Organizational Culture among Master's Colleges and Universities in the Upper Midwest

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Shrinking budgets and growing mission creep currently threaten the American higher education landscape. This situation is exacerbated by an increased push within academe to differentiate colleges and universities (Clark, 1989; Crow, 2007; Henderson, 2009) toward greater specialization and the use of branding as an attempt to achieve higher status (Morphew, 2002). Yet, such trends are being promulgated with little empirical support for their potential to benefit American higher education. An identification of how organizational culture manifests among master's colleges and universities could provide campus leadership with the relevant information to facilitate positive institutional change and growth among a section of higher education that educates a large proportion of the national population of students. By better understanding organizational culture among their campuses, administrators and faculty may better advocate for more relevant changes that ultimately benefit their students.

A Brief History

The study of organizational culture has become an area of growing inquiry over recent decades, with more than 4,600 articles having been published on the topic since 1980 (Hartnell, Ou, & Kinicki, 2011). Yet, there has been little consideration of organizational culture relevant to institutions of higher education. In his seminal article regarding organizational culture at colleges and universities, Tierney (1988) suggests that organizational culture can be conceptualized as the holistic sum of its parts:

> This internal dynamic has its roots in the history of the organization and derives its force from the values, processes, and goals held by those most intimately involved in the organization's workings. An organization's culture is reflected in what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it. It concerns decisions, actions, and communication both on an instrumental and a symbolic level. (p. 3)

Organizational culture, therefore, involves those automatic assumptions upon which members of an organization act relative to the purposes of that organization (Schein, 1986), and patterns and guides

behavioral expectations within an organization (Association for the Study of Higher Education, 2005).

In an earlier scholarly article, and apparently first (per Ramachandran, Chong, & Ismail, 2010), Pettigrew (1979) asserts a number of ideas concordant with Tierney (1988). Pettigrew suggests that organizational culture provides a conceptual framework by which members of an organization may interpret the dynamics of their workplace (Pettigrew, 1979). There also may be special importance associated with the symbols and rituals to the maintenance of an organizational culture. To paraphrase Pettigrew, individuals create culture, and culture guides the individuals within an organization through the relevant symbols (e.g., institutional logo) and rituals (e.g., procedures for tenure and promotion). Members of an organizational culture thus come to identify with the organization via norms of communication (Tierney, 1988).

Birnbaum (1988) extends this thinking to the concept of four institutional types manifest in higher education. According to Birnbaum, colleges and universities with a collegial culture are characterized by consensual decision-making. Alternatively, bureaucratic institutions manifest adherence to hierarchical organization with a focus on policies and procedures. Political institutions tend to be motivated by specific goals in the market landscape. Finally, colleges and universities with an anarchical culture tend toward *ad hoc* actions in response to arising opportunities (Birnbaum, 1988).

Culture versus Isomorphism

Significant cultural diversity exists among colleges and universities in the United States. Such institutional diversity manifests in distinct missions, the recruitment of specific types of students, and emphasis placed on undergraduate and/or graduate education (Henderson, 2007). Colleges and universities are affected further by public versus private control. Indeed, the landscape of higher education in the United States is notable for its institutional diversity. According to Morphew (2009), "institutional diversity, or the existence of many different kinds of colleges and universities within a specific higher education system, has long been recognized as a positive and unique attribute to the U.S. higher education system" (p. 243). Such diversity is often evinced in the values espoused explicitly or otherwise within institutional mission statements (Morphew & Hartley, 2006), and there appears to be a direct relationship between the size of a college or university and the prestige afforded that institution (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990). Various colleges and universities serve different populations of students for different purposes (Lowman, 2010).

Yet, there is also an increasingly common trend toward the homogenization of institutional mission among colleges and universities (Morphew, 2009). Morphew warns against the risk of such academic drift (i.e., mission creep) as a threat to institutional diversity: "A reasonable view of the growth in higher education systems during the past century would posit academic drift—defined as the tendency of colleges and universities to ape the programmatic offerings of the most prestigious—as the greatest threat to institutional diversity" (p. 246).

Changes to institutional mission are not inherently problematic (Lowman, 2010). However, the presence of isomorphic forces, those social forces that result from an increasingly homogeneous institutional environment across the landscape of higher education, may drive academic drift and thereby undermine the presence of such great diversity among colleges and universities within the United States (Morphew, 2009). These forces might motivate colleges and universities to seek higher marks on the "widely accepted scorecard for Harvard emulation" (Christensen & Eyring, 2011, p. 12) and thereby diminish the organizational diversity observed across the landscape of higher education in the United States (cf. CAFT, n.d.)

It is one thing to assert that a college or university manifests a specific type of culture (e.g., Obenchain, Johnson, & Dion, 2004), but quite another to assume that organizations tend to be internally homogeneous. Colleges and universities are not internally monolithic (Toma, Dubrow, & Hartley, 2005). Indeed, Silver (2003) argues against the very notion of organizational culture in higher education as a meaningful construct. Although this conclusion may be extreme, Silver's stance serves as a reminder that colleges and universities are complex organizations that are not easily categorized. What is therefore needed is a method with which the syncretic nature of organizational culture can be more meaningfully explored.

The Competing Values Framework

Organizational culture writ large is a complex phenomenon marked by ambiguity (Cameron & Quinn, 1999, 2006, 2011). Nonetheless, such complexity can be made more responsive to empirical investigation through the categorization of relevant variables in a typology. Such a typology, or concept map, may aid discovery by functioning as a model of organizational culture so long as the types are recognized as incomplete models of reality. When properly recognized as incomplete representations of reality, typologies can aid in creating "pictures of the data" (Holland, 1996, p. 73) regarding organizational culture at colleges and universities. Indeed, the behavioral and social sciences widely recognize

the value of typologies. They have been utilized effectively to elucidate the underlying factors of human personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992), occupational preference as a trait (Holland, 1996), and the factors of effective leadership (Avolio & Bass, 2004), among other areas of inquiry.

In 1983, Quinn and Rohrbaugh proposed the competing values framework (CVF). Based on an analysis of rationally selected items (i.e., those items identified as relevant from the extant literature by recognized leaders in the field), Quinn and Rohrbaugh find that a two-dimensional typology appears to meaningfully identify characteristics of high salience to organizational culture. Quinn and Rohrbaugh specifically identify that organizational culture can be understood by plotting perceptions of an organization's structure (flexible versus controlled) against its focus (internal versus external). The resultant two-dimensional plot yields four organizational culture types congruent with the earlier work of Birnbaum: (a) clan, (b) adhocracy, (c) market, and (d) hierarchy. These competing values of structure and focus can be understood as portraying alternative examples of potentially effective organizational cultures.

	Internal Focus	External Focus
Low Structure	Clan	Adhocracy
High Structure	Hierarchy	Market

Figure 1. Competing Values Framework (adapted from Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983)

Per Cameron and Quinn (1999, 2006, 2011), each of the four organizational culture types (i.e., clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchy) delineated by the CVF can be meaningfully defined. According to Cameron and Quinn, a clan culture is defined as:

> A very friendly place to work where people share a lot of themselves. It is like an extended family. The leaders, or head of the organization, are considered to be mentors and, maybe even, parent figures. The organization is held together by loyalty or tradition. Commitment is high. The organization emphasizes the long-term benefit of human resource development and attaches great importance to cohesion and morale. Success is defined in terms of sensitivity to customers and concern for people. The organization places a premium on teamwork, participation, and consensus. (p. 75)

Alternatively, an adhocracy culture is defined as:

> A dynamic, entrepreneurial, and creative place to work. People stick their necks out and take risks. The leaders are considered to be innovators and risk takers. The glue that holds the organization together is commitment to experimentation and innova-

tion. The emphasis is on being on the leading edge. The organization's long-term emphasis is on growth and acquiring new resources. Success means gaining unique and new products or services. Being a product or service leader is important. The organization encourages individual initiative and freedom. (p. 75)

Cameron and Quinn define a market culture as:

A results-oriented organization. The major concern is getting the job done. People are competitive and goal oriented. The leaders are hard drivers, producers, and competitors. They are tough and demanding. The glue that holds the organization together is an emphasis on winning. Reputation and success are common concerns. The long-term focus is on competitive actions and achievement of measurable goals and targets. Success is defined in terms of market share and penetration. Competitive pricing and market leadership are important. The organizational style is hard-driving competitiveness. (p. 75)

Finally, a hierarchy culture is defined as:

A very formalized and structured place to work. Procedures govern what people do. The leaders pride themselves on being good coordinators and organizers, who are efficiency-minded. Maintaining a smoothly running organization is most critical. Formal rules and policies hold the organization together. The long-term concern is on stability and performance with efficient, smooth operations. Success is defined in terms of dependable delivery, smooth scheduling, and low cost. The management of employees is concerned with secure employment and predictability. (p. 75)

The CVF has been applied with success to the arena of higher education. Obenchain, Johnson, and Dion (2004) utilize the CVF to meaningfully classify Christian colleges and universities based on their dominant organizational culture types. Broader evidence in support of the validity of the four organizational culture types identified by the CVF was more recently demonstrated in the meta-analysis by Hartnell, Ou, and Kinicki (2011). They find the internal structure of the CVF to be coherent across data from 84 previous studies. Intriguingly, Hartnell, Ou, and Kinicki also find positive associations among all four organizational culture types. This suggests that the organizational values actually may be of a more complementary nature. Similarly, Kalliath, Bluedorn, and Gillespie (1999) utilize the CVF among managers of a multi-hospital setting. Their results mirror those of Hartnell, Ou, and Kinicki of positive correlations among the four organizational culture types and support the four-factor structure of the model espoused by Quinn & Rohrbaugh.

Hypothesis

The trend toward organizational isomorphism among colleges and universities may risk diluting the institutional diversity for which American higher education is known (Morphew, 2009) and may be antithetical to the very purposes of higher education. Perhaps colleges and universities should be less concerned about the matter of status (Henderson, 2009; Toma, 2008) and more focused on their educational missions by guiding students to "be more concerned about the fit between the institution and their own interests and abilities than about the prestige of an institution" (Altbach, 2012, p. 31). As applied to master's colleges and universities, an understanding of how organizational culture manifests across campuses could provide an empirical rationale to question the tacit acceptance among many colleges and universities of climbing the Carnegie ladder (Christensen & Eyring, 2011, p. 11-12) and of the supremacy of a research culture (Eddy & Hart, 2012). As Altbach observes, "not all universities are competing with Harvard and Berkeley" (p. 31).

Toward this end, Crow (2007) argue that state-funded universities must overcome what he perceives as the restraint of government oversight. Such caution is representative of the mission creep observed among many master's colleges and universities across the nation. These institutions ostensibly attempt to balance the exigencies of state funding against attempts to attain greater institutional recognition. Thus, master's colleges and universities may be especially likely to seek niches in the United States higher education landscape as they attempt to market themselves as unique institutions (see Lowman, 2010; Morphew, 2009). It, therefore, was hypothesized that master's colleges and universities would tend to manifest adhocracy or hierarchy cultures.

Method

Subjects. Subjects for the present study were recruited among academic deans from all not-for-profit master's colleges and universities in four states of the Upper Midwest (i.e., Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Wisconsin) as identified via the Carnegie classification (CFAT, n.d.). Although a focus specifically on public master's colleges and universities (i.e., state comprehensive universities) would have been ideal, the demographic reality of the Upper Midwest necessitated the inclusion of the comparable private institutions in order to obtain a sample size that allowed for meaningful statistical analysis of the results. As campus leaders, academic deans have been defined as "administrators who [owe] their allegiance to the faculty, curriculum, students, and institution in equal measure" (DeMillo, 2011, p. 95). They are the individuals who "deal with exceptions" (Birnbaum, 1989, p. 246) and must address not merely what is functional but that which is dys-

functional on campus (Birnbaum, 1989). Academic deans, by virtue of their position, maintain a unique ability to apperceive an institution of higher education more holistically than either faculty or chief academic officers.

The sample resulted in 23 academic deans representing 20 master's colleges and universities. The genders within the sample were equally represented (11 males, 11 females, 1 did not indicate gender). Academic deans from tribal colleges and for-profit colleges and universities were excluded due to potentially significant differences in organizational culture or governance at their campuses. The typical subject had occupied his or her current position as academic dean for an average of 4.78 years (range: 1–16 years) and had been at the same institution for an average of 11.74 years (range: 2–28 years). All subjects were treated in accord with the ethical guidelines of the American Educational Research Association (2011) and the American Psychological Association (2002).

Institutional Location	Academic Deans		Institutions	
	n	%	*n*	%
Iowa	4	17.4	3	15.0
Minnesota	11	47.8	9	45.0
North Dakota	2	8.7	2	10.0
Wisconsin	6	26.1	6	30.0
Totals	23		20	

Table 1. Subject and Institutional Demographics

Measures. Subjects were requested to complete an online survey confidentially administered via Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com). Subjects were presented with a series of demographic items and Cameron and Quinn's (1999, 2006, 2011) Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI). The OCAI is a validated and widely used measure of organizational culture (Cameron & Quinn, 1999, 2006, 2011; Smart, Kuh, & Tierney, 1997; Kalliath, Bluedorn, & Gillespie, 1999; Obenchain, Johnson, & Dion, 2004; Fralinger & Olson, 2007; Ferreira & Hill, 2008; Ramachandran, Chong, & Ismail, 2010; Aldhuwaihi, Shee, & Stanton, 2011; Hartnell, Ou, & Kinicki, 2011) designed to identify subjects' perceptions of the dominant culture at their organizations. The instrument is organized into Now and Preferred sections. The Now section of the OCAI comprises six items that require subjects to rate their institutions along six organizational dimensions: (a) dominant characteristics, (b) organizational leadership, (c) management of employees, (d) organizational glue, (e) strategic emphasis, and (f) criteria of success. The subsequent Preferred section of the instrument requires subjects to respond to the same six items as before, but by indicating how they would like their organization to function five years into the future.

These items allow subjects to share their cultural preferences and thus provide potential insight for the leadership at their institutions.

Procedure. Data were analyzed via SPSS v22, with the demographic data first explored to identify relevant sample characteristics. Responses from academic deans to the Now section of the OCAI were utilized to test the hypothesis regarding the expectation of a dominant market culture or hierarchy culture among master's colleges and universities. Mean scores for each of the four organizational culture types were identified, and a chi-squared goodness-of-fit test was computed to determine whether there existed a significant difference across organizational culture types among master's colleges and universities (i.e., are market cultures significantly most likely among them?).

Finally, academic deans' responses to the Preferred section of the OCAI were analyzed to identify congruence between current perceptions and desired direction of organizational culture type among master's colleges and universities. Similar to the analysis of the Now responses, mean scores for each of the four preferred organizational culture types were identified. In other words, subjects were asked to rate how they would like their colleges and universities to culturally function five years hence. A chi-squared goodness-of-fit test was computed to determine whether there existed a significant difference across preferred organizational culture types among master's colleges and universities (i.e., are clan cultures significantly preferred among them?).

Results. Based on the literature, it was hypothesized that master's colleges and universities would tend to manifest market or hierarchy cultures. Although academic deans at master's colleges and universities did indicate that a hierarchy culture was common at many institutions, a clan culture was indicated to be predominant (M_{clan} = 35.72, SD_{clan} = 8.79; $M_{adhocracy}$ = 20.87, $SD_{adhocracy}$ = 9.24; M_{market} = 17.39, SD_{market} = 7.06; $M_{hierarchy}$ = 26.01, $SD_{hierarchy}$ = 11.25). However, the difference was nonsignificant, $X^2(3, N = 23) = 7.64$, $p > .05$, ns.

In addition to requiring subjects to rate their perceptions of their campus culture by ranking the extent to which they perceive clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchy cultures as present on their campuses, academic deans were also asked how they would prefer their colleges and universities to culturally function five years hence. Contrary to the somewhat ambiguous finding regarding perceptions of current culture on their campuses, the academic deans from master's colleges and universities indicated a statistically significant preference for a clan culture (M_{clan} = 37.39, SD_{clan} = 11.59; $M_{adhocracy}$ = 27.83, $SD_{adhocracy}$ = 6.44; M_{market} = 18.51, SD_{market} = 9.69; $M_{hierarchy}$ = 16.27, $SD_{hierarchy}$ = 6.45; $X^2(3, N = 23) = 11.19$, $p < .02$) to manifest on their campuses in the future.
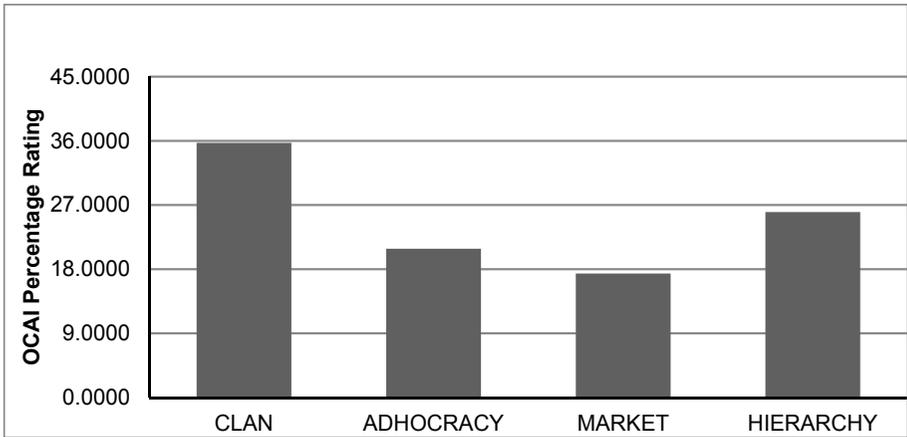
Figure 2. Bar chart of culture type among master's colleges and universities. Bars represent mean OCAI percentage ratings by academic deans for each culture type. No significant difference among culture types was found.
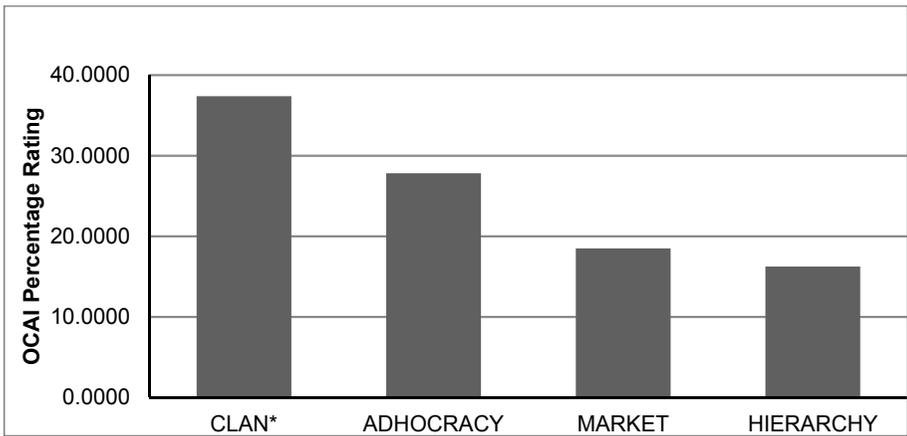

Figure 3. Bar chart of preferred culture type by institutional type. Bars represent mean OCAI percentage ratings by academic deans for each culture type. Asterisk indicates p<.05.

Discussion

The present landscape of American higher education features an array of organizational cultures that provide a range of opportunities for students (Morphew, 2002). Evidence suggests that different types of colleges and universities may manifest notable differences in organizational culture and decision-making (Tierney, 2008). Yet, there is concern regarding the potential for shrinking budgets and growing mission creep to render the landscape as organizationally isomorphic (Morphew, 2009). Henderson (2009) and Toma (2008) recommend that institutions of higher education might more intentionally focus their

educational missions to better align with the needs of their students and geographic regions and thereby increase diversity even further. Cognizant of this seemingly diverse landscape, the present study sought to examine the organizational culture among master's colleges and universities in the Upper Midwest.

Academic deans indicated that no one specific culture type was typical among master's colleges and universities. However, these same academic deans strongly endorsed a preference for a clan culture to predominate among their campuses in the future. The implication of this discovery is potentially significant. By demonstrating a desire among academic deans to work within a clan culture on campus, those leaders may be guided to better advocate for meaningful cultural change on their campuses. It may be time for campus leaders at master's colleges and universities to invest the time and effort to work with their faculty, staff, and students to understand their perceptions of campus culture. The resulting data could assist academic deans and their executive leadership to explore the potential benefits of cultural change or maintenance in the direction of a clan culture, thereby facilitating the intentional growth of the organization toward one that is "a very friendly place to work … like an extended family … held together by loyalty or tradition" (Cameron & Quinn, 1999, 2006, 2011, p. 75).

This discovery, although preliminary, begins to shed empirical light on the phenomenon of organizational culture among master's colleges and universities. Nonetheless, the sample size was suboptimal and generalization of the findings therefore must be restricted. The selection of academic deans as subjects also may have proven suboptimal to truly capture the essence of the organizational cultures manifest among the master's colleges and universities. Perhaps surveying other stakeholders (e.g., faculty or students) would have yielded alternative insight into the cultural status of American higher education.

With these caveats in mind, it is recommended that a national sample of academic deans or other stakeholders across master's colleges and universities be surveyed regarding their perceptions of current, and desires for future, organizational culture on their campuses. The American landscape of higher education currently is experiencing rapid growth among for-profit institutions and challenges to faculty unionization. A greater recognition of the interpersonal synergies that may occur on campus within a clan culture might be an important consideration to guide change that will be beneficial to faculty, staff, and students across the many master's colleges and universities among the landscape of American higher education.

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