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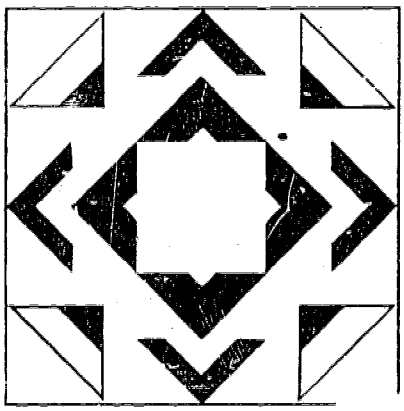
ABSTRACT

This paper is one in a publication series containing general knowledge which can help colleges and universities in the various phases of developing comprehensive cooperative education programs (see note). It addresses how to help smooth the way for major institutional change by fostering an atmosphere of cooperation and support for the project. The first section presents six reasons why an institution might wish to consider an optimal satisficing and consensus building (OSCB) approach to planning and implementing a cooperative education program. (Using such an approach, consensus could be reached on the central institutional objective while reasonably satisfying special interest objectives of individuals and groups--objectives not directly conducive to optimizing that central objective.) Other sections discuss the philosophical approaches toward OSCB, the various communication and decision processes that an institution can undertake in order to develop OSCB, and six organizational structural vehicles for OSCB. (YLB)

Developing A Comprehensive Cooperative Education Program:
BUILDING A CONSENSUS



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Preface

A key step in the development of a large scale cooperative education program is for an institution to foster an atmosphere of cooperation and support for the project. Without such an environment, the implementation process may be exceedingly difficult, fraught with resistance, delays, and roadblocks.

The following publication addresses how to help smooth the way for major institutional change. Often, being sensitive to the needs of others is the clue. Persons charged with orchestrating the change process must listen to the concerns of colleagues who may be affected and must strive to address these concerns. In short, the special interests of groups or individuals must be met, and a consensus must be reached. This may mean altering plans or making compromises, but the removal of obstacles is frequently well worth the price.

There is no formula for building a consensus, since this can only be achieved through open communication and honest efforts at problem solving. However, what can be shared is the importance of this step in the transition process and some of the essential factors in developing an atmosphere that is receptive to change.

In the paper on strategic planning stages in moving toward comprehensive cooperative higher education programs, four stages were identified and discussed. In stage one, the Chief Executive Officer and the institutional constituencies made the key decision that a comprehensive cooperative education program is both feasible for the institution and consistent with the institution's fundamental mission.

In this stage, the following stages, and through the implementation process, it is often important that individuals and groups reach consensus on the decision to develop comprehensive cooperative education programs. In order to reach consensus on this central institutional objective, it is often very important that consensus also be reached on how to reasonably satisfy the special interest objectives of individuals and groups, although these may not be directly conducive to optimizing the institution's central objective. These individuals and groups with special interests may or may not have participated in the strategic decision to move toward a cooperative education program.

This need to build consensus on meeting the institution's objective and on achieving a reasonable satisfaction of individuals' and groups' special interest goals is not peculiar to higher education institutions.

In 1979 Herbert Simon, an American management scientist, received the first Nobel prize in economics given for work in management. He was awarded the Nobel prize for his theory, originally proposed in the mid-1940s, that managers neither maximize nor optimize, but most of their decisions, "satisfice." That is, very often managers try to find the minimum reasonable results rather than the optimum or maximal results.[1]

This is frequently done out of political necessity. That is, there are key groups and individuals within and without the institution who have special interest objectives that often have little to do with the institution's central objective. Managers must attempt to reasonably satisfy these special interests in exchange for reaching an agreement on optimizing the central objective of the institution.

Peter Drucker, in his 1980 **Managing in Turbulent Times**, states the principle quite forcefully and goes somewhat further. Are there implications for accelerated conversion to cooperative education programs in what Drucker has to say? He explains as follows:

> As all institutions become politicized in a pluralist society of organizations, managers will have to learn first to think through the needs and expectations of their constituencies . . . It would, of course, be much easier and probably in the end socially more productive if the single-purpose institution — whether business, hospital, or university — could concentrate on its own job, flatly rejecting demands to satisfy other social needs as illegitimate and as distractions from its competence, its mission, and its function. . . . At the same time, it is no longer adequate to say: 'We will stick to doing what we know how to do and resist demands to concern ourselves with anything else.' This may be the most intelligent attitude, but it can no longer prevail. Today's post-industrial society is a pluralist society which has to demand from its institutions that they take responsibility beyond their own specific mission. . . . But a manager, whether of a business, a hospital, a university, has to think through the impacts of the decision he does make, for he is always responsible for his impacts. And then he needs to think through what the constituencies are that can effectively veto and block his decisions, and what their minimum expectations and needs should be. This is bound to induce a certain schizophrenia. When it comes to the performance of the primary task of an institution — whether economic goods and services in the case of the business, health care in that of the hospital, or scholarship and higher education in that of the university — the rule is to optimize. There, managers have to base their decisions on what is right rather than on what is acceptable. But in dealing with the constituencies outside and beyond this narrow definition of the primary task, managers have to think politically — in terms of the minimum needed to placate and appease and keep quiet constituent groups that otherwise might use their power of veto. Managers cannot be politicians. They cannot confine themselves to 'satisficing' decisions. But they also cannot be

concerned only with optimization in the central area of performance of their institution. They have to balance both approaches in one continuous decision making process.

Drucker states the case quite strongly. While the extremity of his position may not be applicable in the case of planning and implementing the accelerated adoption of large scale cooperative education programs, there are some important principles to be learned concerning consensus building, optimizing, and satisfying special interests. Let us consider whether there are good reasons for considering a consensus building approach to strategic planning and the accelerated adoption of comprehensive cooperative education programs.

Reasons for Considering a Consensus Building Approach

1. The quality of the strategic plan for meeting the organization's central objective can be improved when the contributors to the development of this strategic plan do not have to worry about their special interest goals.

   A new strategic plan can threaten special interest goals and may generate fears that are unfounded. For example, a common special interest of most faculty, administrators, and staff is job security. With the decision to move toward cooperative education some faculty, administrators, and staff may fear that the security of their jobs is being threatened. The fear may be based on a real threat to a job or it may be imagined. But whether the fear is based on a real or imagined condition, the fear itself is real.

   If fear can be substantially reduced, people will not be as hesitant to contribute to a high quality strategic plan. If they are not afraid of losing their jobs, they can devote their creative energies to developing and implementing a plan that is in the best interests of the institution. Another example could be the amount of resources devoted to any particular program. Other examples include how a particular individual's or group's influence might be affected by an organizational change. There are many such examples. To the extent that the key contributors to the strategic plan need not worry about their special interest goals, they can direct their energies toward designing a quality implementation plan.

   The above is a reason for considering a consensus building and optimal satisficing approach to strategic planning. It does not require that the special interests of all key individual and group contributors be satisfied, but it does suggest that when they CAN be reasonably satisfied, the consensus-building process can be much easier. This will of course, depend on the particular situation, on how many special interests are desirable, and on how many can be reasonably satisfied.

2. The motivation of individuals and groups to cooperate with the planning and implementation of a move toward cooperative education can be increased in exchange for some reasonable satisfaction of special interest goals. The point discussed above dealt with the key contributors to the strategic plan to move toward cooperative education. While it is very important to create the conditions where individuals can devote their energies toward a high quality plan, there are also many others who are important to the success of the plan even if they do not contribute directly toward its development.

   It is physically very difficult in large organizations for a large number of

people to participate in developing strategic plans. Yet, the cooperation of many is necessary in order to successfully implement such plans. Even if the plan is very good, it can fail if the people required to make it work are not well motivated.

A significant threat to motivation is the fear that special interests such as job security, program security, personal influence, etc. will be jeopardized by change. If people think that what is important to them will be threatened by change, they tend to resist such change. In order to develop the motivation required to effectively implement change, it may be important to satisfy special interest goals to the extent that this is possible.

3. If the administration and other developers of the strategic plan need the help or the non-opposition of key individuals or groups but do not have the power or cannot use their power to require help or non-opposition, then consensus building and optimal satisficing may be essential.

   In many institutions there are key individuals and groups that possess power to block change or make change possible. The group that developed the plan to adopt cooperative education may need their help or at least their non-opposition. Even if the group developing the plan could use its greater power to order cooperation, the potential ensuing battle might do such damage to morale and motivation as to seriously damage the likelihood of successful implementation.

   For example, there may be a few key trustees, deans, faculty members, program heads, faculty senate members, student groups, alumni groups, etc. with sufficient influence that their help or non-opposition is crucial to the success of the cooperative education plan. Under such circumstances, it may be necessary to insure that their concerns be satisfied in exchange for their cooperation or their lack of opposition.

4. Simultaneous coordination and flexible decentralization may require efforts towards optimal satisficing and consensus building. In many large organizations, it has been found that in order to have flexibility, decentralized decision making, and planning this is essential. At the same time, in order for an institution to have a central reason for being and a central strategic plan, some coordination is also important.

   Many of our larger colleges and universities operate within such a model. For example, there is a president's or chancellor's office that coordinates planning for the university, but each of the several colleges within the university is also responsible for developing and implementing strategic plans that are consistent with the overall strategic plan of the institution.

   In order to have a meaningful overall strategic plan, the parts must agree to and cooperate with the plan for the whole. At the same time the decentralized parts, e.g. colleges within a university, have their own responsibilities and needs for resources. To generate the cooperation required for the success of the overall plan, it is frequently necessary to insure that the special objectives of the decentralized parts are not sacrificed too much in the larger plan.

   If the special goals of the decentralized parts are not adequately satisfied, those with the responsibility for working toward the achievement of these goals may be forced to oppose the overall plan in order to achieve the special objectives for which they are responsible. Therefore, reasonable satisfaction of the decentralized parts' special objectives may be a necessary condition for cooperation and non-opposition to the overall central objective of developing a comprehensive cooperative education program.

For example, a liberal arts dean may not appreciate the benefits of cooperative education as much as a business college dean or an engineering college dean. The liberal arts dean has the responsibility for achieving the objectives of that college, and he or she may be skeptical about the success of a business or engineering cooperative program in a liberal arts college. In order to insure that the dean is cooperative and unopposed to an allocation of resources for the development of such programs, it may be necessary to see that his or her own resource requirements are met in a reasonable manner.

5. Where speed in implementing decisions is important, as in the case of the accelerated implementation of large scale cooperative education programs, decisions based on concensus building can be implemented swiftly because the knowledge required to implement them has been shared and the resistance educed.

One of the observations about differences between Japanese and American management systems is that while the United States business institutions appear to be able to make strategic decisions faster than the Japanese, the Japanese are able to implement the decisions faster. To the extent that this general observation is true, part of the reason for the difference has to do with consensus building. It takes the Japanese longer to make strategic decisions because they spend a great deal of time considering strategic decisions with many managers and layers of management while many American strategic decisions are made by top management with relatively little consensus building consultation. The Japanese appear to be able to implement strategic decisions relatively faster than American business organizations because by the time the organization makes a strategic decision, many people understand it and agree that it should be done.

The strategic decision is usually well understood because it has been discussed thoroughly in the consensus building and decision making processes. During this thorough discussion, agreement is reached by many managers and layers of management. Consequently, time does not have to be spent informing managers about the decision and persuading and motivating them to accept and implement it. Thus the implementation process is hastened.[3]

In the case of accelerated conversion to large scale cooperative education programs, speed is important. Therefore, building a consensus before making the strategic decision is probably also important.

While speed is important, it is also difficult to attain because of the many significant changes that higher education institutions must make in adopting comprehensive cooperative education programs. Generally, the greater the changes required, the more education and persuasion needed. Therefore, consensus building should help speed the implementation of the strategic decision.

6. In some cases, law may require consensus decision making, and because of such legal constraints, the planning group may have to exchange the satisfaction of some special interest goals in order to generate the consensus required to optimize the institution's central objective of adopting a large scale cooperative program. The legal constraints may come from both internal and nce requirements. Examples of internal governance require- pproval of the change by the faculty sena he boar amples of external legal constraints could be union ontracts as well as state laws concerning higher education planning. Union contracts may have sections on "changes in working conditions" that need to be agreed upon

formally by the administration and various faculty and staff unions before they can be implemented. State law may require legislatures to formally approve any significant changes in academic programs in state colleges and universities. Where colleges and universities are licensed, even independent colleges and universities may require state legislative or state board of higher education approval.[4] Since the above types of laws may require consensus decision making, it may also be required to build consensus among the legally protected groups about the exchange of special interest goals for the optimization of the institution's central objective.

In the above discussion, six reasons have been presented concerning why an institution might wish to consider an optimal satisficing consenus building approach to planning and implementing a cooperative education program. While it may be unlikely that any single institution would have all six conditions that would suggest a need for the abovementioned approach, it is also unlikely that an institution would not have any of the six conditions apply. Therefore, this approach should probably be seriously considered by most institutions engaging in or considering the adoption of a comprehensive cooperative education program.

Philosophical Approaches to Optimal Satisficing and Consensus Building

Since it is likely that many institutions should consider optimal satisficing and consensus building (OSCB), it may also be important to consider the spirit or philosophy with which OSCB can be approached. There are at least three different rationales.

1. A higher education institution could engage in OSCB because it considers it unfortunately necessary in some circumstances.

2. A higher education institution could engage in OSCB because it considers it a necessary fact of modern life that does not have significant value consideration.

3. A higher education institution could engage in OSCB because it considers OSCB a desirable approach to strategic planning.

   One may think that the spirit with which one engages in a management activity is unimportant, but if we recognize that management is a behavioral, humanistic, and political process as well as a scientific process, then the choice of an approach becomes very important.

A disadvantage of the first approach is that it may be obvious to those with whom we are trying to build a consensus that management's heart is not in it. If these people perceive that management does not think very highly of the process, it is unlikely that trust can be established. Trust is important for informal, nonlegal agreements, and it is important that all those concerned maintain the consensus. It does little good to build a consensus one day and have it dissolve the next when things get difficult. Good will and trust are very important in difficult times and when large changes are made, these stressful times often occur.

The second approach, which considers OSCB a necessary fact of modern life without significant value considerations, can produce essentially the same positive results as the third approach in many circumstances. This appears to be the approach that Drucker advocates. A potential disadvantage of this necessary-fact-of-life approach, compared to considering OSCB a desirable method, is that in difficult times it may be somewhat inferior.

It may be inferior in the sense that if the people we are dealing with think of us purely as pragmatists, they may also conclude that later if it is pragmatic for us to break the consensus we will do so. Then they may be less willing to stay with the consensus or to believe that we have really reached a consensus at all. Also, people tend to perform more effectively when doing the things that they believe in. In general, it is also more satisfying to engage in difficult activities that we believe in than in difficult activities that we do not believe in. This does not mean that we should play mental games such as telling ourselves to temporarily believe in what we are doing so that we can be more effective at it.

An advantage of the third approach, which considers OSCB a desirable method for strategic planning and implementation, is that it can help produce the opposite effect of the first approach. If people sense that we really believe in the consensus process as a principle, not just as a temporary convenience, they are likely to trust us to keep our agreements and obligations. As faith and trust are increased, they can help hold the consensus together during the difficult periods that can be expected. The approach we take to OSCB can raise important questions of value and philosophy.

Assuming now that we consider OSCB a worthwhile approach for at least one of the above six reasons and that we have selected one of the three approaches, we still must examine how to implement OSCB.

Managing and operationalizing OSCB involves both communication and decision processes and organizational structural vehicles.

Communication and Decision Processes In OSCB

1. Identify the key groups and individuals that are important for the accelerated conversion to a comprehensive cooperative education program. In most cases, these groups would probably include: (1) program administrators such as deans, department chairs, research directors, athletic directors, and functional administrators in admissions, financial aid, housing, etc.; (2) governance leaders and influential faculty involved in the planning process; (3) general faculty; (4) students and student leaders; (5) alumni and alumni leaders; (6) actual and potential cooperative employers; (7) government and other funding organizations; (8) trustees; etc. These are the types of groups and individuals that can help or hinder the planning and implementation process. They should be identified by name as well as by category.

2. Discuss and identify the special interest goals of key groups and individuals. The above groups or individuals may have special interest goals that are threatened or perceived to be threatened by the move toward cooperative education. Examples of such real and [illegible] threats are: (1) academic program security; (2) nonac[illegible]curity; (3) job security; (4) loss of personal status and in[illegible] academic quality; (6) "collegiate" nonacademic social life; (7) soc[illegible] life with persons from "appropriate" socioeconomic classes; (8) quality level of cooperative jobs; (9) "trade school" versus "real university" (10) low level of career opportunities; etc. The above types of issues vary according to their degree of concern with special interest versus general interest goals and the extent to which the issues are real or imaginary.

   It is important to identify which individuals and groups are concerned about the various types of issues. To the extent that fears about the above issues are unfounded there is an important communicating job to be done. Confidence must be built by explaining that the fears are not warranted. When there is some

basis for concern over certain issues, some sort of guarantees or promises may have to be made. Even if there is very little basis for fear on a particular issue, a guarantee or a promise may be able to reduce the fear and build the consensus necessary to advance the move to cooperative education.

In the process of discussing such matters it should be made clear that either the fears are exaggerated or that steps will be taken to reasonably satisfy the particular interests. The process of discussion will also demonstrate that the planning group is sensitive to the interests of others and that it will respond reasonably rather than forcing through a plan.

3. Identify and discuss how the special interest goals do and do not positively overlap with the organization's central objective. Some special interest goals will be fostered by the move toward cooperative education. It is generally useful to build from areas of mutual interest and agreement rather than only concentrating on differences. The "half full" rather than "half empty" attitude toward change is likely to produce more cooperation and enthusiasm.

   It is also possible to develop allies among those whose special interests will be particularly benefited by the change to cooperative education. This process can also make it clearer which special interests of which individuals and groups must receive particular consideration in order to insure a reasonable level of satisfaction with change toward cooperative education.

   For example, some sports may receive increased student attention because they conveniently fit into the cooperative calendar. Individuals and groups interested in these sports may be supporters of the change. On the other hand, there may be other sports that will conflict with the cooperative calendar. This concern will have to be identified and addressed.

   Similarly, there may be some academic programs in which the quality of students is likely to improve through the addition of cooperative education, whereas in others the reverse may be possible. Both need to be identified and discussed in terms of any special arrangements that may have to be made to reasonably satisfy different interests.

4. Discuss, evaluate, and negotiate the progress towards the institution's central objective of developing a comprehensive cooperative education program. Once the important individuals and groups with special interests have been identified, their interests recognized, and it has been determined which do and do not positively overlap with the central objective, then the nature of the positive and negative overlaps must to be discussed, evaluated, and negotiated.

   The positive and negative overlaps need to be discussed in order to determine areas of positive negotiation and to demonstrate sensitivity and concern. They also must be evaluated. It is important to determine which special interests can be reasonably satisfied without seriously threatening the achievement of the central objective. It is possible that some special interests cannot be satisfied, but it is also possible that some accommodations can be made. Additionally, it is possible that the satisfaction of some special interests can adequately compensate for losses in other areas. In some situations, for example, if the jobs of faculty can be guaranteed in and through the change to cooperative education, some faculty may be willing to agree to the reduction or closing of some facilities and programs in order to redirect resources toward cooperative education. Similarly, an expansion of resources for certain academic or sports programs may be a satisfactory exchange for a lack of expansion or a reduction in others.

The above are the communication and decision processes that an institution can undertake in order to develop OSCB. There are also some organizational structural vehicles that can be useful in OSCB.

Organizational Structural Vehicles For Optimal Satisficing and Consensus Building

1. **INDIVIDUAL COMMUNICATIONS:** This type of communication activity can be engaged in formally or informally. Informally, the members of the planning group can communicate with key individuals and groups in the manner described in the previous section on communications and decision processes. In addition, these individual communications can be formalized. For example, lists of the key individuals and groups could be constructed and members of the planning group might be assigned to communicate with all such groups and individuals. The advantage of this approach is that there is the opportunity to respond directly to each special interest. In this manner, concern is demonstrated.

2. **DISCUSSION BODIES:** These bodies are another vehicle for OSCB, and they can take many forms. They can be information sessions or sessions where opinions and concerns are solicited. They can also be exploratory sessions where the possibility and the ramifications of a cooperative education program are discussed. Such discussions might be held with the normally constituted bodies such as departments, faculty senates, staff meetings, etc. or they could be held with special bodies convened for the purpose of discussing the ramifications of cooperative education. A potential advantage of this form compared to individual communications is that it can reach more people at one time and with fewer resources. However, a disadvantage is that it can risk a momentum building against cooperative education possibly based on fear. Within the support of the group, some people may be more willing to express their fears as their main position and thus they oppose the program without having had the opportunity for the type of dialogue that can occur in more individualized forms of communications.

3. **ADVISORY BODIES:** In many higher education institutions there are elaborate committee and governance structures that serve in an advisory capacity to the administration. To the extent that these bodies, such as faculty senates, dean's advisory committees, and chancellor's and president's advisory boards, are representative of key groups and individuals, then they can add legitimacy and weight to the desired consensus. The risk is that the opposite may occur and the planning group may find itself in the very difficult position of trying to overturn or ignore the advice that it receives. However, if the central objective to move toward cooperative education makes sense, if the special interest objectives are reasonably satisfied, and if the communications with individuals and with discussion groups have been effective, negative advisory recommendations should be unlikely. If the advisory groups can endorse the plan to develop a cooperative education program, much progress can be made toward building a consensus and achieving the institution's central objective.

4. **INFORMAL CONSULTANT FACTFINDING AND MEDIATION:** One of the reasons for resistance to change is that the people who are resisting may not have

confidence that the people suggesting the change are competent or objective. Informal consultant factfinding and mediation can be helpful in this situation. For example, the consultant can be paid by the administration but can be selected by, report to, or can be removed by a group that is particularly worried about the change. The informal consultant factfinder or mediator can provide the objectivity and expertise that various groups may feel the administration does not have. The risk here is that the informal factfinder or mediator could come to a conclusion different from the administration's concerning the desirability of moving toward cooperative education. However, if the strategic plan to move toward cooperative education is well thought out and the consultant is competent, this should not be a problem.[5]

5. **FORMAL COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, FACTFINDING, MEDIATION AND ARBITRATION:** In those situations where higher education institutions are highly unionized and where there are contract provisions that prohibit or restrict the administration from making unilateral "changes in working conditions," it may be necessary to work through the formal labor relations structure. In the collective bargaining process, the administration bargains with the unions concerning the acceptance of the central objective of developing a comprehensive cooperative education program. Acceptance would be negotiated in exchange for the reasonable satisfaction of the union's objective. If agreement cannot be reached, formal mediation may be utilized in order to bring the administration and its position into closer harmony with the unions and their special interests. If an agreement still cannot be reached, both sides may agree to submit the areas of dispute to mutually selected arbitrators for a decision. Before the arbitration begins, each party would agree to accept whatever decision the arbitrator makes. This process has the standard advantages and disadvantages of normal labor relations in higher education. An additional consideration is that the labor relations process in the United States is usually not directly involved in strategic decision making. The personnel and the systems involved may not be sufficiently appropriate for this type of participative decision making.

   Even if formal labor relations is a fact of life at a particular institution, the individual communications, the discussion bodies, advisory bodies, and informal factfinding and mediation efforts can go a long way in reducing the probability of the difficult and protracted conflicts that sometimes result in formal labor relations. These mechanisms have been found to reduce labor conflicts in other areas such as in business as well as in higher education institutions.[6]

6. **REPRESENTATIVE DECISION MAKING BODIES:** In some higher education institutions, governance bodies such as faculty senates and college or university assemblies have the formal authority to make decisions. In such a situation, the strategic decision to develop cooperative education might have to be made by such a body. In this case, individual communications, discussion bodies, advisory bodies, and informal factfinding and mediation would be particularly important not only in building consensus, but also in making a positive decision possible.

   This type of a situation resembles the normal legislative process of government bodies. Use of the optimal satisficing and consensus building approach is common in such institutions.[7]

Conclusion

This publication has examined the relationships between strategic planning, optimal satisficing, and consensus building, in moving toward comprehensive cooperative education programs. In it, the need to strive for optimal satisficing and consensus building was explained, and the reasons for considering the OSCB approach to the strategic planning and implementation of a comprehensive cooperative education program were considered. Also discussed were the philosophical approaches toward OSCB, the various communication and decision processes, and the organizational structural vehicles. The optimal satisficing and consensus building approach should be useful in strategic planning and the implementation of large scale cooperative education programs in many institutions of higher education.

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