

Politics

by David H. Kalsbeek

Organizations as Political Arenas

The challenge we face is formidable — to integrate our institutions' planning, policies, programs, and practices to achieve optimal enrollments. The challenge is great because we have to effect change throughout our organizations — and organizations do not change easily. From the two-year college to the research university, from the liberal arts college with 400 students to the land-grant university with 50,000, America's institutions of higher education are very complex organizations. They involve many interdependent people and offices with limited resources engaged in varied and continuous interactions in pursuit of diverse goals in extremely challenging and rapidly changing times. Understanding how such organizations work is not a simple task, but it is critical for successful leadership in enrollment services in an era in which the need for leadership is greater than ever before.

Making change happen in colleges and universities, as in any organization, requires skill in “getting things done,” in initiating and sustaining action, in translating intentions into reality, and in taking great ideas and successfully implementing them. Some suggest that the most widespread

David H. Kalsbeek is Associate Academic Vice President for Enrollment Services at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. Prior to assuming that position in 1993, he spent eleven years at Saint Louis University (MO) as Director of Student Life Studies, Assistant Vice President for Student Development, Acting Dean of Undergraduate Admissions, and Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management. He has made numerous presentations at professional conferences and published numerous articles on student development and enrollment management.

problem in our organizations today is the inability to get things done, to implement desired changes. Pfeffer¹ (1992, 8) quotes Richard Nixon, who noted that “It is not enough for a leader to know the right thing. He must be able to do the right thing The great leader needs ... the capacity to achieve.” Leadership for enrollment management and enrollment services is all about accomplishing change in our organizations, about the ability to successfully get things done, though doing so may tug at the status quo and challenge established ways of being and doing and thinking about higher education.

How do we get things done in organizations? One way is through *formal authority*, by relying on our hierarchically structured organizations where those at higher levels direct all of the activities in lower levels under their purview. We often behave as if following the traditional chain of command is the *only* way to effect change and get action, and we thereby impose substantial limitations on ourselves and our efforts. Enrollment management, by definition, requires us to accomplish our objectives through extensive cooperation and collaboration with colleagues and partners *outside* our direct “reporting channels.” Even at the very top of our enrollment management organizations, the authority we have is extremely limited when compared to the scope and breadth of what we need to do to achieve our enrollment objectives. We cannot rely solely on traditional authority structures to get things done and effectively lead an enrollment management effort.

An organizational culture with *shared vision and common goals* is an increasingly popular prescription for getting things done in organizations. Building a strong climate and culture in support of certain goals certainly can relieve an organization from depending on authoritative hierarchy for direction. But in our complex academic environments with extremely diverse “cultures” among faculty, student affairs staff, and students, and with our many widely divergent goals, it may be unrealistic to rely on a “shared vision” to mobilize the type of synchronized, synergized, and comprehensive effort required to achieve strategic enrollment goals.

A third and primary means by which we get things done in organizations is through *organizational politics* — using power and influence as a way of getting things done in an environment where other ways and means may not be sufficient. Colleges and universities, like any other organizations, are arenas for daily politics, and achieving enrollment

¹ This chapter, with its focus on politics as how we “get things done,” is guided by the perspective of Jeffrey Pfeffer in his provocative 1992 book, *Managing with Power: Politics and Influence in Organizations*. Pfeffer’s approach to describing the political skill and will required for organizational leadership is the basis for this chapter.

management goals requires us to understand that our “organizational life is dominated by political interactions” (Bacharach 1982, 1). But what does it mean for organizations to be “political”?

Most of us have grown up with a very traditional, even naive, view of organizations and of politics. This view leads us to define political behavior as how we manipulate situations, people, and information to our own advantage, calculatingly catering to what others above us in the organization value or desire, believing that getting ahead may require behaviors that are less than forthright, honest or ethical. “Politics has come to mean actions that are in the service of our own self-interest” (Block 1987, xiv). We all encounter ample instances in which such behaviors in fact occur in our organizations.

But the politics of organizational life are natural processes by which we get things done. The fact is that all organizations have limited resources, limited people, limited time and energy, limited opportunities to take action; influencing how the limited resources of the organization are acquired and channeled in specific directions is at the heart of organizational politics (Block 1987, 7). “Behaving in a manner labeled as political is nothing more than a process of influence. ... On this basis, most aspects of life in organizations can be identified as political” (Kakabadse and Parker 1984, x). And it is on this basis that we move beyond seeing the politics of the college or university as “the corrupting and unpleasant side of human nature” (Kakabadse and Parker 1984, x) and begin to see it as a natural and necessary dimension of organizational life as we try to influence the way we get things done.

Developing the political will and skill to get things done in complex organizations is critical for leadership in enrollment services — especially since many believe that colleges and universities are *intensely* political organizations. Warren Bennis, former college president and organizational theorist, noted that “university politics make other kinds seem as fierce as shuffleboard” (Kanter and Stein 1979, 316). But a text on *leadership* in enrollment services cannot make simple or simplistic prescriptions for greater political effectiveness. The key to political effectiveness for enrollment services is to understand and appreciate the inherently political nature of organizational life, to understand how such dynamics define and determine what it means to “lead” enrollment services, and what it means to “get things done” in the college and university setting. How is political influence exercised in an organization? Addressing that question is the purpose of this chapter.

Sources of Political Influence: Authority and Information

Countless texts on effective management offer “how to” tips on effecting change in organizations, on “empowered” leadership, and on building political clout. Sources of political influence include everything from personal charisma to office location. Though simple prescriptions may not always apply in every college and university setting given the extreme diversity of America’s higher education institutions, two universal sources of political power in our organizations are *formal authority* and *information*.

Authority and Organizational Structure as a Source of Political Influence

Influence in enrollment services does stem directly from formal organizational and authority structures. Understanding our organizational charts (e.g., who reports to whom and who has formal responsibilities for what functions) is a necessary step in understanding sources and patterns of influence in the organization. A traditional “tree-diagram” is the way we typically think about how organizations are designed and structured; it is our mental map of the arena in which we work. The hierarchical organizational chart determines in very real ways the political playing field of our organizations since it outlines the “authority structure” which drives how decisions are made and how resources are allocated. Individuals with *authority* have potentially great political influence in an organization; their position gives them that prerogative since it dictates the resources they can control.

But while the organizational chart is a necessary tool for understanding the power and influence that come with authority, it is far from sufficient in accounting *fully* for how influence is exercised in the university setting. In fact, the way decisions and issues actually are influenced often bears little resemblance to the formal authority structure. While individuals may only have *authority* over subordinates, they may *influence* up, down, and across the organization; while they control resources directly under their purview, they can influence resource allocations campus-wide.

So as we seek to understand the organizations in which we work, the formal organizational structure offers great insight into the structure by which political influence is exercised. Clearly such power comes from being in a position to control resources ranging from human to fiscal to information resources, space allocations, and the time and attention of both organizational leadership and staff. But Bacharach and Lawler (1982) define this type of power as a “static, stable feature of organiza-

tions.” Real influence, on the other hand, is a “fulcrum of change” in organizations, a more dynamic dimension of politics by which we get things done. Leadership requires understanding how political influence may transcend organizational boundaries and hierarchies and thereby energize the enrollment management effort.

We all have anecdotes of the departmental secretary, the budget director, or the personnel specialist who, while not having formal authority over enrollment services, wields great influence over how resources can be used and how activities are implemented. Even more important, in the college and university setting it is the faculty who, while not appearing on the administrative organizational chart, have great influence. Faculty determine the parameters within which policies can be developed, strategies crafted, and programs implemented. Their influence, independent of any traditional hierarchical authority, stems from their centrality in the university’s mission. The story is told of how Dwight D. Eisenhower, in his first address to the faculty as the new president of Columbia University, assured them of his commitment to integrally involve faculty in the leadership of the university; the response from the faculty leadership was simply, “Mr. President, we *are* the university.” Failure to appreciate the unique political reality that, in our academic organizations, “there is no rank higher than professor” can easily be a fatal flaw in developing and implementing enrollment management initiatives.

Information as a Source of Influence

Information is a source of power and influence. Information is an especially critical and influential resource when an organization faces increasing competition, greater uncertainty in the environment, greater expectations for performance, and more diversified activities (Galbraith 1973; Kalsbeek 1994). All of these factors are characteristic of higher education and, particularly, the enrollment services environment today: a far more competitive environment, extreme uncertainty about which means best achieve certain ends and about what the future holds, a tremendous (and occasionally unrealistic) expectation for the performance of enrollment services staff, and an increasing diversity — in academic programs and among students enrolling in them. In such an environment, it is extremely difficult to get things done, and information becomes a source of considerable political influence precisely because it appears to provide some certainty and remove uncertainty, to provide some ballast amidst the turbulence, and to give some reassurance that we are not flying completely blind.

A story is told of how David Berlo, past president of Illinois State University, discovered the political power of information in the movies he

watched as a child. In the old Westerns, the person with authority was obvious — the colonel of the cavalry post had all the trappings of power — the crisp uniform, the nicest house on the post, the finest horse; most of all, he was in the position to tell everyone else what to do as his organization pursued its appointed objective: to keep the frontier safe from hostile tribes. But the person *really* in control of the organization's pursuit of its goals was someone who had no formal authority and none of the trappings of power — *the scout*. The scout was not part of the line organization in the cavalry; he was in a staff role, with no authority to tell anyone else what to do. But in those old Westerns, he and he alone had the information required for the cavalry to succeed in getting things done — he alone understood the Indians. As he shared that information with those formally in charge, he actually controlled the organization's outcomes. The lesson is clear: those who control information exert tremendous influence on organizational leadership. Leadership in enrollment services is largely a scouting expedition (Kalsbeek 1995).

Why Enrollment Management is a Political Process

Organizational life is intertwined with politics, with processes of influence and power. However, some conditions create an organizational dynamic in which political processes are *especially* prevalent (Pfeffer 1992), namely, when there is considerable *uncertainty*, conflict or substantial *disagreement* about means and ends, an *absence of a clear paradigm*, and an increasing task *specialization* within the organization. Political processes are clearest in interdependent systems and when change efforts focus on substantial resource bases, such as budget allocations or re-organizations. The enrollment management process exhibits *all* of these characteristics so it is not surprising that it is an extremely political process on most campuses. Leaders need to appreciate why the enrollment management process is such fertile ground for organizational politics.

First, higher education operates in an extremely uncertain environment — especially regarding enrollments — and that pervasive uncertainty makes politics a way of life for enrollment managers. We face uncertainties regarding federal and state policy, about the long-range consequences of short-term solutions, about the increasingly competitive climate, about the future viability of our tuition pricing structure, and so on. Charting a course of action, maneuvering in such “permanent whitewater” (Vaill 1991), and effecting change amidst the volatility of uncertain times requires political adeptness. As we try to influence mul-

tiple and often conflicting institutional priorities and respond quickly and flexibly to new opportunities and unanticipated challenges in a very uncertain terrain, political will and skill are tested by often entrenched and conservative organizations.

In doing enrollment management, there is also inherent conflict — fundamental disagreements and widely varying points of view about enrollment goals and the means to achieve them. Enrollment goals are often diametrically opposed (e.g., ensuring access versus increasing revenue by raising tuition) as are the various means of achieving them (committing funds to merit scholarships versus need-based grants), creating all the ingredients for conflict. Enrollment goals favored by faculty often conflict with those favored by the governing board, by the finance vice president, or by the students. “If everyone agrees on what to do and how to do it, there is no need ... to attempt to influence others” (Pfeffer 1992, 176). Such consensual agreement is hardly ever the case in enrollment management, so political skills are required to ensure that enrollment initiatives move through the potential quagmire of college and university dissent and conflict.

This built-in conflict is exacerbated by the increasing *specialization and professionalization* of the academy. Not only are universities organized around specialties among our faculty and academic disciplines, but the history of higher education administration is one of increasing professionalization and specialization — especially in the area of enrollment and student services. This contributes further to a predictable divergence of perspectives, since professionals, by definition, bring to their work an allegiance to “professional” guidelines, practices, standards, and commitments — all of which dictate multiple views on priorities and practice. Such divergence of opinion, coupled with the fact that enrollment management as a professional practice is still in its infancy, contributes to an *absence of any clear or singular “paradigm,”* an absence of any overarching or uniform perspective that guides our work. All of this creates an environment where political processes dominate daily life and are essential to overcoming barriers to effective action and change caused by organizational and professional fragmentation.

Politics is a natural way of getting things done in enrollment management because, by its nature, enrollment management relies on an interdependence of many departments, functions, and processes. If enrollment management could be organized in isolation from all other activities and domains of the university, we could rely on formal authority to get things done; the person in charge could simply direct the effort. But enrollment management, by definition, is a process whereby we attempt to integrate all of the university’s programs and practices

and policies related to achieving enrollment outcomes (Kalsbeek 1993); such integration transcends traditional organizational structures and is, therefore, highly interdependent. So getting things done cannot simply be through authoritative mandate; it requires exercising political influence.

Interdependence is also driven by the scarcity of resources in our organizations. "Slack resources reduce interdependence, while scarcity increases it" (Pfeffer 1992, 40). If the admissions office had all the resources it needed to produce its own marketing campaign, it would not have to depend on the marketing department. If enrollment services had its own technical staff, interdependence with the computing center would not be an issue. With sufficient resources, each college could manage its own scholarship processes without relying on the financial aid office. But limited resources require us to work interdependently. Moreover, in an era of scarce resources, all departments are playing a zero-sum game. Each department's resource gain is *necessarily* another's loss. In such an environment, politically influencing how resources are allocated becomes a natural and necessary objective and a key to successful leadership.

Finally, organizational politics really come into play when decisions relate to a *substantial resource base* or to *organizational re-alignment*; again, this is, by definition, what enrollment management is all about. For many colleges and universities, the enrollment management process not only affects but singularly determines the resource base for the institution. Tuition dependence means that the institution's lifeblood is its enrollment, so everyone has an interest in influencing that process, thereby politicizing the enrollment management effort. In addition, re-organizing the university for enrollment management is a frequent recommendation, combining into a common cluster of departments those functions most critical to the enrollment process (e.g., admissions, financial aid, registration and records, advising, and other student services). Campus discussions of how to best manage enrollments and provide enrollment services inevitably lead to discussions of the optimal mix of departments and functions under an enrollment management umbrella. Such discussions are an affirmation of the importance of formal authority structures in getting things done in organizations, but they also politicize the process. Any attempt to re-organize challenges the status quo, shakes up established patterns of authority and control over resources, and creates a highly political debate in which many interest groups are vested.

Getting Things Done in Enrollment Services: Some Key Political Skills

Framing

Establishing the framework within which issues are viewed, decisions made, problems defined, and solutions considered is tantamount to determining the result. Framing — the intentional process by which we set the context for any decision or policy debate — is a way of exercising influence and is, therefore, a key political skill (Pfeffer 1992). The types of decisions and actions we pursue in enrollment management can be viewed in many different ways from different perspectives. We “frame the debate” by how we define the salient issues at stake, set the agenda for considering options, and pose the questions to be answered. All of this is a way of influencing the outcome. We also “frame” issues and decisions by the way we gather the data that will “percolate into the climate of informed opinion” and the way we share information that will “constitute the intellectual capital” upon which decision-makers draw in the course of their work (Weiss 1980; Kalsbeek 1992).

Framing is a political process by which innovation and change happen. “Yet we often show little foresight or consciousness about how frames of reference are set” (Pfeffer 1992, 206). Particularly important is the appreciation of the impact of precedent, the influence that history has on the policy process. While an enrollment management perspective may be new to a given campus, all decisions about recruitment and retention strategies inevitably unfold within history, within a rich context of prior commitments and past choices that color or frame the way everyone appraises the present situation and evaluates options for future action. Historical precedent is a powerful predictor of future action because we all naturally rely on the familiarity and certainty of prior experience in deciding our preferred options. History frames possible futures. Herein lies the promise and the pitfall for new enrollment managers. Being new to a campus can free one from the blinders of historical precedent and more easily allows decisions to be reframed; but successfully getting things done also requires understanding the historical context that frames enrollment issues for those who have been around for some time.

Senge (1990) challenges us to become more skilled at identifying the “mental models” that determine what we can do by shaping how we view the situation at hand. Mental models are the deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, pictures, or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action. New ideas often fail to be implemented because they conflict with deeply held images and as-

sumptions of how the world works, images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting and deciding. Senge's work on mental models offers many promising tools for leaders wanting to influence fundamental change.

So getting things done in enrollment management requires leaders to be adept at identifying those assumptions and beliefs that frame the policy arena, those mental models that determine how our organizations define problems and solutions — and then reframing them in order to effect change. Political effectiveness lies largely in our ability to influence the ways in which decisions and discussions are framed.

For example, how financial aid strategies are evolving on many campuses illustrates the power of how assumptions and mental models frame decisions and determine new courses of action. Historically, university leaders viewed institutional financial aid only as a budgeted expense, a cost, appearing on the ledgers like the loss from a casualty (Casteen 1996). Viewed in this way, good decisions sought to minimize the expense. Enrollment managers are reframing the policy discussion by defining institutional aid as a leveraged discount; viewed in this way, enrollment strategies seek not to minimize the cost but optimize the investment. An entirely new range of strategic opportunities come to mind when traditional mental models are challenged and issues reframed.

Similarly, the traditional way of describing the college enrollment process is as a “funnel”; such imagery shows the inter-relatedness of our marketing efforts to our admissions process and our yield strategies. But as a mental model, a funnel connotes some sort of natural cascading or filtration of students from one level (applicants) to another level (enrolled students), leading to a conclusion that forcing more in at the top (more applicants) will naturally lead to more at the bottom (more freshmen). We know this is not how it works. Reframing the mental model can be as simple as inverting the image — turning the funnel into a pyramid that more clearly describes the actual dynamics of enrollment management (Kalsbeek 1996).

Information Management and Analysis

As noted earlier, information and the level of certainty it can provide for enrollment management is a powerful political resource. Pfeffer notes that the prevailing (though mistaken) belief that there is a “right answer” to most problems and that this answer can be discovered through sufficient analysis of information gives those who have information and who shape the analysis of that information great influence

in most organizations. Therefore, information management is a key political skill for enrollment management.

Now with the rapid developments of information and communications technologies that provide unprecedented access to vast information resources from every personal computer, the political dynamics of information are changing practically overnight. It was over twenty-five years ago that Galbraith (1973, 42) noted that:

We cannot foresee the ramifications of information instantaneously available everywhere in the organization. Information is a source of power, so the present power structure is threatened. Most of our attitudes and behaviors still reflect hierarchical and sequential processing of data.

While access to information is a base of political influence, the rise of computing networks and on-line data resources means that mere access to information may not provide the edge it once did. The way information flows through our networked organizations no longer precisely parallels the way other resources are channeled. So a key political skill is to view organizations not bureaucratically (with emphasis on how certain functions and departments are organized) but informatically, focusing on information and communications processes that formally and informally influence how things get done. Infoscclerosis, the hardening and constricting of information arteries through an organization (Kalsbeek 1989), often determines the political capacity to exert influence on the decision process; intentionally constricting or widening information flow can either help or hinder the enrollment management process.

For example, developing and implementing integrated student information systems is critical to improving enrollment services. This process, however, inevitably touches off political battles over information access, spawns volatile discussions of "need to know" policies, and triggers "turf wars" over data ownership. As another example, routinely sharing students' on-line admissions records with academic department chairpersons can positively influence how advisors place freshmen in their initial math courses and, thereby, promotes student success and retention; sharing such information can also invite faculty criticism of admissions decisions and standards as they attempt to influence such decisions. All decisions about information access, information dissemination and information systems are inherently political.

Enrollment management decisions are invariably complex, multidimensional decisions. As such, analysis alone can seldom resolve the prob-

lems at hand or provide singular direction for decisions. We all know that multiple arguments on many sides of an issue can be supported from the same information with different analyses. Therefore, there is always room for the advocacy of information that supports a favored position; there is always opportunity to use information and analysis selectively to influence the decision process (Pfeffer 1992, 258). The political use of information involves the skill to develop, manage and present information persuasively in order to exert influence on the policy or decision process. The creative graphic display of quantitative data and understanding how statistics can be used to manipulate opinion (Tufte 1983; Paulos 1995) are skills of the politically effective enrollment manager.

The successful enrollment manager also understands the dynamics of information use (Kalsbeek 1994). Information is used to make decisions, such as when market research focuses recruitment strategies on those areas where the university has strong visibility or draw. But a more frequent use of information is as it enlightens issues, as it challenges assumptions, as it helps frame policy discussions, or as it defines problems rather than leads to solutions. The same market research that is used to make recruitment decisions is also used when it subtly challenges a dean's longstanding assumptions about the number of potential students interested in certain majors or a president's assumptions about the institution's market presence beyond a 300-mile radius. Though no immediate decision outcomes from that information may be apparent, it is nonetheless used. When information is deliberately gathered and presented in order to make such points and influence the perspective of various stakeholders in the decision process, then the information intentionally is being used politically. This constitutes a powerful skill for the political leadership of enrollment services.

Structuring the Organization and the Decision Process

It is not surprising that a typical approach to increasing political influence is to restructure an organization in order to obtain greater control over desired resources or expand the decision authority. Establishing a "higher" or "broader" position in an organizational hierarchy provides access to information, greater access to those with formal authority, jurisdiction over critical decisions, and responsibility for allocating valued resources. However, a distinguishing feature of enrollment management as practiced in higher education today is the multiple organizational structures found to be successful, the widely varying models and struc-

tures currently in place to achieve enrollment objectives, even among fairly similar institutions. There is no one best way of structuring organizations to provide enrollment services, no one structure that optimizes political influence in getting things done in enrollment management. But while there may be no one best structure, whatever structure is established clearly has political consequences and those consequences relate directly to natural "spheres of influence." Political skills for enrollment services include knowing how organizational structures and decision processes influence outcomes.

It is true that one's perspective on certain issues and one's ability to act on that perspective are directly determined by his or her place in an organization; in other words, where you stand usually depends on where you sit. Persons with different positions in an organization have different perspectives on what resources are expendable, what courses of action are feasible, what are tractable problems, what goals are paramount, and what information is meaningful. Kanter and Stein suggest that this is the central source of organizational tension and the key to organizational politics (Kanter and Stein 1979, 304).

Currently, enrollment services or enrollment management responsibilities generally are centered in either the student affairs or the academic affairs divisions of the university structure, and the different perspectives dominating these two domains of the academy are clear and distinct (Blake 1979). So, for example, when enrollment officers sit within student affairs, their most direct sphere of influence is within that domain. Since they naturally have more frequent contact and collaboration with their immediate colleagues in residence life, student activities, and student services, they can readily influence and be influenced by those colleagues. The enrollment management agenda naturally includes issues related to student affairs and likely is guided by a student affairs perspective; the organizational sphere of influence grants legitimacy to that agenda and fosters that perspective. It is understandably harder, then, to exercise influence among faculty, deans, and academic administrators, and harder to influence enrollment-related decisions about course scheduling, faculty development, the academic probation policy, etc.

When enrollment management responsibilities are centered in the academic arena, on the other hand, the immediate sphere of influence is radically different, focusing far more readily on academic and faculty issues. The greater challenge then becomes to influence enrollment-related decisions in the student affairs area related to campus housing, student orientation, discipline, Greek life, etc. For every political advantage of an organizational arrangement there is a disadvantage, and the

greatest strength of any approach is simultaneously its greatest weakness. Understanding these differences and converting natural obstacles to opportunities is a real political skill.

Politically structuring the enrollment management effort does not always require vast re-organization of standing divisions of the college or university. Task forces and committees and work teams are also structural mechanisms for effecting change. They can be political approaches to either institutionalizing power and influence or diffusing responsibility for decisions and actions. In many organizations, a more participatory approach to making decisions has become a means to better manage interdependence, to bring together diverging interests, and to acknowledge the co-existence of numerous stakeholders (Kanter and Stein 1979). On the other hand such participatory approaches can drain an organization's most precious resource — the time and attention of its personnel — and can heighten expectations for involvement beyond what is feasible.

Politically skilled leaders know that committees are tools of political influence, vehicles for politically co-opting others. By inviting known or potential adversaries or opponents into a decision process, one can thereby achieve some affiliation or allegiance with a task or issue or outcome among those outside the immediate sphere of influence. For example, establishing an enrollment planning committee consisting of representatives of various colleges or departments builds greater ownership for the process among those who could perhaps be its most vocal critics. Involving faculty on an admissions committee, students on a calendar committee, or alums on the marketing task force are examples of how to exert political influence by structuring broader involvement in decision processes.

Language, Symbols, and Ceremony

We live and work in cultures that celebrate ritual, ceremony and symbols. It seems that higher education organizations particularly are enamored with and reliant upon these features of organizational life. As Senge (1990) and Pfeffer (1992) point out, change is fueled by desire, by emotion, by factors that may not appear objectively rational. The power of symbols, ceremonies, and ritual is the power to trigger emotional support and enthusiasm and commitment for our goals, our efforts and our institutions — and thereby make things happen.

Rituals and ceremonies abound in our efforts to manage college enrollments as we serve and educate our students. Commencement exercises in full academic garb, freshman orientation programs, dean's lists,

spring break, homecoming, final exams, tenure and promotion, Greek rush, and countless campus myths that are repeated by generation after generation of students — all are part of the rich tapestry of ritual and ceremony in the academy. We use all of these to build morale and loyalty, to promote certain values, to sanction certain behaviors, to reward and celebrate accomplishments, to establish our identity and distinctiveness, to initiate newcomers to the campus culture, and so on. They become the means by which we build and sustain the emotion and commitment that is so critical to the life and vitality of the academy; leaders in enrollment services must understand and appreciate the pervasive power of such parts of campus life.

Pfeffer notes that even meetings are organizational ceremonies that send important messages and support the pursuit of political goals. Meetings ceremonially can reassure groups of their importance, keep focus on or elevate certain issues, or allow a “public” demonstration of authority or expertise and thereby send a politically charged message. The politically skilled leader recognizes the multiple roles meetings can serve in our organizations and makes the most of them to get things done.

We use symbols to influence action in organizations. Office space, location, and design are all important symbols of power and influence, speaking directly to the basic territorial instincts of the human animal and communicating clear messages of status and authority. Titles are symbols that we use to effect change; promotions and other public recognitions of achievement or merit carry great symbolic weight. Memberships on committees, parking and library privileges, the grade or classification of an office’s support staff (e.g., secretary or executive secretary or administrative assistant) can all be viewed as ways in which influence is wielded through the intentional manipulation of symbols.

Language is a powerful means of exercising political influence. The words we use in our conversation, discussion, and policy discourse carry great influence in our organizations and in our profession. For example, just our choice of “enrollment management” versus “enrollment services” as a rubric for describing our efforts has political significance; the symbolism and connotations of each vary widely and will meet with varying degrees of support and success on different campuses. Our professional practice is sprinkled with language and symbols drawn from industry, from strategic planning, from the exploding computing and telecommunications field, and from psychology and education. The language of marketing long ago entered our professional lexicon and continues to redefine the scope and nature of our work, with mixed results. The language of price discounting, borrowed from fields of economics and business, does not just passively accompany the emergence of new

approaches to our work; this new language actively and fundamentally redefines, redirects and reframes our perspective on our work and, in effect, transforms that work. As we choose the words we use, our rhetoric, and our jargon, we are, in effect, manipulating symbols that influence, positively or negatively, how we get things done in our organizations.

Part of attending to the language of enrollment management is the development of a "unity of voice" throughout our own enrollment services effort. Pfeffer notes that those organizations that achieve a common sense of identity, a shared perspective, consensual support for goals and objectives, and a certainty of purpose are far more influential in gaining control of resources (fiscal, human, technological, etc.) than those organizations with a less-refined, less-defined "paradigm." When an entire enrollment services division achieves such a unity of voice, it is often clearly reflected in the language that is used. With a unified voice, internal and external communications are improved with clear and consistent messages, concerted action is easier to achieve, conflict is minimized, and the entire enrollment effort presents a unified front as it attempts to exert influence throughout the organization. Developing political influence in a university can begin with a comprehensive staff development program to ingrain enrollment management principles and perspectives throughout the enrollment services organization, to develop consensus commitments to enrollment goals and strategies to achieve them, and to develop a common language that ties it all together.

Interpersonal Influence: The Organization as a Social Occasion

All organizations have in common the simple fact that they are social settings, social occasions where people live and work, interact, and form meaningful relationships with one another. The interpersonal dynamic of organizational life underlies all of our political activity; we do enrollment management in social settings. It is the pervasive yet often indescribable network of interpersonal relationships and the influence accompanying those relationships that we typically mean when we refer to an institution's "political environment."

The persistent theme of this chapter is that the political nature of our work is both natural and necessary; so too with the interpersonal network of colleagues which defines the social systems of our organizations. Interpersonal networks evolve not only because of our natural needs for human interaction, but because such interaction is how things

get done. When goals are in conflict, outcomes uncertain, and stakes high, few choose to act in isolation. We naturally seek out the opinion and judgment and perceptions of others, particularly those who we find share some basic similarities with us (similar responsibilities, professional background, personality, etc.). Naturally, and perhaps necessarily, our interpersonal network comes to shape our view of our world, our definition of our problems and opportunities, and our assessment of possible solutions. As Pfeffer notes, our thoughts and actions become "socially anchored." Our decisions are influenced by the interpersonal exchanges that are spawned as we actively satisfy our craving for "the comfort and certainty of shared opinion" (Pfeffer 1992, 208). Such interpersonal influence on how we get things done is part of the political landscape; the effective leader develops organizations that foster interpersonal networks in support of the goals and objectives of the institution.

From a management perspective, the interpersonal network improves our efforts in several ways. By learning from others, we can often expedite our decision-making and problem-solving, since we may avoid learning from scratch what others already know. In other words, the interpersonal and social networking in and about our organizations helps to economize our information processing, providing shortcuts to the pressing need for continual learning in our rapidly changing field. It also provides opportunities for more divergent thinking, as multiple points of view tug at our assumptions and mental models. This is why Senge (1990) calls for the intentional and widespread development of team learning as a key element in keeping organizations vital and vibrant. Many campuses have experienced great success in enrollment management by establishing ongoing interdivisional teams with a commitment to getting things done through persistent interpersonal interchange; this is all part of political leadership in our social organizations.

In all social systems, but particularly in colleges and universities with the type of human services effort we are engaged in, cooperation and collaboration are essential. Ensuring such cooperation and collaboration is a key political skill for leadership in enrollment services. To get things done, we have to get along, and "getting along" in our organizations often involves being able to transact business in a pleasant and effective manner, even with people we may not particularly like but whom we need in achieving our goals. It is not uncommon to have the political climate described in terms of the level of collegiality that pervades the organization. Political leadership, therefore, includes nurturing a civil, courteous, and collegial climate in which diversity and differences are welcomed and in which there are rewards for working well together as professional colleagues.

Finally, the politics of interpersonal influence hinge on the notion of reciprocity. We depend on others to get things done, and they depend on us. The admissions officer depends on the financial aid counselor to expedite an award package for an irate parent. The retention officer needs the collections manager to cancel a late fee for a needy student whose parents missed a payment. The registrar needs the computing staff to revise the format of the grading rosters two terms earlier than initially planned. The underfunded minority affairs director depends on financial support from some campus auxiliaries for the Black Student Association telemarketing campaign. All of these types of interdepartmental dependencies occur every day and generally result from one person obliging another's requests.

A natural ingredient for success in our highly interdependent social systems is this pervasive sense of reciprocity and interpersonal obligation. The negative connotation of organizational politics focuses on quid pro quo exchanges, cutting deals, favors exchanged for explicitly requested favors in return. These are certainly a part of the political reality in most organizations. But the more generalized, diffuse, and pervasive reciprocity by which we try to help colleagues get things done, knowing that we thereby generally improve our likelihood of getting our things done, is a powerful organizational dynamic which politically skilled leaders recognize, encourage, and reward.

Conclusion

The political processes which dominate organizational life are more than just an academic interest, and political skills are more than just a part of the repertoire of professionals seeking career advancement. Political influence is the way by which things get done in our colleges and universities — and the things to be done in enrollment services and for enrollment management goals are of great consequence to our institutions, our communities, and our society. Despite the frequent criticism and calls for reform, American higher education is one of the greatest success stories in the modern world. The political dynamics by which we collectively and continuously move our organizations forward are an integral part of this success and, therefore, are part of solving many of our society's pressing needs; the issues and challenges faced in enrollment management are often at the heart of it all.

Successful leadership in enrollment services certainly requires developing political skill, the capacity to exert influence throughout the institution in pursuit of enrollment management objectives. But while political skill is necessary, leadership also demands political will, the desire and

courage to be in the arena, to avoid being passive in the face of the overwhelming challenges we face, and to act politically to influence how intentions become reality. In organizations like colleges and universities, nothing happens unless someone pushes. The challenge we all face in enrollment management is how to push forward, how to solve the many problems facing our institutions, how to exercise the influence required to make things happen — and then having the will to do what it takes. Knowing how to get things done and then having the political will to do it is the key to successful leadership for enrollment services.

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