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The organizational pattern of continuing education has increasingly become an important issue, particularly to metropolitan universities. Most of the debate about the organization of continuing education has focused on issues surrounding centralized and decentralized organizational arrangements. However, a singular focus on this debate limits discussion to considering issues of control. The debate must be widened to consider institutional boundaries and domain, coordination, and integration in order to fully explore the organization of continuing higher education within the context of modern and evolving metropolitan universities.

The Organization of Continuing Higher Education

Responding to the '90s

Higher education, and continuing higher education with it, are in a period of discontinuous change, a period characterized by changes in kind, not just in degree. Evidence of discontinuity surrounds us; it can be found in society's search for new paradigms of meaning, in the changing nature of our cultural composition, and in higher education's search for its role in and relation with the larger and rapidly changing communities of which it is a part.

Although the organization of continuing higher education has been a historic interest of continuing educators, concerns about its organization have taken on new meaning within this context of discontinuous change. Central to this new meaning is not only higher education's search for its role in society, but also new conceptions from sociological and organizational literature that inform our thinking about what we mean by organization and what options for organizing are open to us.

Metropolitan universities, because of the communities they serve, are experiencing more directly than other segments of higher education the qualitative changes that increasingly surround us. They have to deal directly with increased cultural diversity and suffusion, impacts of the global economy

and competition, society's transition to an information-based society, and the growing presence in metropolitan areas of professional elites who are participating in and leading this transition. This puts metropolitan universities in the vanguard in dealing with the societal and cultural transformations with which all of higher education will have to deal as the decade progresses.

The way in which metropolitan universities deal with the organization of continuing education will provide models for the rest of higher education to consider, analyze, and emulate in the years ahead. Thus, the topic of the organization of continuing higher education in metropolitan universities is important not only for this group of institutions, but also for the larger fields of continuing higher education and higher education.

The organization of continuing education has been a major interest of continuing educators for nearly three decades. The results of a 1990 survey of continuing education deans and directors sponsored by the National University Continuing Education Association show that interest in the topic remains high. In this survey, "organizational structure" was ranked second only to "finance" as the most pressing organizational issue facing the field today. More specific questions embedded in the issue of organizational structure included (1) location of continuing education within the organizational structure, (2) centralization/ decentralization of the continuing education organization and function, and (3) diversification within the continuing education organization. A related issue, "integration of continuing education within the university," was ranked fourth as the most pressing organizational issue by these same deans and directors. Those identifying integration as a major problem expressed concern about how the continuing education function would or would not be assimilated into the fabric of the institution. They were also concerned about how mainstream academic units could be involved in continuing education, and how perceived fragmentation of continuing education and public service efforts could be handled.

Continuing higher education issues must be analyzed within the context of changes in society and in higher education. It is also important to consider the issue from a variety of perspectives so that richness and depth can be added to our understanding of options. Several concepts have particular relevance to a discussion of the organization of continuing higher education: centralization/ decentralization; institutional boundary and domain; and coordination and integration. Each will be considered in turn in order to identify options and their strengths and weaknesses and to propose some new ways of thinking about the organization of continuing higher education.

Centralization/Decentralization

Continuing educators have expended much energy over the issue of the centralization and decentralization of continuing education within the university. It is a subject of discussion and debate at conferences, of case studies within graduate programs of higher and continuing education, and of the continuing education literature. It has also been the overriding

conceptualization around which issues of organization have been addressed since the mid-1970s. The concepts of centralization and decentralization focus primarily upon the variables of authority and control over policies, resources, and programs, and upon the way in which continuing education is structurally organized within institutions. Its most common application has been as a variable and two-dimensional construct in which control over decision making ranges from highly centralized to highly decentralized across the two dimensions of administrative and academic control. The administrative dimension focuses upon decision-making control over finances, administration, and program development, and the academic dimension focuses upon decision making regarding program content and instructional staffing. Few pure centralized or decentralized models of continuing education exist. Rather, the organizational pattern in most institutions ranges somewhere on the continuum according to who should be in control of making decisions related to the administrative and academic dimensions of the continuing education function.

Most continuing educators prefer a model in which administrative decision making is centralized and academic decision making is decentralized, especially with respect to curricular decisions, instructor appointment, and judgments of academic quality. This model is touted as having several advantages:

- It provides for the appointment of a chief executive officer of continuing education, most commonly reporting to the institution's chief academic officer, thereby linking continuing education to the institution's academic units and their agendas.
- It permits recruitment and development of professional staff whose primary responsibility is continuing education.
- Budget control rests with the chief executive officer of continuing education, allowing reallocation of funds as priorities change and as programming is required for which full cost recovery is not possible.
- Problem-oriented, cross-disciplinary types of programs become theoretically more possible.
- It increases the ability and willingness of the unit to develop experimental and innovative programs.
- It focuses advocacy for the continuing education function in one organizational unit.
- It provides a single point of contact for clients.

The model's biggest drawback is its organizational separation from academic units and the potential for lack of assimilation of the continuing education function within the activities of academic units and their faculties. In contrast, the need for direct structural connection with academic units and for incorporating continuing education within academic units' missions and the work of faculty have been regarded as the major strengths of the fully decentralized model of organization, in which both academic and administrative control is decentralized to academic units.

The centralization/decentralization concept has been very appealing to practitioners and scholars alike. Its appeal is based in part on the obviousness of the construct, the formal structure of the organization being highly visible to those who wish to observe and analyze it. It has also been appealing because it does consider issues of control over the continuing education function, especially as activities that can be considered continuing education increasingly pervade various segments of the institution. It raises the issue of organizational survival, drawing attention to questions of the survival of a centralized unit of continuing education and to effects that the loss of such a unit may have on the survival and efficacy of the function for which the unit is responsible.

Although the centralization/decentralization concept provides a very useful way to understand and consider the organization of continuing education, other concepts are also available. These other concepts provide additional insights into the functioning and organization of continuing education and a different perspective from which centralization/decentralization can be considered. One of these other concepts focuses on the boundary of the institution and its domain of work.

Institutional Boundary and Domain

The centralization/decentralization concept was first employed by continuing educators at a time when continuing education was in transition. Continuing education was moving from a totally independent and separate function of higher education (usually housed in highly centralized, independent, and autonomous units of university extension that often had many of their own faculty) to a function that was becoming increasingly incorporated with other institutional functions and priorities. This incorporation (often labeled "structural integration" or "mainstreaming" by those in the field) has accelerated over the past decade and has brought with it several changes. Interdependencies among units and functions have increased, much more collaboration among continuing educators and others has been required, and the continuing education function has been increasingly integrated and reconceptualized within the two major functions of higher education—knowledge generation and knowledge dissemination. And as Gary Matkin (1990) notes, the role and definition of continuing education continue to be reconceptualized from a narrow focus on instruction to a broader focus on the variety of ways that the institution can relate to and with external constituencies. These ways include technology and other forms of knowledge transfer; relations with business, industry, government, and schools; and serving university alumni. Structural integration, redefinition, and reconceptualization raise new issues and require recasting the centralization/decentralization debate into a broader and deeper frame of analysis. The concepts of boundary and domain help define this broader frame.

Continuing educators occupy roles at the periphery or boundary of the institution and act as spanners of that boundary. In this capacity, continuing educators gather and process information from the parent organization, as well as the external, community environment, and transmit

that information to others within and outside the institution. They identify and secure resources (participants, funding, facilities, philosophical support, political goodwill) needed for the work of continuing education and for the larger institution. And they participate in determining the institution's boundary, especially in identifying continuing education clients who in turn become participants in the organization, and the institution's work domain (or what the institution counts as legitimate work in terms of programs offered). As boundary spanners, both the

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continuing education unit and its personnel play critical roles in anticipating and dealing with environmental change as it affects the university. They also influence the environment through their activities and, therefore, provide the institution a means to alter the environment in advantageous ways.

Boundaries of systems, whether biological, physical, or organizational, are recognized as places where there is much complexity and richness. In organizations, this richness comes in the form of environmental change, complexity, and texture and also in the form of the heterogeneity of ideas, values, and perspectives increasingly prevalent in organizational environments. And as the external environment becomes richer and more complex, boundary-spanning activities become more critical to the institution, and the institution also requires additional complexity at administrative levels where boundary-spanning activities are central. As a result, the presence of continuing educators at the institution's boundary, where richness and complexity abound, places them at a strategic location within the institution where many critical contributions can be made to the institution and to its long-term effectiveness and health. They can be collectors, processors, and transmitters of information essential to the institution's functioning and to important external constituencies' interpretations and understanding of institutional mission and action. They can serve as institutional mirrors of self-reflection, contributing to the institution's understanding of how relevant external stakeholders perceive and value it. And they can join, in meaningful ways, in helping the institution define who participates in the life of the institution and what type of programs and services it offers.

At a recent conference, the chief academic officer of a university located in a major city characterized continuing educators as "sleepless niche seekers," focusing primarily upon the perception of continuing educators as marketing experts. Although certainly an important competence of and for continuing educators, this metaphor limits the role and contributions of continuing educators to the strategic development and direction of the institution. A broader perspective on their work, from an organizational viewpoint, is to regard them as essential participants in the articulation of institutional boundaries and in the definition of institutional domain. Both are key elements in an institution's strategy making since they deal with what work the institution does and with whom.

To take full advantage of this boundary-spanning role will, however, require several actions by continuing education and the institution alike. First, it requires institutions to be clear about the mission and priorities of continuing education. As Kay King and Allan Lerner (1987) note, the ways in which continuing education has been organized have frequently developed around priorities obtained through default rather than through prior analysis and planning. Consequently, such unplanned organizational arrangements have much potential for (1) not allowing continuing education to serve as effectively as it might the broader mission and priorities of the institution and (2) not allowing the institution to capitalize on the potential contributions of continuing education's boundary-spanning role to institutional strategy making. For example, what role does the institution see for continuing education in information gathering and processing, in securing resources and developing relationships, in working with identified client and stakeholding groups, and in contributing to further definition of (or to changes in) institutional boundary and domain? Answers to these questions help identify mission and priorities that, in turn, provide greater direction about how continuing education should be organized, what activities it undertakes, and how those activities fit within institutional strategy and strategy making.

Second, continuing educators will need to become increasingly concerned with and competent in organizational learning. Chris Argyris and Donald Schon (1978) help us understand organizational learning by distinguishing between single-loop and double-loop learning. In single-loop learning, activities and outcomes are compared with existing operating norms and standards to identify errors in need of correction, as is most often the case, for example, in program evaluation. In contrast, double-loop learning focuses attention on the norms, standards, and assumptions themselves, inquiring whether they are appropriate for the organization and its changing environment. For example, a division of continuing education recently conducted an internal review, focusing on "what do we want to be," rather than on "what is needed to make us better?" The focus on "what the division wanted to be" (instead of on improvement, using existing norms as evaluation criteria) resulted in double-loop learning and major organizational reconfiguration, since it required questioning the appropriateness of existing norms and assumptions. Because of growing environmental complexity, the double-loop form of learning will be increasingly needed by continuing education and the institution. Double-loop learning will be required to comprehend, interpret, and act on the richness of ideas and perspectives encountered at the edges of the institution. It will also be required to identify and reflect upon implicit values and assumptions that may place limits on the ways continuing education and institutions perceive their environments, as well as upon the boundaries and domains of unit and institutional work, mission, and priorities.

Continuing education can be the front porch of the institution—a place where outsiders may initially be more comfortable.

Third, new ways of doing continuing education's work will have to be explored and supported. These include the use of several forms of matrix organization, such as task forces, ad hoc committees, and temporary project teams, to address issues and problems for which knowledge dissemination and application are appropriate. These forms of organization draw their membership from a variety of academic and administrative units within the institution and from a variety of community groups. They have the potential for bringing the richness of the edges together in the form of individuals in and out of the institution who do not necessarily share the same ideas and perspectives, but who are willing to interact in genuine dialogue about issues and problems of interest to the institution and the community it serves. This form of doing continuing education's work also allows for improved responsiveness and action in dealing with environmental heterogeneity, uncertainty, changes, and demands. It provides a system of organization design that has the potential for combining the advantages of centralized and decentralized organizational forms, while diminishing the disadvantages of each. For example, it permits involvement in and ownership of projects by representatives of academic units, while maintaining the advocacy, budgetary, and entrepreneurial advantages of centralized units (Woodin, 1990). And this model also has the benefit of nurturing the quantity and quality of participation by important internal and external stakeholders in the life of the institution.

Kay King and Allan Lerner have metaphorically described continuing education in this model as the front parlor of the institution, a place where people come together to visit, share, and enter into dialogue. An equally powerful metaphor is continuing education as the front porch of the institution, a place where continuing education is still part of the institution, but a place that is more readily accessible to outsiders—a place where outsiders may initially be more comfortable as they explore becoming participants in the institution, and a place where the continuing educators' vision is not impaired by existing institutional boundaries and domains. Like Janus, the Roman god of doorways and gates, continuing educators will be required increasingly to look both outside and inside the institution. The front porch analogy focuses primarily upon the looking out, while the front parlor analogy focuses primarily upon the looking in. Irrespective of where one starts, the maneuvering of the threshold and the realization that the threshold is dynamic will be key to bringing community and institution together.

The use of boundary and domain as concepts to consider the organization of continuing education has several advantages. The concepts point to the important roles continuing educators can play in contributing to institutional strategy making, as well as in implementing existing strategy. They highlight the need for developing and managing continuing education's capacity for organizational learning. They underscore the necessity of clarity by the institution about the mission and priorities of continuing education. They also help us to identify some new possibilities (e.g., project teams) for doing the work of continuing education and for developing some images (front parlor, front porch) to capture the meaning of that work.

But application of the boundary and domain concepts also has the disadvantage of creating an organizational design that can be chaotic, a design in which the same client groups are approached by different arms of the institution, one in which different work domains remain unconnected, and one in which those identified as potential clients (participants of the organization) are too varied and diverse for high-quality institutional response and effectiveness. These are useful concepts for understanding some potentially new ways to think of continuing education's organization. To tap these potentialities, however, these concepts need to be coupled with means for coordinating and integrating the institution's responses to its environment.

Coordination and Integration

Coordination is manifested in two ways in organizations. Vertical or hierarchical coordination is achieved through supervision, rules, and control systems. Because this manner of coordination relies on the use of control mechanisms, it is the form most frequently addressed when centralized and decentralized arrangements for continuing education are considered. But coordination is also necessary across the organization—or laterally. Lateral coordination is most commonly achieved through the use of meetings, committees, and by employing the various forms of matrix organization identified earlier. Lateral coordination focuses foremost upon the interdependencies among different organizational units. And when matrix structures are involved, lateral coordination has the added purpose of helping various people work together and integrate their efforts. Integration, however, requires more than just coordinating mechanisms. According to Albert Vicere (1985), integration requires collaboration among administrative levels (vertically) and academic and administrative units (laterally) so that unity of effort (and institutional integrity) is achieved in meeting the demands of the external environment.

As a result of the increased volume and complexity of institutions' continuing education interactions (e.g., instruction, knowledge, and technology transfer) with their environments, there is a growing need for lateral coordination and integration of these functions within continuing education, as well as across all the units and administrative levels that are involved. Though this kind of coordination and integration exists to varying degrees, it requires more of our attention and efforts. Fostering the institution's capacity for multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary programming is one example that helps explain the potential for application of these concepts.

We have become increasingly aware of the need to see many problems faced by society and the professions as holistic, largely ill-defined, and embedded in historical, social, and cultural contexts. Consequently, many of these problems are not amenable to solutions provided independently by one discipline. Rather, multi-, cross-, and even interdisciplinary contributions are required to address global, national, and local problems, such as urban decay, inner city renewal, problems of aging and the elderly, economic stagnation, environmental issues, human health, crime

and violence, immigration and ethnic relations, at-risk youth, illiteracy, and women's issues. The work of the professions has also increasingly become characterized by an ensemble approach to practice in which representatives from different professions add unique perspectives, knowledge, and skills not only to problem solving, but also to the more important process of problem definition, in which matters of perspective, value, and context play important roles.

In earlier times, continuing education was said to provide a supportive environment for multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary work because of its marginal status within the institution. Innovation, experimentation, and multidisciplinary work was considered possible because continuing education, housed in highly centralized, independent units, was out of mind and out of sight of mainstream campus agendas and priorities. Now, however, the continuing education function is less marginal and more incorporated with the mission of the institution and its academic units. The current rationale for continuing educators' involvement in multidisciplinary work must, therefore, rest upon their presence at the value- and idea-rich edges of the institution. They are, or should be, (1) experienced and skilled in developing relationships, in fostering collaboration, and in understanding the needs and interests of both the community and the academy; (2) poised to undertake the brokering required to bring need and expertise together; and (3) ready to capitalize on those traditional features of continuing education that relate to the transformation and integration of knowledge through dialogue among those in and outside the institution who have a stake in a problem's solution (Hartman & Iwanchuk, 1986).

When it comes to an institution's responses to its environment, the need for coordination and integration becomes paramount. Though centralization of the continuing education function does provide the mechanisms of control and vertical coordination, these outcomes are not enough. Lateral coordination also is required to deal effectively with the interdependencies among different administrative and academic units. In addition, continuing education must be organized so that its boundary-spanning capacities are brought to fruition, which will in turn nurture the collaboration (within the institution and between it and its environment) that is essential to ensure integration and unity of effort in responding to these complex tasks. From this vantage point, some degree of centralization of the continuing education function would appear to be essential. In these cases, the need for coordination and integration broadens the centralization/decentralization debate from one focusing exclusively on control over decision making to one that also raises the question of how best to provide the coordination and integration of activities which are required.

Conclusion

Higher and continuing education are at an important juncture in their development. The discontinuous change that we are just now beginning to see in heightened relief poses a great challenge to society as a whole and to its educational institutions. Metropolitan universities are

in the forefront of confronting and having to deal with these changes. The ways in which they respond will set courses for others to discuss, analyze, and perhaps follow in the years ahead. How continuing education is organized and functions within this context will have an impact on the organization and functioning of continuing education throughout all segments of higher education.

Debates about centralization and decentralization of the continuing education function will probably continue. But the debate must now be engaged within the broader organizational, historical, and societal context in which the organization of continuing education is embedded. There is a critical need for a refocusing of the debate from one centered on issues of control and vertical coordination to the broader and deeper considerations of lateral coordination, collaboration, integration and the institutional integrity (or unity of effort) to which these factors contribute. Likewise, the boundaries of the institution and its domain must be subjects of dialogue, for they are essential elements in defining the mission and priorities of continuing education and the institution as well. Full consideration of and careful attention to these issues by the entire institution are required to identify, implement, and nurture the organizational pattern that will contribute most to the strategic development and direction of modern metropolitan universities.

Suggested Readings

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