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Leading Organizations for Universal Design

Joseph B. Berger and Duong Van Thanh

The purpose of this article is to provide a model for helping campus leaders create and sustain efforts to fully incorporate Universal Instructional Design (UID) throughout their institutions. The article uses a multiple dimension model of organizational behavior as the basis for making recommendations to support this type of institutional transformation.

College and university student bodies have become more diverse over the last 30 years, especially in terms of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and a wide variety of physical and learning disabilities. Unfortunately, the ways in which postsecondary institutions are structured has not changed to keep pace with these demographic shifts. Universal instructional design (UID) (Bremer, Clapper, Hitchcock, Hall, & Kachgel, 2002) is one educational intervention that has been demonstrated as an effective means for making postsecondary classrooms and campuses more supportive of diverse learning than have traditional approaches to collegiate education (Bremer et al., 2002; Dolan & Hall, 2002; Higbee, 2001). Universal instructional design is an educational philosophy and set of educational resources and strategies designed to make learning more accessible to students with disabilities. UID is used to consider the needs of people with disabilities, but has been demonstrated to be an effective means for promoting better learning environments for all people, regardless of disability, learning styles, or other individual characteristics. The principles of inclusiveness and equity serve as the foundation of UID and ideally this perspective is used so that all students are able to meet learning goals. Ultimately, UID creates classroom and campus environments that respect and value diversity in many forms. However, despite its advantages, universal instructional design remains underutilized and has not been incorporated as a mainstream or primary means for maximizing learning opportunities for all types of students. The incorporation of UID into the mainstream campus environment will require a true transformation of existing organizational structures and academic processes on postsecondary campuses. Leadership and organization are key considerations in order for universal design to become a reality on college and university campuses. Like any broad-based initiative or

attempt to implement a transformational vision on campus, the ultimate success of universal design as a fully integrated approach to postsecondary education rests on the extent to which campus leaders successfully pay attention to all of the aspects of the organization that must change in order to realize fully the permanent implementation of universal design as a campus norm.

Postsecondary institutions that embrace the challenges of transforming their organizations to serve all types of students will be providing badly needed leadership in American higher education. However, leading organizations to accomplish this vitally necessary but extremely difficult goal will be a demanding and complex task. Given the challenges associated with the comprehensive incorporation of UID into the educational core of college and university organizations, the purpose of this article is to present a multidimensional model that draws on existing organizational behavior literature to help campuses create leading organizations for universal instructional design.

A FRAMEWORK FOR LEADING ORGANIZATIONS

Leading organizations is a complex and challenging task, and successfully implementing fundamental organizational change is even tougher. Such tasks are made even more difficult because although leadership and organizational structure are often seen as distinct issues, successful organizational transformation requires focusing on the relationship between leadership activities and various aspects of organizational structure (Berger & Milem, 2000). From a leadership perspective, it is important to recognize that individuals and teams do not provide leadership in a vacuum; they lead in

organized contexts we call colleges and universities—these individuals are *leading* organizations. From an organizational perspective, successful organizations have clear visions, defined goals, and cohesive organizational structures and processes that contribute to the well-being of those inside and outside of the organization—these are *leading organizations*. Whether the emphasis is on leadership or organization, two key aspects of a larger whole are central—how to best facilitate *leading organizations*.

Colleges and universities that successfully incorporate universal design into the fabric of the entire institution will be leading organizations in two ways. First, they will have leadership that can develop internally and implement comprehensive organizational transformations that can sustain universal design as a core process that is embedded across the full range of organizational activities found in higher education (such as teaching, advising, etc.). Second, in so doing they will become a leading organization that serves as a model for the rest of higher education in terms of the ability to provide equitably excellent education to all students. The purpose of this article is to describe the various aspects of organization on campus that must be taken into account by institutional leaders in order to successfully embed universal instructional design across the entire fabric of the institution.

As organizations, colleges and universities have seen themselves in a position of providing leadership for society (Senge, 2000). The implementation of universal design throughout higher education appears to be an ideal opportunity for higher education to provide such societal leadership by promoting a pedagogical shift that provides for greater equity while benefiting learning and knowledge acquisition for all types of students. However, initiating and sustaining any significant shift in well-established organizations is a challenge to those who undertake and lead such change (Kotter, 1995). Likewise, educational organizations present unique challenges to change agents (Birnbbaum, 1988; Fullan, 2001). There are good reasons for focusing on leading organizations that may lead to changes of institutional structures and cultures. For instance, a healthy organizational culture can promote identification (who we are), legitimizing (what we need to accomplish as an organization), communication (with whom we talk), coordination (with whom we work), and development (what the dominant perspectives and task are) (Davies, 1997). Such issues and questions are fundamental to creating sustainable transformation within an organization; subsequently it is important to identify the key conceptual tools that facilitate the most effective means for addressing these key issues and questions. It has become increasingly clear that the best way to examine and change within higher education organizations is to use multidimensional

models for understanding organizations (Berger & Milem, 2000; Birnbbaum, 1988).

Although there is recognition that universal design has numerous implications for educators at all levels (Higbee, 2001), the responses of academic leadership, governance, and organizational effectiveness of an institution to a growing need of universal design have not been examined through a comprehensive analysis. There appear to be few useful models to help guide the process of organizational change toward an effective implementation of universal design. The main purpose of this article, therefore, is to provide a rationale for the types of changes and implementation strategies warranted in higher education. Second, with reference to a multidimensional model of leading organization and universal design, the article defines the essential components for a framework that suits the actual decision-making process and environment of higher education. While universal design contains technical solutions and accessible formulas, the multidimensional model of leading organization involves a variety of human activity that reflects human communities functioning at university campuses.

A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL MODEL OF COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY ORGANIZATION

Organizational behavior and structure has been defined in a variety of ways in higher education literature and elsewhere. Indeed, there is no such thing as a theory of organizational behavior; rather, there are many theories (also called schools, perspectives, traditions, frameworks, paradigms, and models) of organizational behavior, which collectively cover a great deal of conceptual terrain (Shafritz & Ott, 1992).

While some theories build upon earlier works, others have tried to take the most salient features of key theories and models to develop multiperspective models to view organizational behavior as a multi-faceted construct. Examples of such classifications that have been used to describe organizational behavior at colleges and universities include Bolman and Deal's (1992, 1997) four frames, Birnbbaum's (1988) models of how colleges work, and a variety of other classifications of organizational functioning (e.g., Bush, 1995; Kuh, 2003). Each frame, model, or dimension adds a unique perspective of organizational behavior. Berger and Milem (2000) in their recent work on organizational behavior and student outcomes identify five dimensions of organization, each illustrating different hypotheses regarding the nature of organizational life and change. The resulting five dimensions of organizational behavior at college campuses are labeled in the following manner: systemic, bureaucratic, collegial, symbolic, and political.

Many related research studies have led to the conclusion that leaders who use a "multi-dimensional" model are more likely to be successful than those who use a single-dimension approach (Birnbaum, 1992). Multi-dimensional thinking seems particularly useful at a time when resources are tight and demand is high and when organizational change may mean focusing "on competitive strength and market niches, to eliminate weaknesses, to increase productivity and to enhance the strategic capacity of the university while developing much autonomy to operating units often below the level of faculty" (Davies, 1997, pp. 132-133). The following sections describe key dimensions of organizational behavior, and each dimension serves as a lens for understanding the different aspects of organizational structure and behavior that must be addressed in order to successfully implement UID into the core educational activities of colleges and universities that wish to assert their roles as leading organizations in this manner.

THE BUREAUCRATIC DIMENSION—BUILDING STRUCTURAL SUPPORT FOR UNIVERSAL LEARNING

Formal structure and bureaucracy provide what is perhaps the most common frame of reference when people think of organizations. The bureaucratic dimension is an analytic lens for viewing organizations that is built on the assumption that organizations exist primarily to accomplish established rational goals and objectives. The roots of the bureaucratic tradition can be traced to the work of German sociologist Max Weber who originally described bureaucracies as formal social networks dedicated to limited goals with a hierarchical structure that maximizes coordination and communication (Weber, 1947). The organizational characteristics of most colleges and universities match Weber's description of the ideal bureaucracy (Baldridge, Curtis, Ecker, & Riley, 1977; Godwin & Markham, 1996). These characteristics include the use of competence as the primary criterion for appointment, the appointment rather than election of officials, the payment of fixed salaries directly by the organization, the recognition and respect of rank, the exclusive employment in one organization by workers, the presence of security through the tenure system, and the separation of personal and organizational property (Weber, 1947). From this perspective, there are ideal structural forms that can be designed and implemented to fit any set of circumstances, including the comprehensive implementation of UID throughout a college or university campus. Specialization and division of labor, and coordination and control through hierarchical authority are essential to the effectiveness of a bureaucratic organization, such as a postsecondary institution.

The bureaucratic perspective describes not only the structural arrangements of an organization but also the specific norms and ideological values embedded in it. The most fundamental value is the premium placed on rationality, in which it is assumed that there is one best way to accomplish organizational goals (Bush, 1995). Of course, this assumption is built on two other basic assumptions—the first is that organizations have clear, defined goals and the second is that all organizational members are largely working towards those same goals. As such, viewing organizations from the bureaucratic dimension also emphasizes the necessity for hierarchy and the chain of command. Hierarchy and differential status positions are valued as necessary means for ensuring efficient accomplishment of organizational goals through increased technical competence, clearly defined authority, specialization of expertise, and division of labor. These same characteristics and values, while often more ideal than real, can be used to help create structures that support the systematic routinization of UID across a campus.

Given that the objective of bureaucratic structure is to routinize tasks, functions, and processes like an assembly line routinizes production (Weber, 1947) and if the goal is to fully incorporate UID as a routine part of campus life, then it makes sense to begin with an analysis of how best to accomplish this goal by looking at it first from the bureaucratic perspective. More specifically, in the case of UID, the goal is to routinize UID strategies as core pedagogical and academic support functions. From a bureaucratic perspective, routinization is preferable as it "leads to improved organizational effectiveness and efficiency" (Kuh, 2003, p. 271). Because bureaucracy is a rational perspective on organizing it is clear that successful routinization of UID requires that formal rules and procedures be put into place to facilitate the accomplishment of the larger goal. Bureaucracies achieve such formalization through the deliberate use of the formal structures described above.

Viewed through the window of bureaucratic dimension, there are structural forms that can provide support for universal design. Hierarchical authority or a clear chain of command, division of labor, rules for work, standard operating procedures, technical competence, and differential rewards—each of these can play a role in effective implementation of universal design. Creating a hierarchy that is responsible for the appropriate implementation of universal design is essential to ensure that instruction and academic support actually incorporate UID principles. Formal authority structures provide accountability mechanisms that can be useful for enforcing compliance in environments that would not otherwise pay attention. Clear goals, guidelines, and procedures make it easier for

individuals with different responsibilities, levels of knowledge, expertise, and interest in UID to successfully utilize new strategies. Standard operating procedures for UID can provide clear guidelines for how instructional and academic support tasks can be performed accurately and consistently in the spirit of universal design.

The success of a campus-wide UID initiative requires the presence of an organizational unit that is explicitly charged with responsibility for the initiative. This will provide a structural provision for ensuring that there are individuals with appropriate expertise who are charged in their formal responsibilities for supporting UID efforts across campus. This is quite consistent with the basic tenets of bureaucracy, given the emphasis on expertise and technical competence as a hallmark of successful bureaucracies. There also is a need to train others initially and through professional development so that all campus educators have the technical expertise to use UID as intended. The success of creating formal structures designed to support campus-wide UID efforts also will depend on the establishment of clear measurable objectives and timelines that are regularly evaluated.

However, the nature of postsecondary educational bureaucracies presents challenges to restructuring campus bureaucracies to support the implementation of UID. When viewing organizations from a bureaucratic perspective, it is important to consider the type of organization. For example, Mintzberg (1979) notes that colleges and universities are professional organizations, and as such, they differ from traditional business-oriented organizations. As a result, and as is the case with all organizational views, the bureaucratic dimension, according to Kuh (2003), has several challenges when applied to an institution of higher education. Because of the "bounded rationality" of institutions of higher education (Simon, 1947), specialization, standardization, routinization, and repetition discourage organizational flexibility (Hage & Aiken, 1970; Strange, 1994) and change efforts (Morgan, 1986). Unlike corporate institutions, faculty and professional staff expect autonomy rather than close supervision.

It is clear that the successful use of bureaucratic structure to support organizational goals and functions requires a delicate balance. Too little formal structure hinders efficiency and accountability and creates higher levels of uncertainty (Godwin & Markham, 1996), particularly in times of change and transformation. Yet too much bureaucracy is seen as constraining and depersonalizing. Sole reliance or over-emphasis on bureaucratic structure as the solution to incorporating UID throughout a campus has other drawbacks as well. In organizations coordinated through bureaucratic patterns, people relate to one another based on their command of technical expertise. Hence, other organizational

strategies are needed as described in the following sections.

THE COLLEGIAL DIMENSION—FINDING CONSENSUS ABOUT UID

The bureaucratic approach focuses on structuring the task of UID implementation, but the human element of organization also must be addressed, and the collegial dimension provides an organizational lens for focusing the structure of human relations. The collegial dimension focuses on features of organizational structure in terms of collaboration, equal participation, concern for human resources, and the use of consensus to establish goals and to make other important decisions. The underlying assumption of this dimension originated from the human resource perspective (Bensimon, Neumann, & Birnbaum, 1989; Birnbaum, 1988; Kuh, 1996, 2003). Parsons (1947) suggested that the collegium is perhaps the most appropriate way to view university organization because the technical competence of faculty members plays a more important role than the bureaucratic aspect of the administration. Indeed, this model best fits with Mintzberg's (1979) conceptualization of educational institutions as professional organizations.

Kuh (2003) emphasizes that the collegial view consists of two enduring values of academic institutions: professional autonomy and a normative compliance system. Faculty and staff are specialists in their field, and therefore, they expect to determine the conditions under which they perform. Academic settings depend on the shared work and responsibility of all educators to successfully achieve their teaching and research goals. The ideal collegial process is active, authentic, social, and collaborative, because it occurs during the course of development and it involves a team of participants who cooperate to make decisions. As a matter of fact, faculty and professional staff tend to welcome the collegial view of organizations as the preferred way to organize and govern leading organizations of higher education. Power also tends to be informal, through network of influence (Kezar, 2001).

Given the collaborative professional norms of the academy, UID can be most successfully implemented on campus if faculty are provided the means to be autonomously engaged in the process of planning for and implementing UID as a comprehensive campus-wide system. Whereas, the bureaucratic dimension emphasizes the way in which administrative hierarchy and structure must be dealt with in order to transform campuses around the concepts of UID, the collegial dimension as a conceptual lens highlights the need to focus on faculty involvement as an integral part of the organizational transformation process. Higbee (2001) notes that faculty members have been among the first to apply the

concept of universal design to their own profession and those faculty who are already engaged with UID can provide collegial leadership to work with their peers to become familiar with and willing to work with UID. Other implications of the collegial model include the need to focus on the use of committees and consensus building as a means for incorporating UID from the ground up in the university as a professional organization.

Although the collegial model is often assumed to be the best mode of organizing for postsecondary institutions, and even though it is highly congruent with UID, a purely collegial approach has disadvantages and cautions associated with it as well. The collegial dimension faces challenges throughout the organizational life on campus. Kuh (2003) notes that there is a tendency to oversimplify life in universities and colleges. Likewise, Berger, and Milem (2000) point out that collegiality is often perceived to include only faculty and marginalize other members of the campus community. Therefore, the successful use of collegial decision-making should be predicated upon broad representation on committees and workgroups from all campus constituencies. This will facilitate greater investment and ownership in UID among various constituencies and will prohibit the process from becoming the exclusive property of some individuals or groups at the expense of other community members who will need to work with UID. Time inefficiencies are another weakness associated with collegial patterns of organizational behavior. Discussions and debates are necessary and important; however, making decisions on policies based on consensus consumes more time from administrators and faculty and time is a crucial factor in implementing of universal design. Campus leaders will need to monitor issues of timeliness throughout any collegial processes that are used in guiding the development of UID across campus.

THE POLITICAL DIMENSION—POWER AND UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Colleges and universities may reflect the political dimension more than any of the other dimensions (Baldrige, 1971). The earliest conceptions of the college and university as a political organization focus on the political process of policy-making and implementation at the campus level (Baldrige, 1971). Increased recognition about the role of power as an important determinant of political activity has been one of the most important advances in our understanding of organizational behavior on college and university campuses. Power is generally defined as the ability to determine the behavior of others or to decide the outcome of a decision or conflict (Bush, 1995). Power in educational organizations can be thought of in terms of being formal, based on authority, or informal, based on influence (Bacharach & Lawler,

1980). If a radical transformation like UID is to succeed on campus, it is crucial to understand the role of power and be able to address political realities in a meaningfully strategic manner. This requires the identification of sources of formal and informal power on campus and working to align those forces in support of UID.

A campus characterized by the political perspective often has a competitive atmosphere in which dissension exists, some individuals and groups are more powerful than others, networking and collaboration occurs across groups, there are shifting coalitions, and people are apathetic unless they have a stake in a specific issue (Birnbaum, 1988). The political dimension characterizes organizations as coalitions composed of varied individuals and interest groups with enduring differences among individuals and groups in their values, preferences, beliefs, information, and perceptions of reality. The most important decisions in organizations involve the allocation of scarce resources; they are decisions about who gets what. Because of scarce resources and enduring differences, conflict is central to organizational dynamics, and power is the most important resource. Organizational goals and decisions emerge from bargaining, negotiating, and jockeying for position among members of different coalitions (Bolman & Deal, 1992). From this perspective, it is essential that key political actors, their sources of power, and the vested interests to which they are or might be aligned must all be carefully considered as one looks to successfully implement and ultimately sustain UID on campus. In particular, resource allocations, material and symbolic, must be taken into account and strategies for demonstrating how competing interests could be better served by investment in UID must be provided. In fact, the extent to which UID can be portrayed as an investment will greatly aid in developing successful political strategies through bargaining, negotiating, and coalition-building as proponents of UID build their own bases of power to support their vision.

Individuals who believe that the university should be a rational bureaucracy or a collegial community might be troubled by the emphasis on competition for resources. However, from a political perspective such competition for resources is viewed as an important part of a healthy, dynamic institution with ambitious people and groups who are helping to move the institution forward (Kuh, 2003). The political dimension is important because it not only acknowledges the existence of issues of power, conflict, exchange, and conflict resolution but also recognizes the centrality of these concepts to organizational life. This dimension emphasizes policy-making as a process for issue management and encourages collaboration among groups with disparate interests (Kuh, 1996). In sum, the biggest advantage of the political dimension is that it is dynamic. This perspective focuses not on static structures, goals, and values but rather on the fluid

processes of exchange and interaction. For these reasons, the political dimension has been called a less idealistic, but more realistic, portrait of organizational life than other more static models of organizational behavior (Baldrige et al., 1977; Pfeffer, 1981). This implies that a political perspective provides a means for thinking strategically about how to get individuals involved in the process of transformation by identifying how a move towards UID is in their own best interests. The more the interests of specific individuals and groups can be brought into play, the more likely meaningful activity will mobilize around the issue. The key to success is identifying ways that organizational actors can view UID as a positive benefit, otherwise there is a risk that opposition to the initiative may be more successfully mobilized if UID is perceived as a threat to particular interests.

It is worth noting that while conflict and competition are key concepts in the application of the political dimension to the study of educational organizations, these concepts are often overemphasized. Cooperation, collaboration, consensus-building, negotiation, and the development of coalitions are important mechanisms to consider when explaining how political models work. Political models are often characterized as exchange models in which organizational members continually exchange resources. These exchanges have been characterized in organizational studies from purely economic standpoints, that focus on formal and material sources of power (Shafritz & Ott, 1992), or from more inclusive definitions that recognize resources as being both material and symbolic (Berger & Milem, 2000). Exchanges may occur between individuals, groups, or some combination of the two. Such exchanges provide the basis through which competition among various individuals and interest groups can be at least partially resolved so that decisions and choices can be made from among the competing interests and values (Bush, 1995). It is most likely that UID will succeed on campus if it is viewed as an opportunity to build consensus and collaborate, rather than as a source of competition with existing goals, programs, and interests that must compete for a limited set of resources.

The resources that individuals and groups on campus strive to acquire are varied. Examples of these resources include money (salaries and wages for individuals, budgets for departments), facilities (better and bigger offices), and time (course buyouts for research, sabbaticals), to name a few. As a plan is developed and put into place for institutionalizing UID, it is important to consider these resources as both a source of support for the implementation process and as hooks that can be used to develop coalitions of support for the transition. Dramatic shifts in resources can create disequilibrium in any organization and the shift of any resources to

UID is likely to create tension. Even if new funds are acquired specifically for the purpose of incorporating UID more fully across campus, problems may still be encountered. One group of administrators may want to use the funds for a new staff position, a group of faculty may desire to invest it more heavily into faculty development activities, while a second group of faculty may want more technological support, and still others might have their eye on developing a new center or institute (Birnbaum, 1988).

THE SYMBOLIC DIMENSION—MANAGING THE MEANING OF UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Many organizations, particularly institutions of higher education, are characterized by purposes and structures that are loosely coupled, problematic goals, unclear technologies, fluid participation, and high levels of ambiguity and uncertainty (Baldrige et al., 1977; Birnbaum, 1988; Cohen & March, 1974; March & Olsen, 1979). The ways in which individuals make meaning in an organization are therefore essential to understanding the ways in which organizations actually function. Emphasis on organizational meaning is best characterized from a symbolic perspective. The following set of propositions summarizes the symbolic dimension. Events and meanings are loosely coupled, such that the same events can have very different meanings for different people because of differences in the schema they use to interpret their experiences. Additionally, many of the most significant events and processes in organizations are ambiguous and uncertain. Faced with uncertainty and ambiguity, human beings create symbols to resolve confusion, increase predictability, and provide direction (Bolman & Deal, 1992, 1997). Many organizational events and processes are important more for what they express than for what they produce. These symbolic events and processes include secular myths, rituals, ceremonies, and sagas (Bolman & Deal, 1992).

A quick look around any college campus provides ample evidence of the strength of the presence of the symbolic dimension on campus. Colleges are full of a wide variety of organizational symbols that convey shared institutional values through artifacts (college logos, seals, architectural styles), rituals (orientation, final exams), ceremonies (commencement, convocations), and stories and myths about the founding of the institution or exemplary teachers and campus leaders. The symbolic nature of organizational behavior is also evident in the presence of distinct campus subcultures based on roles (student versus administrator versus faculty member), disciplines and departments, personal characteristics, and ideologies (Birnbaum, 1988; Kuh, 2003). Moreover, the

ambiguous and unstructured nature of the academic world often leads to a high degree of individual interpretation of values, goals, and expectations in lieu of the more explicit and formalized ways of the business and corporate world (Cohen & March, 1974).

Most studies that examine the symbolic nature of organizations are based on the assumption that the symbolic behavior within organizational cultures unifies individual members of the organization. However, the more we study organizations, the more we come to realize that organizations are rarely, if ever, monolithically cultured. Many organizational cultures are really comprised of multiple subcultures (Birnbaum, 1988; Kuh, 2003). Moreover, organizational cultures serve three different symbolic functions—integration, differentiation, and fragmentation (Martin, 1992). The symbolic behaviors within organizational cultures are integrative when they reduce ambiguity about organizational values and norms so that there is consistent understanding among all organizational members. Symbolic behavior in differentiated organizational cultures is viewed as consensus about norms and values that occur within organizational subcultures rather than across the organizational as whole. The fragmentation perspective views ambiguity as inevitable and the symbolic meaning of any cultural manifestation (e.g., institutional artifacts, rituals, and stories) as subject to multiple interpretations by organizational members (Martin, 1992). The term "organized anarchy," in its most pure form, has been used to describe this type of symbolic environment (Cohen & March, 1974).

Symbolic models also have been characterized as being cultural, ambiguous (or anarchical), or subjective (Bush, 1995). Cultural models focus on shared values, beliefs, and norms that are expressed through ceremonies, rituals, stories, hero(ine)s, and artifacts (Bolman & Deal, 1992, 1997; Bush, 1995). Anarchical models focus on organizational events and processes that are ambiguous and uncertain, making it difficult or impossible to know what is happening or why it is happening. High levels of ambiguity and uncertainty lead people to use symbols to make meaning out of otherwise chaotic situations (Bolman & Deal, 1992, 1997; Bush, 1995; Cohen & March, 1974). Finally, subjective models focus on how people make different meanings from experiencing the same events (Bush, 1995). Cultural models generally focus more on the integrative function of symbolic behavior, while anarchical models emphasize the differentiation function, and subjective models are more oriented towards the fragmentation function. Despite these various emphases, all three models focus on the powerful influence of symbols, symbolic behavior, and symbolic interpretations in organizational life. Taken together, these different models describe the full range of symbolic activity and functions within organizations. This helps explain how

symbolic behavior can lead to a powerful symbolic culture in some settings, while providing a fragmented organizational understanding in others. A more complete view of the symbolic dimension also helps us understand that the symbolic nature of organizations is composed of multiple layers. Embedded within these multiple layers are some values and norms that may permeate the entire organization, while others only operate at the sub-cultural level, and still other interpretations of organizational reality occur only at the individual level (Martin, 1992).

The success or failure of initiatives has rested not with the technical merits of the idea, but with the meanings that became attached to it. Higher education is traditionally resistant to change and incorporating new approaches because meaning can become so fragmented or differentiated. On the other hand, a well-crafted vision, particularly when it can be associated with existing campus values, can create higher levels of shared meaning. This is, of course, more difficult on large campuses. But even where differentiation is likely to occur, awareness of formal and informal campus subgroups can help leaders who wish to promote UID find ways to help different community members make sense of UID in positive ways without having to strive for the more elusive (and often unrealistically counter-productive), more fully integrated meaning.

The symbolic dimension focuses less on the rationality of decision-making as the basis for organizational behavior and more on the importance of sense-making (Birnbaum, 1988; Bolman & Deal, 1992; Weick, 1969). Managing meaning becomes a more valuable skill than rational decision-making (Morgan, 1986). Hence, from this perspective, the creation, understanding, and interpretation of a decision are more important than the decision itself. The process of meaning-making becomes more important than the product of the decision itself because the product is likely to mean different things to different people (Birnbaum, 1988). Therefore, as UID is incorporated on university campuses, project leaders need to monitor the ways in which constituents make meaning of evolving UID efforts, and work with individuals and groups to interpret and re-interpret those meanings as appropriate.

Attention also should be given to the ways in which the importance of UID can be symbolically reinforced on campus. The use of logos, slogans, and ceremony can help create greater shared meaning if they are developed to reflect underlying values rather than simply providing a positive spin on UID's value. The endorsement and use of UID by formal and informal campus leaders and the inclusion of UID in highly visible key campus programs and events will symbolically reinforce the values of UID across a wider range of individuals and groups. For example, the incorporation of UID principles into

orientation and convocation activities not only makes practical sense, but also provides symbolic forums for demonstrating the effectiveness of UID in a variety of educational settings.

THE SYSTEMIC DIMENSION—THE LARGER CONTEXT OF UNIVERSAL DESIGN

The impact of environmental forces on higher education organizations has increased dramatically in recent years (Berger & Milem, 2000). Sources of external influence include increased state and federal government intervention, access to information via advanced information technology, the continuing rise of professional affiliations and associations, the development of university-industry partnerships, and the globalization of American society (Peterson, 1997). As a result, colleges and universities can be aptly described as open systems with interacting components and the ability to import people, ideas, and resources through permeable organizational boundaries and transform them into educational and scholarly outputs. These organizations are composed of varying numbers of subunits and processes that have traditionally been only loosely coordinated (often referred to as "loose coupling" [Weick, 1969, p. 3]).

The following assumptions are derived from previous work (Berger & Milem, 2000) and describe the systemic dimension of organizational behavior. Organizations are open systems in which external connections and internal structure are interdependent, such that the environment is not simply external to the organization but also embedded in institutionalized structures and processes within the organization. Embedded aspects of the external environment (professional norms, societal expectations, governmental regulations, accreditation standards, etc.) serve as primary determinants of organizational action. Organizations exist within fields or sectors, composed of similar or related organizations, and the relationships among organizations within a common field constrain and enable organizational behavior. Hence, both change and continuity of organizational form and function reflect internal organizational responses to external stimuli. Certain types of environmental influences (e.g., professional norms, cognitive maps, and regulations) tend to reinforce the similarity and stability of organizational form and function across institutions, while other environmental forces (e.g., competition for scarce resources) tend to generate new organizational processes and structures that can be diffused to other organizations. It is important to remember that just as organizations are affected by the environment, the environment also is affected by organizations.

Organizational action is often constrained and enabled by environmental contexts. More specifically, Birnbaum (1988) identifies colleges and universities as

cybernetic open systems that use automatic sensing processes and mechanisms to monitor the environment in order to maintain a steady state of equilibrium. These systems are more responsive to information from inputs than they are in responding to changes in levels of productive output. Hence, colleges as cybernetic systems are more likely to respond to a drop in admissions applications than they are to act on a decrease in student learning outcomes (Birnbaum, 1988).

It is already clear that the impetus for UID comes not only from the internal efforts of a campus but also from external sources in the broader environment. These forces can best be understood in higher education from a neo-institutional perspective. Neo-institutionalism arose in response to the overemphasis on technical and rational processes found in traditional forms of open systems theory, including classical institutionalism. Neo-institutional theory responds to this oversight by focusing on persistence and order over change; emphasizing common understandings, routinization, and cognitive schema over intentionality and interest group conflict; and emphasizing cognitive learning over newcomer socialization (Crowson, Boyd, & Mawhinney, 1996). From this perspective, organizational structures are less a reflection of the technical tasks of an organization than they are codified myths that legitimize the espoused purposes and functions of the organization (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The institutionalization process occurs as organizational boundaries disappear and organizations become isomorphic, or similar, in form (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Scott, 1996). In other words, organizations within a similar field begin to look more and more like each other. For example, empirical evidence suggests that patterns of faculty role performance at the institutional level have become increasingly homogenized during the last 20 years (Dey, Milem, & Berger, 1997; Milem, Berger, & Dey, 2000). From a neo-institutional view, organizations have institutional components embedded within them, in contrast to the traditional open systems view that organizations are embedded within the environment and use permeable boundaries to protect the organization from environmental turbulence.

Three institutional mechanisms—coercive, imitative and normative—create tendencies toward institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Scott, 1996). Coercive (or regulative) mechanisms occur when dominant or elite organizations force dependent organizations to conform to certain structures and practices. Imitative mechanisms occur when less successful organizations borrow ideas from more successful, or legitimate, organizations. Normative mechanisms occur when professionalization increases the diffusion of common ideas and practices across a field of organizations. Knowledge of these mechanisms can help further the incorporation of UID on campus. The Americans with Disabilities Act

(ADA) and other regulatory mandates are examples of coercive mandates that have helped fuel the use of UID, and these mechanisms can be used to help justify the need for greater attention to and use of UID principles and practices. Models and best practices from other campuses can provide imitative structures that will make it easier to implement and promote UID as a new or expanded initiative.

Although the neo-institutional perspective is fairly new, similar ideas have been used previously to describe the organizational environment of higher education. Isomorphic pressures on college and university campuses were first called to popular attention by Riesman's (1956) description of the "snake-like procession" in which the head of the snake (prestigious colleges and universities) is constantly guarding its position atop of the institutional hierarchy, with schools lower in the procession always trying to catch up with those ahead of them. Hence, innovation rarely occurs because postsecondary institutions are more concerned with trying to legitimize their place in the systemic hierarchy and are less concerned with their ability to deliver improved educational outcomes via technical proficiency. Given the strength of institutional hierarchy in American higher education, the cause of UID can be furthered on any one campus by looking to ways in which UID is being used on campuses at the same or higher levels in the symbolic hierarchy of institutional prestige.

This perspective provides insight about the sources of challenge in changing existing structures and incorporating UID. The neo-institutional mechanisms identified above tend to reinforce existing norms and patterns of behavior in higher education. The academic core of the enterprise is particularly difficult to change given the power of faculty socialization and the continuing strength of disciplinary influence across campuses. However, other environmental factors can be used to offset these pressures toward traditional conformity. The observation that colleges are more likely to respond to inputs than to outputs (Birnbau, 1988) is also useful knowledge for efforts to advance the use of UID on postsecondary campuses. Students are a key input, and higher education is rapidly becoming more market-oriented. The more UID can be shown as a means for responding to new markets (e.g., students with disabilities) or even as a way to better invest in the current student market, the more likely it will be to succeed.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the ways in which we lead organizations is critical to our success in making our campuses leading organizations for universal instructional design. The ability to understand and engage with

organizational structure and behavior from a multi-dimensional perspective is fundamental to successfully realizing goals in an organizational context. The transformation of campus around UID principles and practices is important and complex enough that we should use all of the conceptual tools available as we work to ensure its success. The multi-dimensional model of organizational behavior presented in this article is one such set of tools.

Each dimension described above provides an important but limited lens on organization in higher education. The bureaucratic dimension provides a means for evaluating and using formal structure as an efficient and often effective means for coordinating and routinizing UID throughout the academic and administrative structures that comprise the formal organization of a college or university. However, too much reliance on top-down mandates and bureaucratic mechanisms fails to account for other organizational realities. The collegial dimension focuses on the human side of the enterprise and emphasizes the importance of finding ways for all constituencies, particularly faculty, to become engaged in consensual decision-making processes and collaborative activities that provide strong support for initiatives from the ground up. The political dimension reminds us that power and resources matter, and that we must attend to the vested interests of organizational actors in order to create movement toward change. The symbolic dimension focuses on the necessity of being aware of and managing meaning in highly ambiguous settings like higher education. Attention to meaning and symbolic behavior can be a useful tool for moving the campus community toward common goals. Finally, the systemic dimension focuses on how external forces can both hinder and facilitate organizational change toward greater use of UID. The ability to read and react to the larger environment is critical to the success of UID initiatives. It also is important that campus leaders are aware of their roles in higher education, and that any one college or university can be a leading organization to demonstrate how to enhance the educational experience of all students through greater use of UID.

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