Whither Good Governance? Beyond the Current Malaise in Higher Education

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This paper outlines a model for governance based upon mutual respect among organizational stakeholders, which it calls rational and reasonable governance. The first section describes some of the inherent or unmet needs in many governance structures, sources of irrational or unreasonable governance, or more simply anti-governance. The second section describes several sources of rationality and reasonableness for the self-understanding of higher educational professionals. These sources of better governance address the inherent needs. The third section sketches a model of governance that reduces the sources of anti-governance and opens up synergies for academic professionals who choose to collaborate through revisioning and renewing their interactions. The paper concludes with a comment on the relationship between a rational and reasonable model of governance and institutional trust.

Keywords: governance, higher education, mindfulness, profound knowledge, leadership

Introduction

The topic of governance in higher education is neither new nor novel as a subject. However, with the currents of change at work in higher education, it remains a subject of great importance. Increased demands placed upon many institutions of higher education, in particular public institutions, accent the need for governance. The grand full funding bargain between state legislatures and public universities and colleges is dying, and in many places, it is dead. The lack of both full funding and assurance of adequate funding create pressures to diversify revenue streams, increase tuition, and at the end of the day, for many institutions to live on less than what had been available 25 years. The public is unwilling to countenance a return to the past. Transparency, value for tax dollars, and zero-based or performance metrics-based funding dominate the politics of higher education.

These streams of concern systematically introduce uncertainty into our colleges and universities as to their futures and their solidity, as active institutions. They accent the need for university and college academic professionals to work together and show a positive model of governance. Good governance in an institution’s culture works to decrease uncertainty and mitigate its impacts.

Higher education institutions prepare adults to assume positions of responsibility in society and the professions and constitute key sites for engaging citizens as to their responsibilities. Indeed, they are key socialization grounds for political culture. They also are the organizations where millions of academic
professionals work out their careers for the benefit of students, other university stakeholders, and broader communities. Higher education professionals need governance in order successfully to function as members of complex organizations dedicated to the provision of learning, marketable skills, and general education. They must demonstrate and educate students about the importance of good government and the interaction of voice, responsibility, action for change, and community.

Colleges and universities require governance to sustain themselves, and, now as much or more than ever, model good practices for today’s global citizens. Nonetheless, a survey of writing on the subject of governance seems to reflect the current malaise. Gone pretty much are the institutions of yesteryear—traditional, faculty-dominated, and stable in their niches as quasi-guilds for the provision of scarce knowledge. Still current for many, the notion that corporate thinking and managerial science should guide university governance has experienced a loss of faith. Everything, from the failed not-for-profits to the failed Trump University, stands as examples of the mistaken idea that universities are corporations. A higher education institution is neither guild nor corporation, though too many academic professionals stubbornly cling to these false images.

Governance and Mutual Respect: An Outline

Today’s university is a field of fields of interactions across realms of skilled labor and knowledge. Subject matters experts and faculties, seeing growing ranks of professionally trained and highly skilled administrators or managers occupied financial, enrollment, student services, physical plant, and other divisions of a typical institution. No one segment of a university and no one group of constituents or stakeholders monopolizes the relevant content or set of knowledge, skills, and power.

The university operates through a collective set of purposes. A mission (as well as a vision of the future, a plan of action, and shared values) necessitates the collaboration of experts and credentialed and qualified professionals across fields of scarce knowledge and skills. Today’s colleges and universities are collaborative spaces driven by interdependence. It is this nexus of collaboration that should inform models of governance for higher education in the 21st century.

Administrators manage staff who tutor, coach, mentor, and serve the needs of students inside and outside of classrooms. Faculties, administrators, and staff situate areas of activity, responsibility, and expertise that are much more fluid, interdependent, and interpenetrating, which last centuries. The field of fields of interactions that forms a university or college requires governance to create institutional synergy. Synergy in higher education depends upon the appropriate levels of cooperation and conflict within governance structures of academic professionals to serve students under a shared mission.

Governance is an important means of fulfilling the missions of institutions and the trusts that constitute higher education. An organization that needs internal cohesion and solidity will face greater challenges without governance. In an era of uncertain to drifting commitment of legislatures to the funding of higher education, a failure of governance not only diminishes the quality of an organization, but also can threaten the existence of a college or university itself.

How then should we conceptualize governance past malaise of the early 21st century in higher education? How can we view collaboration between the constituents of colleges and universities, as neither guilds nor corporations?

This paper outlines a model for governance based upon mutual respect among organizational stakeholders. It illustrates one form of what Bowen and Tobin (2015) thought of as “horizontal organization structures that
drive collaborative practices” in the sense of “meaningful participation from all campus constituents.” The paper calls this a model of rational and reasonable governance.

**Inherent Needs for a New Model**

In this section, we describe some of the strands of inherency or unmet needs driving a new model of governance in higher education. They are the perception of faculty’s diminished authority and power, the existence of discretion in the divisions of academic institutions, and the problem of false dichotomies. These three sites of inherency also form bases for irrationality and unreasonableness, or anti-governance, which reflect the current malaise, where the model will attend.

The first trend of concern has been the perception of drift towards greater administrative oversight, that is to say, diminished faculty authority and power. Boards and faculties have some reasons to be concerned, and not just in the United States (Rowlands, 2013). On the heels of investments in such areas as compliance, quality control, enrollment, and fundraising, academic management has focused on the training and hiring of a cadre of professionals in these fields. They often hold powerful offices and have significant staffs. They may and indeed often do not proceed from a prior career as instructional professionals or professors. The subtext on many campuses is that “managers,” “corporate types,” “careerists,” “politicians,” and “non-academicians” have taken over (Minor, 2014).

The irrationality stemming from this source of inherency arises from excessive scapegoating of administration. At an extreme, having administration is cited as a problem of governance, as there are too many administrators, or all/most of the administrators are ineffective. Anti-governance, as in irrational and unreasonable governance, arises when university constituents project and displace their frustrations, fears, and perceptions onto administrators as the primary or sole source of problems in governance and for the life of a college or university. Hardened versions of these stances perpetuate governance as fealty to false ideologies.

While many faculties can and do make excellent administrators, most faculties likely would admit the fact that they do not want to be administrators. Most want to pursue their academic professions as instructors, researchers, and in service to their communities of concern. Faculties want respect for their roles as integral to the institution’s foundation and its ongoing operation as a teaching enterprise for research and contributions to the mission in the areas of service and community activity. Faculties expect to have a voice and a recognized and leading opinion in matters of determining curriculum, institutional leadership, mission, vision, and values. They expect to have a seat at any table of planning, budgeting, and use of resources. This list is not exhaustive.

A second concern is the problem of authority as discretion. All constituents of a university have prerogatives or areas of discretion that can escape influence or countervailing controls—checks and balances—by other constituents. As an example, Ayers (2014) identified, in his analysis of university “budget updates,” the workings of administrative discretion are to minimize resistance by other stakeholders and legitimate managerial actions. Legon, Lombardi, and Rhoades (2013) noted an important threat to governance which arises when faculty perceive or situate:

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1 Rationality employs ideas that have validity with respect to their objects. A rational idea is one that describes reality accurately, though perhaps is not perfect, and is held in the face of counter-ideas, arguments from empirical evidence, and related standards of scientific investigation. Reasonableness is the use of ideas in order to accomplish means-end and non-instrumentalist ends in thought and practice. Reasonableness employs rational ideas so as to arrive at the best possible means to accomplish an end and to respect the non-instrumentalist ends of the agents/actors involved.
... declining presence of an independent faculty voice to weigh in on key issues, the increased fear of exercising that voice and the heightened willingness of administrators and boards to claim that using the voice... is not an aspect of academic freedom. (p. 32)

Institutions that devalue faculty participation in decision-making, intentionally or otherwise, have lost themselves, at least temporarily, in the pursuit of other aims. Analogous sources of anti-governance arise when other constituents see their roles, authority, and power diminished by structures of authority and power that exclude appropriate participation of other academic professionals.

Discretion as a source of irrationality and unreasonableness can arise from the effort of administrators to maximize their administrative prerogative, in particular, if that discretion has no checks or balances arising from other constituent groups at the university, in particular faculty (It is the purpose of governance and associated structures and processes to establish those checks and balances, as we shall see). Chief among these other aims that can promote irrational and unreasonable discretion are appeal and codifications of power under expediency, the short-term decision calculus, managerial briefs to accomplish “change,” leaders who seek deference, and a mindset that change should occur “top-down” (Legon, Lombardi, & Rhoades, 2013).

At an extreme, defining any area of rational and reasonable concern to faculties, staff, the board, alumni, and students, as subject to the mandamus or necessary authority of an administrator, situates a tendency to anti-governance and erodes the trust and collaborative reason as well as rationality that are needed for complex organizations, such as those in higher education.

A third source of anti-governance is where and when academic colleagues occupy silos corresponding to false dichotomies. A stable but false conception of a higher education institution is that it exists as an opposition between “faculties” and “administrators.” It might make better sense to say “faculties” and “others.” Political psychology is stable, when there is a clear separation of two opposing poles of authority—power and existence. However, this conception of a college or university, while having limited validity, ultimately stands as a delusion and a limitation on governance, certainly on rational and reasonable governance. Some degree of interest competition and conflict characterizes all good institutions, but dichotomizing academic professionals into rival camps creates inherent drains on synergy and conduces to stasis at the margins, in particular, when governance insulates and protects “rival” colleagues from collaborating.

For example, as Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, and Bowman III (2010) indicated, institutions, not just but perhaps often serving minority predominant populations, may have developed with less formal structures for governance, allowing for greater centralization of management (both administrative and faculty/union) and the development of ossified boundaries vis-à-vis faculty or other university constituencies. Administrators and faculties, for example, may cling to familiar dichotomies as contradictions, without sustaining them in any productive sense. These “old saws” prevent an institution from progressing or evolving to a higher level of synergy as a system.

We must begin to understand that over the long run, the following type of statement is illogical, irrational, and unreasonable for the governance of a higher education organization:

... focus on service and effectively educating individuals with limited access to consistent, quality education ... support[s] the justification for the hierarchical and autocratic nature of ... governance [and for] ... strong executive leadership. (Gasman et al., 2010)

These three sources of irrationality and unreasonableness discourage good governance by
misunderstanding academic professionals in dichotomies (or trichotomies, etc.), as fundamentally opposed and contradictory groups of stakeholders. They tend to correlate with and justify a centralized and hierarchical organization of higher learning institutions and their contexts, in terms of faculty councils and unions as well as the administration.

Today’s academy now faces a context of increased demands on governance among a collection of professionals increasingly specialized, with decreased natural or pre-existing connections. Instead of a more unified community of scholar-professionals, we have an amalgamation of credentialed experts contending and cooperating, more or less, for success within a self-understanding as opposed interests. Faculty perceive themselves as declining powers, administrators may situate areas of insufficiently mediated discretion, and both groups (along with others) may exaggerate the degree to which they are separate and different, and rival stakeholders for governance.

How, then, do we mitigate these three sources of anti-governance and the inherent tendencies to irrationality and unreasonableness that have just been described? The paper now turns to modeling and describing sources of rationality and reasonableness in the self-understanding of higher educational professionals. These sources encourage better governance by working against the false images of the age. They will inform the presentation of a model for good governance in the subsequent section.

**Sources of Better Governance**

In this section, we want to draw together several ideas that will inform the subsequent description of a model of rational and reasonable governance: mindfulness and sustaining contradictions, Deming’s conception of “profound knowledge,” and the generalization of leadership to generate trust. All three are in the direction of breaking down inherent barriers characterizing the sources of malaise in the governance of higher education institutions.

First, governance requires habits of mind and action that borrow from the mindfulness practice of thinking or reasoning of “sustaining contradictions” (Zajonc, 2013). We must work with what appear to us as contradictory things or contradictions. We must overcome and transcend polarized dichotomies and stereotypes. We must bridge the apparently opposite and opposed.

The examples of “faculty” vs. “administration,” “managers” vs. “professors,” or “politicians” vs. “communities” situate important contradictions that do not admit of easy resolution, certainly in the short run. They may not admit of resolution at all. However, these differences must be accepted in order to function. They may situate and cite the real and necessary existence of a higher education organization and require living through them. In order to see that contradictory or different constituents do not stand as real contradictions (i.e., contraries are not contradictories), it is important to inculcate rational empathy in the reason of academic professionals and the broader public. Employees of higher education organizations should model this understanding in governance by thinking and acting to sustain contradictions.

We can learn from the literature on mindfulness that intense arguments about the conditions of university operations can intersect awareness that our complex reality demands a particular kind of toleration. We must accept conditions that cannot easily be resolved and work with them—work through them, out of respect for fellow professionals. We must share in governance as academic professionals.

By viewing the task of higher education professionals (and really all consumers and suppliers of college and university education) as agents transcending sustained contradictions, that is to say, by accepting
contradictions and working with them (which entails a combination of competition and cooperation, conflict and consensus), the contradictions are transcended, resolved, sustained, and lived through to positive end from the perspective of governance. To anticipate, this is one way of understanding how leadership as a trait in the academy can be generalized, in theory and in practice, as a basis for governance.

The mindfulness of reason as respect for sustaining contradictions calls on academic professionals to think of governance as the elaboration of Deming’s conception of profound knowledge (Maguad, 2011). Too often, institutions settle into comfortable modes of cooperating, contending, and competing as faculties, administrators, deans, chairs, staff, and so forth, without limit. The ideology of self-righteousness takes over, and quality of the enterprise assumes the back seat, or, to the end, (unintentionally) becomes a means of institutional game winning or not losing, which we will term “anti-governance.” This describes the opposite of profound knowledge, or perhaps profound ignorance.

As Maguad (2011) discussed, Deming, the 20th century father of American systems management theory, really was the father of a deeper kind of thinking, one that wanted “everyone … working together as a system to achieve the aim of the system” (p. 768). Maguad spoke of four aspects of Deming’s profound knowledge that should find reflection in campus governance: appreciation for a system, knowledge of variation, theory of knowledge, and psychology. Maguad characterized their presence as a basis for transformation or metanoia that extends a fundamental change in the institution’s self-conception and identity.

A system is a whole greater than the sum of its parts according to its mission/aim. The system is a complex field of interdependent relationships. The participants realize that as “the people” of the university, they are one community, a community of sub-communities, and a collection of diverse individuals. All of these facets of the system have interests that can align not so much through the cooperation and conflict of institutional politics, but through the shared work of the university.

Knowledge of variation means that the relationships of the system existing in reality are rarely optimized as to their performance (We contend that anti-governance and the sources of irrationality and unreasonableness in governance are sources of performance variation). There are variations from any norm or mean of desired behavior relative to the system’s aim. Institutional constituents, especially those charged with assessment and institutional effectiveness, should work to identify these variations and improve upon them, and bring them into alignment with the system’s aim. Since institutional existence is dynamic, the aim has some constancy, but also some dynamic tendency. Governance must realize that an organization’s effectiveness in existence affects and is affected by variation. Knowledge of variation as a concept counsels patience and persistence in realizing that knowledge is imperfect and the psychology of sub-communities, individuals, and the community may vary from the norm.

Theory of knowledge refers to the need and responsibility of all participants in the system to count and be valued. The effort of a system and its parts must be measured, assessed, and considered for improvement. Knowledge is dynamic as the frontier for quality and excellence evolves. Latecomers and low resource systems encounter negative feedback, and higher education professionals tend to assume that they are sufficient repositories of knowledge, resulting in higher than normal negative feedback, stasis, and inaction.

Psychology of system members is properly a matter of the vocational work-cycle, but tends to zero-sum thinking about survival that is overcome partially and more or less through governance, through making the system’s aim concrete and extended by a legacy of traditions, practices, and behaviors, and by extending the synergies that interdependence of relationships imply into fuller expression.
The valuation of sustaining contradictions and applying profound knowledge serve the purpose of good governance. They sensitize constituents of the university to the precious and especial qualities of the institution. They promote synergy concerning their aims or missions and the lives of those they serve, all as parts of a complex organization and shared trust and responsibility.

A third basis for better governance is generalizing the conception of academic professionals as leaders, in order to catalyze greater institutional synergy. Leadership is so much a buzzword that it becomes a cliché. We need leaders. Leaders must implement a vision that drives the organization. Leaders have or cultivate qualities that entitle them to initiate and accomplish change.

Too often, this conception of “leadership” is viewed as the province of senior administrators and perhaps leaders of faculty councils, unions, etc. This is mistaken. In actuality, everyone has a role in leadership, if profound knowledge is at stake, and if we agree to live through sustained contradictions and not alienate other university constituents. To the extent that these qualities are acculturated and treated as matters of heart and mind for all constituents, the university does better. Accordingly, this kind of spirit and culture should undergird governance and be cultivated through related practices, rituals, and traditions, as a conscious matter and the bases for ingrained habits of heart (Maguad, 2011).

Engebretsen, Heggen, and Eilertsen (2012) noted in their discussion of higher education in Norway that higher education organizations were sites for continuous improvement and accreditation. As institutions, they generalize and reformulate educational power to emphasize development as “self-control.” The demands of students are joined by those of fellow citizens (taxpayers), community members, and other organizations to make complex the context and needs for governance. The dissatisfaction of many academic professionals with current campus governance is matched or exceeded, and to some extent, reformulates the frustrations of wider publics with educational institutions as requiring improvement and justification. There is no choice but to accept that all stakeholders in the academy have responsibility for the assurance of their institutional missions, visions, and values. Governance has moment as a way of aspiring to self-control for a community of academic professionals, and as a service to students and the broader community.

Executive and faculty leaders’ visions are important, but a model of rational and reasonable governance stresses the idea that we all are leaders. Perhaps just a few participate as senior administrators, but no constituent of the university is beyond the need to illustrate leadership. Governance requires that faculties, staff, and students, as well as non-senior managers assume this mantle. Contrary to Stensaker and Vabo (2013), governance capacity cannot depend upon “entrepreneurial ideals” that map to the next president or senior administrator alone. Leaders who merely extend what they refer to as “social integration” through symbols and hollow ceremonies (p. 271) do not vitalize organizational culture. Stensaker and Vabo (2013) approached a better idea, when they concluded that organizational innovation must catalyze governance and that leadership and entrepreneurialism must catalyze trust and engagement, in order not to fall victim to a politics of symbolism.

By viewing the college or university as a system and site for profound knowledge, all stakeholders increase their regard for others. Their rationality and reason inculcate respect for the self-understanding of all colleagues, for reducing system variation in performance, and for improvement as a unifying aim that builds trust as it extends rational and reasonable governance.

By viewing the college or university as an organization eliciting and needing the leadership of all constituents, among students, faculties, staff, administrators, alumni, and community participants, governance instills and extends trust throughout the institution’s culture. The cultivation of trust through governance needs
the inclusion in rationality and reasonableness that anyone and everyone is a leader for the institution. That we do not all lead in the same way is the minor point, compared to the valuation of all agents in the institution as change agents (Hoppes & Holley, 2013).

A Model of Rational and Reasonable Governance

Having described several sources of inherency and discussed counter-measures, the paper now turns to sketch a model of governance that builds upon rational and reasonable ideas. It is not a complete model, and it does not aspire to unify all institutional cultures under one rubric. It does seek to reduce the sources of anti-governance and open up thought about synergies for academic professionals who choose to collaborate through revisioning and renewing their interactions.

The model of rational and reasonable governance utilizes the leaven of the sources of better governance as modalities of thought and behavior to mitigate the sources of anti-governance. Based upon it, this section develops the broad outlines of a model for governance by the following:

(a) Defining broad parameters of faculty and administrative/staff concern;
(b) Synergizing collaborations and bridge building;
(c) Viewing governance as a means to reducing systemic uncertainty and an end in itself for the meaning of higher education;
(d) Including a method for addressing boundary issues;
(e) Writing down the governance structure. Promulgating and using it, and assessing it, with an eye to improvement overtime.

Broad Parameters

It is trite to say that faculty has centrality to the university mission at any higher education organization. That is true only when constituents cease to live that way! There is no other way to found a college or university, unless it is to preface student learning, which goes hand in hand with faculty centrality. Any governance model and document worth paper or keystrokes must state the centrality and normal control of faculty over curricular matters in the senses below:

(a) A general first principle defined through processes and structures, not just as an idea;
(b) A first principle that eschews exclusivity of faculty control;
(c) Respect for the authority of state authorities, accrediting bodies, and other statutory bodies to impinge curricula. Most such requirements are mediated by administrations in college/university governance contexts;
(d) Refusal to treat administrators and staff as others;
(e) Search for a collaborative, respectful use of governance structures to accomplish change.

Faculties are the stewards of curricular matters. This does not mean they own or have exclusive authority over them, but as a general principle and basis for normal control, which is foundational. State authorities, accrediting bodies, and statutory requirements impinge curricula. Administrators mediate these requirements and bring various other visions of curricular improvements that should be received and respected. Faculties should not consider administrators as alien to the academic enterprise. The key is to develop a collaborative and respectful set of processes and practices that embodies faculty stewardship and control for curriculum within the context of an institution’s mission and vision as well as with respect for the role and authority of administrators.
A second basis for the higher education organization is the existence of administrators and staff who manage and execute non-curricular matters. This is a foundational context for statement in any governance document. Administrative and staff management of non-curricular matters:

1. Makes sense as a general first principle, but must be defined through processes and structures, not just as an idea;
2. Does not make sense as a first principle, if it means exclusivity;
3. Refuses to treat faculties as others;
4. Insists on a collaborative, respectful use of governance structures to accomplish change.

Administrators and staff must not view their authority over staff and non-curricular matters as an entitlement to exclude faculty input (or that of other constituents) in normal operations. They eschew the accretion of discretion, when it occurs apart from checks and balances to reinforce governance. Emergencies and crises do not a university make. In turn, while administrators have, at their foundation, responsibility for implementing a university’s mission and vision through the institution’s operations, there is no exclusive zone of control. Faculties are not alien to the administrative enterprise. In particular, they are vital partners in accomplishing the teaching, research, and service components of a mission and strategic plan. In most cases, they constitute the single greatest investment in human capital terms on a campus. The key is to develop a collaborative and respectful set of processes and practices for administrative responsibilities within a context of respect for the role and authority of faculty.

More broadly, there should be a campus governance structure, drawing on key councils from administration and faculty, and permitting the convening of a standing committee to address issues of improvement or problems that arise. This group’s purpose should be to draw on and inculcate the sources of mitigating bad governance, or the bases for reasonable and rational thinking about governance, in campus culture. Sustaining contradictions, profound knowledge, and generalization of leadership and trust as keystones of ongoing campus governance summarize the orientation of a campus governance committee in this model. The tasks of sustaining governance may also form part of the brief of an appropriately determined quality council.

The governance structure should have a defined life or term. It should require renewal in much the same way an institution renews its mission, vision, and values dynamically, or at least periodically.

Synergies

To identify areas for collaboration requires understanding of areas of shared energy-synergy-stasis. These can thwart or catalyze the operation of any governance model in practice, in tandem with the sources of bad governance and that for better practice. More generally, they test and catalyze good governance, as they become shared fields of interaction for the life of a college or university culture: The field of enrollment management, campus culture and communications, and freedom of speech and “dirty laundry.”

The best fulcrum around which to envision the idea of administrative and faculty collaboration is to consider that, at the end of the day, the greater part of a college or university’s functions require shared effort. For example, enrollment management amounts to little to nothing, if it, simply and unqualifiedly, is relegated to a cadre of staff, administrators, community supporters, and volunteers (For many institutions, this area of the institution’s aim is the initial site of resistance to collaboration). Faculties constitute some of the best spokespersons and advocate for a higher education institution, and how the organization recruits and retains
students needs to be informed by academic departments and faculty in many senses, including by active participation as part of an enrollment management plan and its implementation and assessment for improvement.

Second, in order to have a culture of good governance, communication must occur from all vantage points. The two-way or many lanes communications require all parties to assume responsibility for communicating their initiatives, positions on initiatives, criticism and feedback, and ongoing willingness to collaborate for continuous improvement. It does not work to relegate these functions to a communications department or wait out of deference and tactics. The enemy of communications is hierarchical communications processes.

Third, respect for freedom of speech is a foundational item for any college or university in a constitutional democracy, such as the United States. However, good communication also embodies some regards that freedom of speech carries an implicit responsibility to remember that all constituents are leaders. Simply airing problems damages the power of a university, in its credibility and capability. Internal political struggles do not really mitigate anti-governance when make global attention news bites, and doing so does not promote their successful resolution.

Reducing Systemic Uncertainty

This model of governance does not view the structure or culture of governance as a panacea. It does not fix or address all ills. It does form the basis for a university to value collaborative professional effort to accomplish the institution’s mission and vision. It also states a value in and of itself. Governance should amount to good governance as it is practiced, understood, and evaluated by campus constituents.

In addition, it carries a major instrumental value of reducing uncertainty. As the structures and processes of governance on a campus adhere and gain the sympathies of stakeholders and as the tenets of the written understanding are practiced, a major benefit occurs by way of reducing uncertainty. Come what may, the campus has an established and solid nexus of interactions that will meet and sustain not just the institutional operations, but also the core meanings, value, and intentions of the organization.

The inherent sources of anti-governance among administrative or faculty or constituent mindsets and behavior imply a broader context for governance defined as living down uncertainty in the provision of an educational mission amongst stakeholders with interests that compete, but generally require greater convergence of university stakeholders or constituents to accomplish optimum success.

Success requires achieving the interests of all university stakeholders, beginning with students. The need for synergy increases as there are stressors on a university’s mission arising from limited resources, uncertain or flagging enrollment, internal political upheaval or leadership transition, external mandates (especially unfunded mandates) from governments, and broader socioeconomic indices of unemployment, inflation, and falling real incomes.

Boundary Issues

A governance model should include provision for what to do when the system encounters difficulties, including parameters for boundary conditions. These typically might include the following:

(a) Provision for areas of administrative expertise, authority, and input when administration is required by external bodies to affect faculty areas of normal control;

(b) Provision for administrative initiative in areas of normal faculty control;

(c) Provision for faculty initiative in areas of normal administrative control.
A governance model must state the first principles just identified, as well as others particular to each institution’s culture, traditions, mission, and vision. The articulation of a governance document is necessary, but it must arise from and reflect the institution’s rough consensus on the areas of normal faculty and administrative control, as well as the valuation of collaboration. It must state mechanisms for naming and addressing conflicts when normal understandings break down. Constituent bodies, such as a President, Provost Council, or the Faculty Senate should be able to request the convening of the campus governance committee to consider issues of moment when they occur. These kinds of issues should not arise often. Should they arise, it presupposes that the governance document does not really reflect the institution’s values. A power struggle or period of dissent is not the same as a governance breakdown.

Write It Down

It goes without saying, perhaps, governance structure and set of processes should not amount to a virtual constitution. There must be an institutional document for governance, not just a collection of practices, policies, and traditions. The latter allows for departures from what are customs. A written document provides transparency, publicity, a basis for transparency and evaluation, and clarity for all constituents, including external audiences of a university, such as accrediting bodies, state governments, and the broader public. The document should envision a process for amendments.

A Governance Model Builds Institutional Trust

As previously noted, a rational and reasonable governance model builds trust throughout a higher education organization, as it tends to good practice. Multiple constituencies of an organization stand as partners in an enterprise that admits of greater egalitarian spirit in the contemporary period. No longer is a university a guild with hard and fast, tried and true, or caste-like groups of professionals organized as a hierarchy. There is interchangeability and transferability of knowledge, skills, and experiences that make old ways bad ways. As Legon et al. (2013) noted:

… At its best, governance is a collaborative process … This collaboration requires mutual respect between boards, senior administrators, and faculty members, as well as an awareness on the part of each of the others’ roles. (p. 25)

Hoppes and Holley (2013) argued that participation, intentionality, absence of fear (of retaliation), and transparency are among the key factors in building organizational trust in higher education institutions. Though their work builds in a chicken-and-egg paradox (as in which comes first “trust” or “governance”), the broader theme is that collaboration in an open and inclusive system builds synergy, confidence, and respect among constituents. Organizational trust requires good governance and it is its byproduct. Likewise, implementation of governance structures requires trust in the public and the publicly acknowledged responsibilities, powers, and limitations characterizing the work of university stakeholders.

Hoppes and Holley (2013) also noted that more institutional trust reduced reliance on formal controls, boundary negotiations, such as grievance processes, and tended to reinforce mutually understood pathways for participation. Repeated, reliable interactions (that admit of improvement based upon perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) avoid governance sliding into archaic silo-driven and robotic simulacra of genuine interactions. The presence of trust enables an institution to handle crises, such as resource reductions and vice versa.
References


