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Judith A. Ramaley
Winona State University

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Following is the complete text of Chapter 5 of the book entitled Field Guide to Academic Leadership – A Publication of the National Academy for Academic Leadership; Robert M. Diamond, Editor. The chapter was written by Dr. Judith A. Ramaley, President, Winona State University. The book may be purchased from the publisher, http://www.wiley.com/

CHAPTER 5

Moving Mountains

Institutional Culture and Transformational Change

JUDITH A. RAMALEY

Our institutions are changing all the time but for the most part these changes do not make a big difference, either because the results are confined to an isolated segment of the organization or because the environment is not responsive. To be considered truly transformational, the initiative must alter the culture of the institutions by changing select underlying assumptions and institutional behaviors, processes, and products; it must be deep and pervasive, affecting the whole institution; it must be intentional; and it must occur consistently over time (Eckel, Hill, & Green, 1998).

QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS UNDERTAKING TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

For those of you who are seeking to introduce transformational change, here are five questions to ask yourself. If you consider them carefully, your answers can improve your chances of leading a successful change effort.
• Do you have a mandate for change? If so, from whom?
• Do you understand the factors in the institutional culture and history as well as in the external environment that can support or resist change?
• Is the campus ready to change? If not, what might you do to create a more receptive climate for change?
• Have you thought through a strategy to manage institutional response as the change process unfolds?
• Can you undertake and lead change?

Do You Have a Mandate?

Do you have a mandate? If so, from whom? When new leaders are hired, those who hire them usually have intentions for what these new leaders must accomplish as well as a model, often somewhat deeply buried in their thinking, about what the problems or opportunities are and the right ways to go about addressing them. Most of us are attracted to places that are seeking to

accomplish goals that we cherish. We often assume that because we were chosen, the board or the person to whom we report must have given us a mandate to move forward. But this is often not the case. It is important to know clearly *what* you are expected to accomplish and whether there are any expectations about *how* you will do so.

It is also helpful to recognize that gender biases still exist and that governing boards and campus community members may expect leadership to be exercised according to the models they know best—often behaviors developed by the majority culture. If you are a woman or a person of color, you may encounter difficulties simply because you do not look or act "like a leader." You may also open up questions if you happen to ascribe to some of the more contemporary ideas about connective leadership (LipmanBlumen, 1996) or women's ways of knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997), which place the leader in a collaborative working relationship rather than a directive relationship with the members of the community.

At one institution that I served, the mandate from the governing board was to repair relationships with the state legislature and citizens, develop a clear vision for the institution, and put the budget on a healthy footing. Although these challenges were articulated by the governing board, they were not endorsed as strongly by the campus community, which was fairly evenly divided between people who wanted to introduce some new ideas and people who thought things were just fine as they were. For this latter group, there was no clear mandate except to respect the traditions of the place.

It is important to take time to explore both what you are expected to accomplish and how you are expected to go about doing it. In the case of a budget, for instance, you may be planning to balance it by generating new sources of revenue and redesigning critical campus operations. Your board may want you to eliminate duplication and cut programs. Both are avenues to balancing the budget, but they differ dramatically in approach, implementation time, involvement of the campus community, and consequences.

This example illustrates a growing tension between the academic model of shared governance and the dictates of either a political or a corporate leadership model. In a recent essay, Roger Bowen (2001) describes the battle he has experienced between two cultures—the academic and the political—which offer very different views of the academy that are "contradictory and inhospitable to each other" (p. 14B). According to Bowen, underlying the growing gulf between the experiences and expectations of governing boards and campus leaders is a "suspicion of academe and its arcane traditions; its inefficient, labor-intensive ways of educating students; its practice of lifetime employment through tenure; and its procedures of shared governance" (p. 14B). Members of governing boards may be impatient and suspicious whether they come from the political sector or the corporate sector. This changing set of expectations among those choosing to become members of a governing board and the satisfaction they hope to derive from the experience have made it harder to define a mandate for change. This situation helps explain why leaders must check to be sure that they are in accord with the governing board about not only *what* needs to be accomplished but also *how* it is to be done.

Do You Understand Factors That Support or Resist Change?

Do you understand the factors in the institutional culture and history as well as in the external environment that can support or resist change? It is difficult to capture everything that a newcomer needs to know about the culture of an institution. However, at the very least, a new leader must explore a few issues.

First, what does your new institution expect from its leaders? If you are the founding president or the first provost or dean this is not likely to be an issue, because you are going to set the example that will teach the institution what to expect. But if you are succeeding someone else or a whole line of other people, this first question matters a great deal. At some institutions, leaders are expected to be aloof and somewhat mysterious, and no one remarks if they are off-

campus a lot. At other institutions, leaders are expected to be accessible, approachable, and always available. On such campuses, every trip is looked at with suspicion, and rumors may soon fly that you are already looking for another job. Why else would you need to be off-campus so often? Similarly, some institutions want their leaders to be hands-on and involved in everyday campus decision making. Elsewhere, such behavior would be labeled micromanagement and viewed with disfavor.

Second, it is important to know the basic model on which your campus operates. I have found Birnbaum's classification to be especially helpful. As Birnbaum says, "Culture provides the 'central tendencies' that make it possible to generalize about the character of" the systems that make up a campus. Culture establishes "an 'envelope' or range of possible behaviors within which an organization usually functions (1988, 73). He goes on to define four models of institutional behavior to help us think about the range of normal behaviors of the organization we are seeking to change: the *collegial institution*, where power and values are shared throughout the campus community; the *bureaucratic institution* that is based on a rational structure and decision making that follows standard pathways of influence, usually top-down; the *political organization,* where different constituencies vie for power and influence and resources; and the *anarchical organization,* where each component is an island unto itself and the institution as a whole has problematic goals and decision-making channels that are unclear and shifting. Leaders must develop their influence very differently in these distinctive cultures. It is unlikely that your own institution is a pure example of any one kind of organization and decision making, but these models offer a way to size up your environment.

Third, it is important to understand that culture actually has several layers: surface, unspoken, and deep. The *surface* layer is discernable by observation. Do students address the president as President So-and-So or do they use his or her first name? Do students of all backgrounds sit together in the student commons or do groups stay pretty much to themselves? How do men and women interact? Are there symbols and places that hold special meaning for the campus?

Underneath this surface there is a set of *unspoken* rules about conduct and expectations that determine whether new people will be accepted. Often, special expectations apply to the new leader. It is this level that we seek to address when we set up mentoring programs for new faculty or support programs for new students. If only there were such programs for new presidents! Some unspoken rules hold sway on most campuses, but some rules may be unique to your particular institution. It is sometimes possible to discern some of the outlines of this level of culture by noticing carefully how people answer such questions as, "Why do we do things this way?" The explanations that people use to account for things can offer valuable clues to the mental models and the boundaries of the culture.

Most *deeply* buried in a culture, and only brought to the surface when open challenges to leadership occur, is the sense of identity, belonging, and citizenship in a community of like-minded people. Unfortunately, transformational change efforts may disturb this cultural layer. When this happens, the resulting emotional response may be either anger or cynicism. The predominant emotion depends on the primary out-come of change. If the results mostly show that the "new way" has some problems or faults, the result is likely to be cynicism on the part of people who were willing to go out on a limb and try it. If the outcome seems to suggest that there were some genuine advantages to the old way, senior members of the campus community may become outraged at the efforts of others to meddle with perfectly good programs and processes that did not, in their opinion, need to be meddled with in the first place. Cynicism slows down the change process and may derail it because its proponents abandon the effort. Campus anger may unseat the leader instead, thus also derailing the change process. As Lipman-Blumen (1996) has observed, we often have unrealistic expectations of our leaders, and when they fail to perform

miracles, even if what we expect is impossible, we often drive them out rather than acknowledge that we too have some responsibility for a good outcome.

Is the Campus Ready to Change?

A final aspect of institutional culture worth examining before you undertake transformational change is the question of the receptivity of the campus. This topic is covered in detail in a series of occasional papers based on the experience of the institutions that participated in the American Council on Education (ACE) project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation (see the ACE Web site at www.acenet.edu for PDF versions of these documents). One of these monographs, called *On Change III: Taking Charge of Change* (Eckel, Green, Hill, & Mallon, 1999), offers extensive advice for creating the context of change and analyzing institutional culture and readiness for change. According to Eckel et al., a good exercise for a leadership team to use to analyze campus culture at the start of a change process and during the transitions that accompany it is to ask each of its members to answer the following questions. The resultant pattern of observations and agreements and disagreements can be very helpful.

• List ten adjectives that describe the campus culture.

• Describe primary subcultures in the institution. To what extent could the same adjectives used for the campus culture be used to describe the subcultures? 'What other adjectives might be more appropriate for particular subcultures?

• What are the implications of these answers for the change agenda and for the process to accomplish it?

It is helpful to carry out this exercise with careful attention to what the ACE project calls *artifacts*—namely, the language people use, the myths and stories that they repeat again and again to newcomers, observable rituals, the published mission, what people say when asked to talk about the institution. If the surface and the under-lying layers of culture are congruent, significant change may be possible. If there is of a covert subculture that diverges significantly from the formal values and goals of organization, then trouble may lie ahead. It is important to know if there is a "firm cultural and attitudinal base for action" (Eckel et al., 1999, p. 22).

Do You Have a Strategy to Manage Institutional Response?

Have you thought through a strategy to manage institutional responses as the change process unfolds? It is helpful when undertaking transformative change to adopt strategies that can lead to the creation of a special form of institutional democracy, where individual members of a campus community develop a shared sense of purpose, learn to communicate effectively with each other, and acquire the capacity to participate in collaborative work. To accomplish the goals of an institutional democracy in which learning is predominant, a university must become a true learning organization (Senge, 1990). According to David Garvin, "A learning organization is skilled at creating acquiring, interpreting, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights" (1995, p. 78). In a learning organization, change is intentional, based on a valid body of knowledge, and rigorously assessed. That is change is a *scholarly act (Ramaley,* 2000). To develop the capacities of a learning organization, support collaborative behavior, and establish a scholarly basis for action, a university community must accomplish six tasks (Martin, Manning, & Ramaley, 2001):

• Instill a discipline of reflection and a culture of evidence, insisting that everyone support their perspectives with real information (qualitatively and quantitatively derived), not just opinions.

• Create new patterns of conversation and interaction that encourage and support; everyone is to be involved in defining the essential issues in a learning organization and transformative institution.

• Engage in genuine conversation about difficult and controversial subjects as one way to disperse power and leadership throughout the organization. These conversations promote discipline and clarity of purpose rather than confusion about goals and actions. Informed, respectful, thoughtful dialogue is the greatest learning tool of any organization today, and few of us know how to do it. We lack skill in managing contentious issues—when there are strong feelings about rights or entitlements, or when two worthwhile principles come in conflict with each other. We often resort to defensive or blaming behavior rather than real conversation, or we go into debate mode and seek to defeat our critics rather than understand them.

• Adopt a philosophy of experimentation, assessment, and management of reasonable risks.

• Create new ways to access information and a common base of acceptable knowledge about the institution and its performance and condition. This activity encourages everyone to make informed choices among the many options.

• Create legitimacy for planning and assessment by documenting the research and practice from which the approaches are derived. In the process of creating a research-based foundation for action, the different norms and standards of knowledge espoused by the disciplines making up the academic community must be understood, subcultures must be defined and recognized, and common and agreed-upon standards developed to guide good decision making.

In a learning organization, the role of the leader is to build a shared vision, surface and challenge prevailing mental models, foster systemic patterns of thinking, and model intellectual virtues. These virtues include "the willingness to explore widely, the ability to test one's ideas against those of others, the capacity to listen thoughtfully, and the strength to adduce reasons for one's assertions" (Payne, 1996, p. 19). Furthermore, this capacity cannot be exercised just at the top of an organization but must be widely distributed throughout. Therefore, leaders must also foster and develop the leadership skills of people in their organization.

A learning organization that values shared governance is likely to be psychologically much safer than an organization that is led autocratically. People in a more democratic setting believe they are wanted and belong; that they are valued, so ideas and thoughts are listened to and used; and that they are respected and free from harassment and discriminatory behavior (Manning & Coleman-Boatwright, 1991). They also feel empowered to share responsibility for achieving institutional goals and purposes, are comfortable and knowledgeable enough to make decisions in areas of responsibility, and share in a vision for the future. They also respect each other's expertise.

Can You Undertake and Lead Change?

 The exercise of leadership, like every other experience in a group or organization, shaped in several ways: on the personal level through a leader's personal qualities an values and beliefs; through interactions between the leader and others and how these communications interpret the experience of others in the organization and thereby create meaning and direction; and by the climate created in an organization based on the permission and expectations of the leadership. By now, most of us have learned that leadership's influence cannot be felt only at the top levels of an organization. It must be widely distributed throughout the organization.

Critical Organizational Qualities

William O'Brien, former CEO of the Hanover Insurance Company, recently said that a new wave is forming, one that we cannot yet describe or name. O'Brien suggested that if an organization or community has several abilities they will help it cope with rapid, as yet poorly defined, change. First, in this period of dimly discernible trends and patterns, organizations must learn how to disperse power in an orderly way. It is important to remember that empowerment without

discipline and clarity is dangerous. Organizations must also learn how to disperse power so that self-discipline replaces the control they have traditionally exercised in this century through bureaucracy.

Organizations must also become adept at systemic thinking. Most of us in academia are good at dealing with problems stated with clear questions and a clear, research- based answer. We have very little experience managing unclear problems with unclear answers that require us to understand systems and interrelationships. In *Educating the Reflective Practitioner,* Donald Schön (1988) says, "In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the hard ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research- based theory and techniques. In the *swampy lowlands,* messy, confusing problems defy technical solutions" (p. 3). As a president, I have spent most of my time in the swampy lowlands where problems have many dimensions and clear answers are few. The only way out of a swamp is to invent as you go (see Ramaley, 2000).

Finally, organizations must accept the fact that leadership can no longer be exercised by mandate. Increasingly, all employees, not just faculty, may be better thought of as volunteers. Command-and-control strategies must give way to collaboration, competence, and creativity.

Remaining Accessible

So how can a president set significant changes in motion and model the appropriate behaviors to deal with them? Consider ways to maintain accessibility and direct contact with members of the campus community through e-mail, open forums, coffees with a cross section of campus community—students, faculty. Next, spend time identifying the change agents on campus, the people with a "can-do" or "make-something-good-happen" attitude. Invite these people to participate in a campus leadership series where they can work with each other, learn about the larger context of the campus and its environment, develop trustworthy communication networks, and acquire a genuine commitment to a shared purpose. If you do not already have them, consider introducing individual development plans that encourage faculty and staff to identify their changing interests and skills and then make sure there are avenues for such interests to be fostered and new opportunities offered. *Ask* your leadership colleagues to identify projects that involve teamwork. This will encourage networking and practicing the habits of a learning organization.

Becoming a Storyteller

Encourage members of the campus community to tell you about good things that are happening and that they think are especially contributing to the enhancement of the institution in quiet ways. With this material you can become a storyteller, as you acquire new knowledge of the institution through all of these means. Your stories will help create meaning and direction for the institution. Howard Gardner in *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership* (1995) argues that "leaders achieve their effectiveness chiefly through the stories they relate" (p. 9). He uses the verb *relate* rather than tell because a story can be conveyed in many ways—through words, artistic expression, or scholarly work. In each case, the leader embodies the stories.

To relate a compelling story; a leader must characterize and resolve important life issues for himself or herself and then successfully influence the views of various audiences to effect desired changes. Gardner sees leadership as a process that occurs in the minds of individuals who Live in a culture—a process that entails the capacity to create stories, understand and evaluate them, and appreciate and manage the struggle among competing stories. The extent to which a story takes hold and shapes how people see the world depends on both their developmental stage and how effectively the leader adapts the story to their minds; the leader does this by being attuned to their basic questions and search for identity.

Dealing with the Campus Reaction

It is also helpful to know how people react to and interpret changes that are beginning to take place around them. Change can generate serious and unsettling questions can unbalance established routines. This will usually cause anxiety. If properly channeled, these questions can be thought-provoking and encourage organizational members to think more deeply about what is happening (Isabella, 1992). This can, in turn, contribute to the development of the better communication, clarity, and agreement will be so essential for guiding institutional progress toward excellence.

The campus reaction to a significant change or *trigger event* unfolds in four predictable stages, each requiring a different leadership response.

- As rumors fly about change, members adopt an "assembly" or detective mindset, assembling rumors and tidbits of information and drawing often sweeping inferences and conclusions from them. The management task at this stage is to promote open and honest discussion of fears and concerns and to provide accurate information to dispel rumors.

- When the change begins, members draw on traditional explanations and familiar patterns of the organization to explain what is happening and to resist the change. At this point, the management task is to offer new and more constructive interpretations of what the changes mean.

- Once the change is in place, people move to an "amended" mindset as they search for the symbolic meaning of what has happened and what it portends for them personally. As they do so, they are "trying to actively reconstruct their environment: deciding what to retain and what to alter" (Isabella, 1992, p. 23).

- As the change progresses, managers and others review the consequences of what has taken place and reinterpret what it all means. People are doing their best to put the change in perspective. Unless this stage is actively managed, all will draw their own individual conclusions, which may vary significantly with the institution's mission and strategies.

Achieving Direction

Achieving clarity and direction in a loosely coupled institution—with connections between people and units that are often fragmentary or nonexistent—requires either a major environmental change or mandate, a fiscal crisis that is honestly and openly addressed, or the deliberate introduction of a significant internal imbalance. Whatever the cause of the destabilization of the loosely coupled internal systems of a campus community, a successful outcome depends on consistent and open communication and leadership accessibility at each stage of the planning or change process. Leaders must consistently help people understand what is happening and what it means as well as uncover and deal with rumors and misperceptions through open and honest dialogue. Good storytelling helps, especially when the material comes right from real conversations with campus constituents.

As long as we understand that academic institutions are distinctive cultures unto themselves—both as a sector of society and as individual institutions with their own senses of place and tradition—it becomes clear that change constitutes a cultural change, and leadership is the process of telling compelling stories about a different kind of reality or identity. In such a culture, according to William G. Tierney (1999), leadership means doing several things: putting people first; studying the unique culture of the campus; connecting people together; defining and embodying the values and beliefs that will support needed change; being attentive to the diversity of experience of the people who make up the campus and the need to create conditions where everyone can be fully themselves; practicing change strategies that are based on an acknowledgment of the campus culture; promoting courageous participation by enhancing trustworthiness and reducing the risks associated with experimentation; fostering leadership in others; being accessible; and supporting and rewarding collective responsibilities and efforts as well as individual excellence. In other

words, *to lead is first to learn and then to teach* through the example of one's own conduct and through compelling stories.

Having a Good Theory of Change

Finally, it is important to have a well-grounded theory of change. My own preference is for a model that lays out several components that must be attended to in order to introduce and sustain meaningful change. To move an institution intentionally in a desired direction, four conditions must exist, or be put in place if they do not already exist. They will be summarized here, but those interested in exploring this issue further may wish to consult the case study of Portland State University, which is one of the few institutions in recent years to undergo truly transformational change (Ramaley, 1996).

- A *compelling case* for systemic or transformational change must be made. Most people are unwilling to embark on major change without both a compelling reason and the confidence that their efforts will be supported and recognized.
- There must be *clarity of purpose*. Even when the reasons are clear, the goals must also be clear. Otherwise, there will be no way to judge the value of the efforts made or to convince honest skeptics of the value and legitimacy of the work.
- There must be *significance of scale*. Most change is too small and piecemeal to make a real difference in an organization. The choice of the first project is critical.
- A *conducive campus environment* is essential. There are many barriers to change at most institutions. Some time must be spent identifying factors that will impede change.

Observers and practitioners of change continue to argue about whether large-scale change can occur in the absence of some serious and ongoing crisis. Given the traditional strengths of higher education and the slowly growing pressures on our enterprise, it is a good idea to anticipate changing social and economic conditions in society and respond to them—before they are imposed on us.

QUESTIONS FOR INSTITUTIONS UNDERGOING TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

Here are the kinds of questions that should be asked about an institution in order to establish clarity of purpose when embarking on intentional or transformative change without a precipitating crisis to generate the need for change (modeled on Hamel & Prahalad, 1994). These questions should be asked not just once, but continuously.

• What are our core values and what is our mission?
• What lessons can we draw from our own history and tradition?
• What new core competencies will we need in the future?
• What core competencies must we retain and enhance?
• What organizational values and principles will guide our decision making?
• What new educational models must we build?
• What new alliances must we form?
• What promising programs must we nurture?
• What long-term regulatory initiatives must we pursue to reshape the marketplace in which we operate regionally, statewide, or nationally?
• What new learners must we serve?
• How will we generate the resources to invest in new competencies?

An important step in the process of change is to have a firm grasp on the institution's actual condition before you begin and then measure your progress along the way. A useful way to assess the extent to which a particular change has truly become transformational is to use the matrix developed by Holland (1997), a scale of low, medium, high, and full integration of service

into an institutional mission. The matrix can be used just as well to examine any other kind of meaningful change, such as curricular reform. The scan is comprehensive and includes the wording of the mission itself; promotion, tenure, and hiring policies; organizational structure; student involvement; faculty involvement; community involvement; and the content, perspective, and intended audiences of campus publications and communications.

Finally, it is wise to keep an eye on the conditions on the campus that can either support change or impede it. A redefinition of faculty roles and rewards is often required, and a conscious link must be made between faculty work and the tasks necessary to achieve the institutional mission. This generally means reworking the standards and documentation required for promotion and tenure.

Most of the procedures and policies of an institution have accumulated over time and often are overly complex and unintentionally fail to facilitate or reward the behaviors and working relationships necessary to achieve desirable changes. In addition, the introduction of new technologies as well as new working relationships with other organizations changes the kind of support structure needed and the competencies of support staff. Old systems of work classification and traditional forms of employee development often cannot keep pace with these changes.

Many institutions fail to take into account the importance of students in shaping the institution—as student employees, participants in outreach and public service, members of research teams, and citizens of the community that the institution serves.

In many institutions, individual departments act as self-contained entities and reward department-centered activity but not participation in cross-disciplinary work or campus activities that benefit the institution but not the department directly. To bring the work of departments into alignment with the needs of the institution as a whole, it is helpful to create a direct relationship between the setting of goals and priorities at the department level and the articulation of institutional goals and to reward departments and programs that contribute to the campus goals. For a strategic resource cycle to work and be sustainable, an institution must have three elements in place (Ramaley 1998):

A clarity of vision and purpose translated into goals and objectives; a clear understanding of how resources are generated and consumed by activities; and a culture of evidence that provides good measures of the results obtained by various programs and activities and a model whereby the future setting of goals and the distribution of resources is guided by outcomes.

CONCLUSION

A leader who wishes to foster transformational change must work in a complex three-dimensional mental space. Such leaders must learn about the culture of the organization and work in ways that respect it, must embody the qualities that are associated with a true democratically guided learning community; and must have a clear and compelling model for change that guides the actions they take. In the beginning, this can be a demanding exercise, but over time, practiced leaders begin to work naturally in this space and can effectively bring out the best in their institution.

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