Community College Faculty and Shared Governance

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Abstract

Community colleges currently face a crisis is governance in which globalization and the neo-liberal agenda have dictated how many administrators have chosen to structure their organizations. Consequently, faculty at these institutions have found themselves marginalized in this new corporate model. Shared governance, in response, provides a framework that scholars and practitioners can use to maintain community colleges' relevance in today's global market while ensuring the inclusion of faculty in institutional decision-making.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a shift in the way institutions of higher education are governed in the US. Such a shift can be viewed as a response to changing external influences on higher education stemming from business and industry, declining revenue streams at the state and federal levels, and the nuances associated with globalization and neo-liberal ideology (Levin, 2002; Levin, 2005; Levin & Kater, 2013; Mills, 2012). As a result, many institutions, namely community colleges, have had to reevaluate their operating structures to maintain a sense of relevancy in such a rapidly-changing and increasingly global environment. As Amey, Jessup-Anger and Jessup Anger (2008) stated, "…community college leaders are on the front lines navigating the volatile terrain ahead for postsecondary education" (p. 5). Mills noted that this movement, however, has now become a model that has seen the shrinking of full-time faculty hires in favor of cost-saving adjuncts, an increase in the number and scope of full-time administrators on campuses, the inclusion of top-down management practices, drastic increases in tuition, and the viewing of students as customers.

Prior to this more "corporatized" shift, many institutions held to a more collaborative model of institutional governance as outlined by the American Association of University Professors (1966); one that included representation from the faculty, administration, the board of trustees, and sometimes even students in the decision-making process. Such a model seems to stand in direct contrast to the corporate model, which makes a compelling case for the fact that community college scholars and practitioners must recognize that this crossroads in governance warrants further scrutiny. Equally important are the internal repercussions of a particular governance model as that impacts organizational culture as well the effectiveness of the institution in the external environment.

Faculty in the Corporate Community College

The broad tenets of the corporate governance model, as discussed, represent an increasingly popular response on the part of higher education to an expanding global market as well as regulatory and economic duress; however, major consequences of this model have been realized in both how administrators' roles have changed and how that has contributed to the marginalization of full-time faculty who have seen their academic freedom and influence severely curtailed (Mills, 2012).

With regard to administrators, Schachter (2011) reported that more and more senior executives are coming into their positions from the business world having no previous faculty experience, which has attributed to the downfall of faculty influence in institutional governance. Tagawa (2012) echoed this by stating, "When you have chief administrative officers and boards coming from nonacademic backgrounds, they tend to do what comes naturally, which is to make decisions without sharing with faculty until major decisions are already made" (Para. 12). Tagawa continued by discussing the resulting distance between faculty and administrators due to this kind of change in managerial strategy by stating that, "…over time, the governing body and those who are governed begin to forget where the other side comes from…" (para. 15). The shift to a corporate model has shown that colleges and universities are willing to take drastic action to preserve the institution, but it has also come at the expense of alienating faculty from administration and diluting the commitment to academic excellence that has traditionally been central to the mission of higher education. As Levin (2005) stated, "Community college faculty, committed to institutional mission, have become captive to the corporate culture that relies upon neo-liberal practices" (p. 8).

Events such as this represent a crisis in governance in which colleges and universities must acknowledge the importance of addressing the fiscal and workforce challenges of today while not losing sight of, arguably, the most valuable resource internal to each institution, the faculty. Without an understanding of the external forces that are leveraging community college administrators to align their structure of governance with the corporate model, practitioners and scholars will not be able to adequately address the diminishing role of faculty in such a model.

To that end, Levin, Kater and Wagoner (2011) first defined two major drivers of the corporatization of higher education governance that have adversely impacted faculty. First, globalization is defined as a compression of the world that involves "…the unification and assimilation of our economic and social realities" (p. 26). Globalization can be discussed through the economic, social, and political lenses and is considered a melding of norms and values. Counterpart to globalization is the ideology known as neo-liberalism, which promotes such behaviors as "…the expansion of open, economic markets; the reduction of government responsibility for social needs; the reinforcement of a competitive structure for economic behaviors; and, the lowering of social expectations for economic security" (p. 27). In the context of education, the global, neo-liberal ideology has directly influenced how institutions have come to be viewed as corporations who have adapted their respective curriculum to the economic market in order to serve an economic constituency (students).

To illustrate how globalization and neo-liberalism have been so influential in higher education, Levin, Kater and Wagoner (2011) pointed to the economic connection as being most prominent based on the the fact that higher education has such a high dependency on external sources of funding that perhaps extends to a perceived shift in the overall mission of higher education towards one of economic survival. Levin et al. further described the concept of managerialism, which includes such tenets as centralized decision-making and an increased emphasis on accountability, as the conceptual foundation of the corporate governance shift. Managerialistic ideals came as a response to state legislatures, who demanded that community colleges increase their levels of productivity without any additional financial support. One of the ways administrators accomplished this, as it pertains to faculty, was through a standardized curriculum which curtailed their voice in institutional governance and emasculated their authority as subject matter experts.

In sum, Levin, Kater & Wagoner (2011) described the antagonistic relationship between educational and economic values as such:

> Budget problems pressure faculty to accept more students and classes, in spite of pedagogical objections; funding limitations are justifications for the hiring of more and more part-time, contingent faculty, so that the college mission of access can be fulfilled; and competition for resources makes colleges dependent upon resource providers including the state, business and industry, and students so that curriculum and instruction are tailored, modified, an arguably corrupted to satisfy the 'customers' as well as the political and economic agendas of external influencers (p. 115).

Purpose

The purpose of this paper seeks to shed light on marginalization of faculty in the corporate governance model and explore how this issue may be addressed in the shared, or collaborative, model of community college governance as discussed in the research literature. Given the internal and external challenges that community colleges must now face in the 21st century, it is imperative that practitioners and scholars alike work proactively in response to these challenge rather than reactively. Shared governance, in pursuit of this purpose, is defined as a decision-making, or governance, structure within an institution of higher education, which relies on collaboration between the board of trustees, faculty, the president, and students when appropriate (Olson, 2009; Amey, Jessup-Anger & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Miller & Miles, 2008). Shared governance is an approach to higher education governance that, while not a new concept, is increasingly relevant given the explained challenges faced by colleges and universities, both internal and external. In a statement outlining shared governance in 1966, the American Association of University Professors stated that:

> The variety and complexity of the tasks performed by institutions of higher education produce an inescapable interdependence among governing board, administration, faculty, students, and others. The relationship calls for adequate communication among these components, and full opportunity for appropriate joint planning and effort (para. 2).

This statement serves as a foundation for the shared governance model, which requires the inclusion of the board of trustees, the president, the faculty, and the occasional involvement of students in support of the health and stability of the institution. There are several key components to shared governance: 1) institutional authority begins with the board and the degree of decision-making delegation first happens between them and the president who, in turn, invites additional stakeholders as appropriate, 2) everyone in the decision-making process has a role, although not everyone participates at every stage, 3) decision-making authority is delegated to a particular group over a specified area, and 4) the board has final authority and may elect to overrule a decision as they see necessary; however, the faculty, and other institutional stakeholders, may protest (Olson, 2009). Levin, Kater and Wagoner (2011) argued that shared governance today does not accurately capture the spirit of the traditional model of shared governance, as outlined in the 1966 AAUP statement, and that the legal authority granted to boards are absolute. Tagawa (2012), however, noted several instances at various institutions in which faculty acted out of their expert authority to challenge, and overrule, a board's decision to unilaterally implement a plan without any outside input.

In addition to the original tenets of shared governance developed by the AAUP (1966), Nevarez, Wood and Penrose (2013), discussed democratic leadership theory, among others, which provides a framework for shared governance that can help create an avenue for community colleges to develop an informed response to globalization and faculty marginalization. Democratic leadership theory recognizes that group decision-making is of paramount importance and that, employees' goals, motivations, interests, and involvement in the organization are necessary for an institution to function properly. Nevarez et al. described the tenets, or beliefs, of democratic leadership theory as follows:

- **Employees are assets** – leaders should be cognizant of the fact that employees bring a great deal of value to an organization through their life experiences, skills they have developed, and expertise. These are valuable assets that can help guide organizational decision-making.

- **Emotional connection to the organization** – a goal of democratic leadership is for employees to take ownership of their work that goes beyond a contractual obligation. If employees inherently work to better the organization, leadership is to reciprocate that through support of the employees. (i.e. professional development) This helps to develop a sense of dependency on each group and creates a culture of trust.

- **Healthy balance between hierarchy and democratic structure** – democratic leadership values the traditional hierarchical relationships within organizations but it seeks to imprint democratic practices on those relationships rather than supplant them. Doing so facilitates a merger of the working relationships between leaders and employees in the hopes of fostering employee buy-in.

With respect to these foundational beliefs, Nevarez, Wood and Penrose (2013) described 3 benefits to democratic leadership within an organization. First is the sense of permeated trust and respect that can be seen throughout the organization; this is especially relevant when discussing the institution’s governance structure. In a shared governance model through the democratic lens, decisions are mutually agreed upon and there is equal representation throughout the decision-making process. Second, as this decision-making process develops, leaders come to view their employees’ decision-making abilities as a highly valued asset. Third is the benefit of increased morale among employees of a highly democratic organization. With high morale, comes an increased sense of empowerment among employees to go further in reaching organizational goals.

Finally, Nevarez, Wood and Penrose (2013) outlined three assumptions of democratic leadership that are most relevant to community colleges. First is the assumption that leaders who treat employees in an accepting, cooperative manner will treat other stakeholders (i.e. students, and business and industry leaders) the same way. Second is the assumption that the mission of the community college is going to continue to grow in complexity such that it will be very difficult to be governed solely by a small group of administrators. This being the true, the collaborative structure outlined by democratic leadership would prove to be far more sustainable in supporting this complexity to the point that shared governance would be necessary. The third assumption is that democratic leadership would build a sense of community among the organization that would ultimately lead to strong relationships among all institutional actors.

An additional framework that supports the democratic approach is known as path-goal leadership theory (Nevarez, Wood & Penrose, 2013). Path-goal leadership can be thought of as operating inside a democratic, or shared, structure as it outlines specific behaviors between leaders and followers. Within this framework, leaders utilize one of four leadership styles dependent on the situation, needs, the environment, and employee characteristics. Of particular relevance to shared governance is the participative style of leadership. Under participative leadership, the leader solicits the ideas, thoughts, and opinions of employees, which are then used in the decision-making process. The key to participative leadership within the path-goal framework, as Nevarez et al. stated, "…is best used when employees are skilled, seasoned, and experts in their respective posts" (p. 38). As faculty are considered subject-matter experts in their respective disciplines, the participative approach under path-goal leadership theory is an appropriate fit for guiding the development of a shared governance model.

It is readily apparent from the literature that the current state of the faculty in the corporate model of governance is not sustainable, but that shared governance, through the theoretical lens of theories like democratic leadership, could help to create an environment of community and inclusion within the organization. Such cohesion would also allow community colleges to take a more unified posture when adapting to today's globalized, neo-liberal culture. The knowledge provided from the literature about globalization, the shortcomings of the corporatized community college, and the benefits to shared governance provides the opportunity to examine some "next steps" in changing the conversation from corporatization to collaboration.

Recommendations

Research conducted by Levin, Kater and Wagoner (2011) indicated that "…faculty are an integral part of the operations of the institutions through their participation in governance" (p. 53). In other words, their goal in studying community college governance was to first identify where there were connections between faculty in administration. Kater and Levin (2004) reiterated this when they stated that, "Work between faculty and administration is indeed shared: faculty are an integral part of the operations of the institutions, over and above their teaching role" (p. 19). Knowing this provided an initial means of deciding how to exploit those connections in developing a model of shared governance that would withstand the globalized, neo-liberal agenda without compromising the faculty's influence within the organization. A second means to this end is identifying ways in which the traditional roles of faculty within shared governance have been put into practice; doing so exposes opportunities to expand the role of faculty in shared governance.

According to Levin, Kater and Wagoner (2011), faculty's role in shared governance has traditionally been academic and has included such activities as: curriculum development, evaluation of other faculty members, delivery of content, new faculty hires, and establishing policy as to how faculty are to be promoted. Thus the major areas in which there were more administrative opportunities for more faculty involvement include: retrenchment, budget processes, strategic management, and the hiring of new administrators.

Assuming that these traditional boundaries regarding the role of faculty in shared governance were to increasingly blur, it is recommended that these "new norms" be contractually reflected. The reason for this has to do with what Levin, Kater and Wagoner (2011) refer to as "management rights" (p. 60). These are typically contractual clauses that give administrators broad discretion in order to maintain a higher level of authority than anyone else in a participatory style of governance. Levin et al. state that these broad powers are still a hangover of managerialistic ideals and would ultimately hinder any collaborative effort on the part of the institution. By contractually establishing the roles of each representative group in a shared governance model, everyone knows their place in the organization and there are no opportunities to subvert another groups' authority over their specified area. A limitation to this is that there is little research on what those boundaries should look like. In other words, it may be difficult to generalize the defined roles and responsibilities of faculty and administrators, for example, in a shared governance model. The question still remains as to how customizable such a model should be.

Another recommendation in light of the literature has to do with a growing distinction between workforce faculty and transfer faculty. To this point, there has been a marginalization of faculty in general due to the corporate model of governance, however, as Levin (2005) stated regarding community college faculty, "They have adapted to a changing labour force through workforce preparation programs and contract training, involving partnerships with private organizations to provide specialized training, and by modifying the traditional curriculum to emphasize employability skills" (p. 8). This would seem to indicate that certain curricula are being marginalized in the corporatized community college. The question then becomes, in terms of a research focus, whether or not certain faculty groups are being treated the same based on the demand of their subject area or program. To this point, the discussion has centered around faculty being viewed as one, cohesive group that has been marginalized in the corporatization of higher education, and there is little evidence to support the notion that multi-faculty groups, even in a shared governance model, would be effective. This statement is not intended to indicate that workforce faculty and transfer faculty are being viewed as two separate groups. It is simply a recommendation that this possibility should be explored, if only to rule it out.

A final recommendation has to do with redefining and exploring new definitions on what it means to lead in a shared governance model. We've seen through the shift to the corporate model that community colleges are open to different approaches to leadership if it means their health and stability, but, as Eddy and VanDerLinden (2006) stated, "If community colleges want to embrace the ideal of participatory leadership and leadership throughout the organization, organizational structures and the mindsets of leaders may need to change" (p. 23). These authors noted that community college leadership, holistically, still largely views the institutional hierarchy from a bureaucratic standpoint. Their findings suggest that further research in defining new definitions of leadership might help to dispel this bureaucratic notion and arrive at a definition of leadership that is more participatory.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper has been on community colleges and to shed light on the vital role that effective leadership and governance play in the health and relevance of these institutions. At issue is how corporate model of governance, in the name of survival, has damaged the organizational culture of community colleges through the marginalization of faculty and the takeover of academic freedom. This model represents a reactionary form of leadership in which institutional decisions must be made unitarily and quickly based on the demands of the external environment. Romano and Dellow (2009) pointed to this when they stated that because technology and globalization happens at such an unpredictably fast rate, the best that colleges can do is react as fast as they can to these fluctuations. Of secondary issue is this notion of identity. As we've seen, faculty have struggled in the corporate model largely because they struggle to find a sense of relevancy with respect to what's being asked of the institution from business and industry as well as legislative bodies. The irony is, community colleges who have adopted the corporate governance model have done so because of this very issue. The conversation about the identity of people groups within the organization does not begin and end with leadership, however. Several other factors, including: race, gender, years served as a faculty member, and years served at a particular institution, for example, have an impact on both the culture of the faculty and the culture of the institution holistically (Serra Hagedorn & Vigil Laden, 2002). In other words, when assessing the depth of a governance issue, as is the case in this paper, it is necessary to acknowledge that other factors may also need to be taken into consideration to truly ascertain whether or not a particular style of governance or leadership is sufficient to address the issue.

Based on the evidence, it seems clear that leadership, as a concept, is not something that can be treated as preferential; rather, true leadership is an essential part of every aspect of the institution. That being said, we must still remain vigilant in understanding how the external, globalized world has an impact on higher education. As scholars and practitioners of higher education administration, we must make informed decisions about how to best govern our institutions, to not lead from behind the external curve of globalization, and to solidify the identity of the institution and all of its internal stakeholders.

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