Motivation Matters: Using a Multidimensional Theoretical Framework to Assess What Enrollment Structures Reveal about Institutional Priorities

Scott Andrew Schulz, Ph.D.
Jerome A. Lucido, Ph.D.
Center for Enrollment Research, Policy, and Practice
University of Southern California

ASHE Conference
November 7, 2009
Vancouver, British Columbia

USC Center for Enrollment Research, Policy, and Practice

- Founded in 2007 at the University of Southern California
- Center Goals
  - Provide forums that allow scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to share their perspectives and further generate ideas that enhance our understanding of enrollment issues
  - Conduct and sponsor research
  - Expand knowledge and expertise within the enrollment management field
  - Serve as a central hub for information relating to enrollment issues

Providing Context

- Enrollment efforts have become more sophisticated in the last 30 years
- The rise of enrollment management as a profession is manifested in structural changes
- The percentage of institutions that report having a chief enrollment officer (CEnO) at the senior level has increased, with the majority of institutions reportedly having a CEnO

Purpose of the Study

- Why do some institutions centralize their enrollment operations while others do not?

- What is the motivation to centralize?

- What institutional priorities do these structural changes reveal?

- What barriers stand in the way to centralization when desired by enrollment professionals?

Theoretical Framework

- ## Resource Dependency Theory
  - Structural adaptation in response to external pressures to manage resource dependence
- ## Academic Capitalism Theory
  - Competition for resources and the infusion of market principles lead to structural changes to maximize resource access
- ## Institutional Theory
  - Structural change in response to isomorphic forces
- ## Organizational Culture
  - Can be a unifying or dividing force, leading to or standing in the way of structural change

Methods

- Interview participants were gathered using data from a 2007-08 salary survey of HR representatives at 3,800 institutions conducted by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR)
- Institutions self-identified themselves as having a Chief Enrollment Officer (CEnO), Chief Admissions Officer (CAdO), or both.

Methods

- Interviews of approximately one hour in length each were conducted in the spring of 2009
- Final set of interview participants (n=52) included in this analysis consisted of:
  - 19 CEnOs (out of 48 volunteers)
  - 17 CAdOs at institutions with CEnOs (out of 32 volunteers)
  - 16 CAdOs at institutions without CEnOs (out of 61 volunteers)
- Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, coded, and themes extracted for analysis

- Centralization to Pursue and Manage New Funding Sources
  - Shifts in dependency relations are leading public institutions to prioritize tuition revenue to a greater extent and reshape their structures accordingly
    - Many institutions see the need to centralize enrollment operations behind a chief enrollment officer
    - Many reported a supply-side approach to funding emerging

- Centralization to Compete for External Resources
    - Both public and private institutions are moving to centralize their enrollment systems so as to engage an increasingly competitive and changing environment for external resources
        - Restructuring to act more strategically
        - Centralization to internally maximize access to institutional resources
        - Coordination of enrollment units to enhance "customer service," consistent with a market ideology

- **Centralization for Legitimacy**
  - Centralization normalized by senior institutional leaders looking to mimic other institutions
  - Consultants serving as conduits for the spread of normative values
  - Events hosted by consulting firms and professional associations moving institutions to act similarly
  - A market-driven normative model is being virally spread to institutions by mobile senior leaders

- Resistance to Centralization
  - Institutional agents decentralize enrollment units following centralization efforts
  - Institutional agents keep centralization from taking place
    - Faculty
    - Localized senior leaders
    - Enrollment-related units
    - Chief admission officers

Discussion

- Expect to see continued centralization of enrollment functions
    - Institutional leaders are, for the most part, committed to centralizing enrollment units in pursuit of resources, to respond to the external environment, to follow institutional trends, and to fulfill their aspirations
    - Senior leaders continue to carry the model to new institutions
    - Consulting firms support centralization efforts
    - Many enrollment professionals promote a centralized model to ensure a voice at the senior leadership level, to compete for institutional resources, and to provide service to students
    - Enrollment units are being structured to respond to world economic and educational competition

- Additional questions:
  - Which structures or levels of centralization are most effective and to what ends?
    - To what extent does centralization enhance revenue generation *as well as* progress institutions toward their educational goals?
      - Our research highlighted resource generation as a primary motivation behind centralization efforts
      - To what extent is the shaping of a class, the organization of academic services to ensure student success, and the delivery of the curriculum to maximize student benefit being compromised or enhanced by organizational motivations to boost revenue?

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