Graphite into Diamonds: Using Teams to Strengthen Intracollegial Interaction

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ABSTRACT: In an information-processing organization, it is essential that lines of communications stay open and fluid, and that can best be accomplished through cooperative teamwork. In science, when graphite is subjected to extreme heat and pressure, it is converted into a diamond. When pressure is applied to a collegiate bureaucracy through retraining key personnel, it can be transformed into a team promoting unity and interaction. Strategies for developing teams are discussed.

Teams offer a distinct advantage over traditional structures, such as bureaucracies, in terms of attaining optimal utilization of diverse resources available within contemporary institutions of higher education.

At the heart of an institution's ability to function at optimal efficiency are the established lines of communication and the interaction between those who process information and those who use information for decision making. The strength, quality and effectiveness of a college may be reflected in the formal and information structure of that organization, and hierarchical order and intraorganizational design often give rise to efficiency and productivity. Many times the quality of the college lies in the ability and the frequency with which information is transmitted across such hierarchical boundaries. Establishing intimate relationships, as in a team, is often the key to maximum application of information to administrative decision-making, and teams offer a distinct advantage over traditional governance structures for the

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optimal utilization of diverse resources available within a contemporary college or university. Harlan Cleveland noted in the July/August 1985 issue of *Change* that “Collegial, not command, structures become the more natural basis for organization. Conferring and ‘networking,’ not ‘command and control,’ become the mandatory modes for getting things done.”

**Advantages of Teams**

It is important to establish close integration when identifying and defining the object of exchange—information as knowledge. In his book *The Knowledge Executive*, Cleveland illuminated the process and transformation which occurs during the communication by stating:

> Most knowledge is expertise—in a field, a subject, a science, a technology, a system of values, a form of social organization and authority. Wisdom is integrated knowledge, information made super-useful by theory, which relates bits and fields of knowledge to each other, which in turn enables me to use the knowledge to do something. That’s why wisdom is bound to cross the disciplinary barriers we set up to make the fields of knowledge manageable by the use of scientific method.

According to Cleveland, effective processing of this “crucial resource” (knowledge) allows for (1) information to expand as it is used, (2) information to be compressed, integrated and summarized, and (3) information to replace labor and capital. Therefore, effective information processing (the manner in which humans perceive, organize, relate and remember vast amounts of sensory data) depends upon developing relationships which highlight strong two-way communication and provide supportive working conditions.

An innovative college structure is needed to encourage the collaboration and synergism that are necessary for the optimal utilization of knowledge. The strength of the relationships which are needed to facilitate the collaboration depends upon the amount of interaction among coworkers. While such interaction often is sparked by individual initiative, it may be enhanced and encouraged through the design of the college structure.

The structure in higher education is dictated by function, purpose, and goals identified by the administration, and such a structure may not provide the optimum circumstance where “everybody can talk to anybody.” In *Leadership Development: Strategies for a New Era*, John Gardner noted that with the emphasis and reward system focusing upon disciplinary specialization and academic departmentalism, there