tool in understanding the problem? That is, an institution characterized by: (a) strong administration, (b) weak committee structure, (c) administrators who have lost sight of what it means to be a faculty member and, (d) faculty who have a low level of confidence in their administration.

How, then, might an administrator in the community college use the Seven S Framework to assess the potential for unionization at his/her institution? Using the framework in a checklist fashion might prove helpful.

Superordinate Goals—It appears that what has occurred in this institution is a re-definition of the meaning of the work. That is, due to an exclusionary process the institution appears to be seeking to meet administrative needs rather than student or community needs. One can assume from the Boyer study that such a faculty would feel they own the meaning of the work and administrators have lost sight of the original meaning.

Strategy—If strategy refers to the transmission of the community college meaning to its constituency then one must ask how current/prospective students would view a unionized institution. Would they

see the college as less professional? Or would those constituents who are themselves union members feel more drawn to a unionized institution?

Structure—Structure plays a critical role. This institution has been described as an institution that has a weak faculty senate and a sparse committee structure. This indicates very little reliance on groups to aid in the solution of problems. To the extent that the structure diminishes communication and participation by faculty, it is not surprising that faculty would feel isolated.

Systems—The structure and systems go hand-in-hand, working in tandem to either increase participation or decrease participation in the meaning of work within the institution. A structure that does not enhance communication leads to an "us/them" environment. Therefore, it is not surprising that faculty would cite a lack of confidence in their administrators.

Staff—In this instance, it does not appear that the problem lies with the faculty insofar as their understanding of the superordinate goals is concerned. In this instance, the problem lies with a different group, administrators.

Style—The style of the administration, (and most probably that of the entire organization), has been described as autocratic. If administrators serve as role models and set the tone of the institution, then one can assume that an autocratic style comes to be viewed as the "way to be" at the institution with the result that faculty and staff treat students in that same manner.

Or, the faculty and staff do not view the administrators as appropriate role models and seek recourse themselves from being treated in an autocratic manner. This recourse may take the form of a union allowing faculty to discuss among themselves the meaning of the work at the institution and to define for themselves (and ultimately for administrators and the institution) what their level of participation will be.

Skills—The skills demanded of the administrator in this instance include a mindfulness and re-articulation of the original superordinate goals as well as the restructuring of the institution to include a stronger faculty senate and an emphasis on the committee system as a way of solving institutional problems. In addition, special attention must be given to the communication between administrators and the faculty in order to enhance faculty participation and responsibility as well as making them aware that the institution is, once again, on track with its goals.

Thus, by using the framework in checklist fashion, the community college administrator is given a tool to aid in the identification and solution of management problems.

Conclusion

To conclude, the reinterpreted Seven S Framework encompasses both the technical and philosophical dimensions of organizational problem solving. It is intended to be a resource for community college administrators who want to share the ownership of the superordinate goals of the institution and those who are seeking to improve their communication with faculty.

The implicit prescriptions of the framework can aid them in providing better services to the community as a by-product of their mutual work and the administrator's ability to manage the college more effectively.

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