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ABSTRACT

Change is the new status quo in higher education and nowhere is the pressure of change stronger than in student affairs. Some of the innovations and trends confronting student affairs professionals are explored in this paper. Cognitive and affective aspects accompany change, and it is stressed that organizational changes must occur in a safe environment, where no one worries about personal harm. Nine key factors for creating a safe environment for stimulating change in student affairs are presented: (1) the environment must possess an ethos in which the student affairs practitioner is valued, trusted, and empowered; (2) the change-oriented environment must have systematic outcomes assessment data for the purpose of improving; (3) permission must be given for innovation; (4) artificial barriers between people and organizations, which inhibit collaborations, must be dismantled; (5) clear and oft-stated expectations for individuals should be embraced; (6) governance should be characterized by partnerships and not by patriarchy; (7) change comes about from individuals willing and able to shape the future; (8) change typically occurs in organizations which adjust quickly and recover easily from turbulence, upheaval, and other forces; and (9) change behaviors are characterized by continuous communication and negotiation of meaning. (RJM)

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Creating Environments for Change: Strategies for Transcending Fear

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Change is the new status quo in higher education. It is a ubiquitous pressure to recreate, rethink, redesign, reorganize and renew undergraduate education resulting from unyielding environmental pressures. Eroding public confidence, demands for accountability, new pressures to focus on learning, dwindling government support, shifting student demographics, restructuring and privatization all make today's campus a turbulent sea of change (Kuh, in press b).

Nowhere is the pressure of change stronger than in student affairs. Student affairs professionals are being asked to reconsider the student development model of practice (Bloland, et al., in press), to be more efficient managers (Guskin, 1994), to become experts on learning (King and Magolda, in press), to partner with faculty (Schroeder and Hurst, in press), and to act as institutional renewal managers (Kuh, in press a). They are being told they must be masters of change - creators of new learning environments, organizational innovators, and visionary campus leaders (Ward, 1995). Yet, while the necessity for change is undeniable, what remains uncertain is whether student affairs professionals possess the ability and willingness to be campus change leaders.

Change is a complex phenomenon with cognitive and affective aspects. Real change requires people to understand and to connect emotionally. One way to understand the cognitive and affective aspects

of change is to consider the amusement park experience. Student affairs professionals often approach change similar to how many of them approach roller coasters - cognitively they know the roller coaster is not going to suddenly leave the tracks, hurtling them to their doom, but affectively fear, uncertainty and an emotionally overwhelming sense of risk still dominate the eventual decision to ride or not to ride! Understanding the motivation or mechanics of restructuring a student affairs division or comprehending the principles associated with creating learning environments is not difficult. But understanding alone will not make change happen if the ride looks scary.

When change happens it is because the ride looks and feels relatively safe. Change happens not when student affairs practitioners connect with it cognitively, but when they *also* connect with it affectively. Student affairs professionals introduce, embrace and enact change when they work in environments which are safe *for* change. Not safe *from* change, not free from uncertainty and risk, but when they feel safe doing the things which change requires - learning, taking risks, stepping over boundaries, and testing assumptions.

Unless such an environment exists, transformation of student affairs practice will not occur - instead we will see small, diluted or incremental tinkering. The revolutionary change needed as we enter the next millennium will be substituted for by evolutionary change, the kind

which is rarely noticeable and rarely high impact. When the organizational climate includes a milieu in which innovation and transformation is encouraged people feel safe to initiate change. In such an environment the leadership necessary to effect change emerges - in an unsafe environment, fear feeds into the hands of the status quo and suppresses new voices. In a safe environment synergy and ownership is created, generating innovative ideas and practice - in an unsafe environment communication is constrained, creativity is repressed, and personal energy is spent covering up rather than opening up. O'Toole (1995) describes thirty-three root causes for the resistance to change, among them self-interest, cynicism, mindlessness, lack of knowledge, myopia and fear. Student affairs organizations which create environments safe for change are able to overcome these burdens

If, as we propose, change in student affairs occurs only in environments safe for change, how can campus leaders create such environments? As we approach the new millennium, change is increasingly continuous, not discrete - the waves of change are so rapid that change appears as an unrelenting tide of permanent white water. In order for student affairs practitioners to master these waves they need to feel safe in the water - they need skills, support and encouragement. Borrowing from the language of The Student Learning Imperative (ACPA, 1994), the key to change in student affairs is not for things to calm down -

they likely never will - but for student affairs leaders to create the conditions which inspire, motivate and equip practitioners to invest time and energy in innovative thinking and practice.

The following address the organizational environment of student affairs, illustrating the characteristics of an environment safe for change.

1. Student affairs environments which stimulate change possess an ethos in which the student affairs practitioner is valued, trusted and empowered as an educator first and administrator second. In such an ethos risk is encouraged and rewarded and the future is celebrated, not feared.

   The real work of student affairs will not be possible until student affairs professionals are seen by others, as well as themselves, as educators, not administrators (Schroeder, 1995). Yet, while calling student affairs professional educators is easy, recreating them as educators requires institutional rethinking. It is imperative, if we expect real change to take place, that we begin treating our practitioners in new ways - supporting and capitalizing on their creativity, nourishing their ability to transform rather than simply transact, valuing their humanness as we value their productivity, encouraging them to take risks, trusting them with the future, rewarding *their* vision, and empowering them to add educational value to the institution.

If we want people closest to the student to be enthusiastic about change and committed to their work, we must also be enthusiastic about change and committed to the people closest the student. People don't resist change, victims do - and most victims have a good reason to distrust (Quick, 1989). One approach which expresses commitment, eliminates victimhood and produces a change-oriented environment is empowerment. Empowerment takes many forms but is rarely practiced well by student affairs administrators managers (Ward, 1993); however, a few notable approaches to empowerment which have particular applications to overcoming the fear associated with change are important to address.

Leadership in modern organizations has often failed because it is paternalistic and controlling, hardly the stuff that expresses value and enhances trust (Block, 1993). In the place of leadership, Block inserts stewardship, the notion of accountability without control. This approach to organizational life is designed to foster innovation and change by making this clear statement to staff - "We value your abilities, we trust your judgment, and we want you to create our future." Likewise, Pritchett (1995) urges managers and leaders to: a) Let everyone be in charge of something, not so much to give them power, but to keep them from feeling powerless - powerlessness produces a "What's the use?" attitude which strips away creativity and

imagination, the staples of change, and teaches people to learn to act helpless; b) Make people feel like they matter, like they are useful, relevant, significant - people who feel important enough to make changes are more committed to making changes work; and ,c) provide staff a cause, a grand purpose, a mission with larger meaning that inspires and energizes - not just a bottom line or strategic plan.

2. Student affairs environments which are change oriented also systematically collect and utilize outcomes assessment data for the purpose of improving, not proving. No longer can the profession be, as characterized by Ted Marchese, "risk free and data averse". In the quest for change, assessment to add value must precede assessment to justify jobs. Good assessment can serve as the backbone for change because the information it generates gives people a firm footing from which to stand and reach for something higher. If change efforts are to even get off the ground, information must be available across, up and down the organization. Without it, uncertainty prevails and the fear is not transcended.

Throughout this field, the opportunities to assess sought outcomes, particularly those related to student learning and development, abound. We should choose to use those opportunities not to prove that what we have done in the past has been valuable,

but to give us confidence that what we can do differently in the future will be even better and is worth shooting for.

3. In the change environment, permission is given to clear the decks for innovation by abandoning expendable programs and services - those which may be outdated or which have little impact on student learning or other intended outcomes. Failure to abandon the expendable is one of the greatest stressors during periods of organizational change and often leads to failed change efforts (Pritchett, 1995). In student affairs our collective conscience is characterized by an undying aim to please, to do right. Thus when we find a way to help students we are loathe to let go of that program or service, even when a better approach is available or in place. If, as a recent SACSA study has suggested (M. Howard-Hamilton, personal communication, November 14, 1995), we are overworked, we must partially blame our cultural propensity for trying to do it all. As higher education moves to outcomes-based measures of quality and effectiveness, we must create environments where programs and services which do not produce sought outcomes can be disposed of, thus allowing innovative approaches to replace them.

Individuals often fail because they allow something good to get in the way of something great (Covey, 1989); perhaps we do the same organizationally. Too often the fear of change is accompanied by the

realization that one can only do so much. When there is no room on their plate, many otherwise progressive student affairs practitioners will resist change, believing that change means one more thing to do.

Many practitioners see change opportunities as more work. Their potential enthusiasm about a new direction is dampened by an already overcrowded weekly planner. Do they fail to see that practicing the principles associated with a suggested innovation can effectively replace their current practices, or do they work in an environment where once something is done, then it will always be done? Most likely both! As we in student affairs go about constructing the co-curriculum and the administrative structures that support it, we ought to make room for change by seriously scrutinizing existing practices and allowing staff to make empowered decisions to discontinue those practices which are inefficient, tired, redundant, ineffective, misplaced, or unproductive.

4. The dismantling of functional silos and other artificial barriers between people and organizations which inhibit collaboration, cooperation and creativity is characteristic of environments safe for change. The bifurcation of student affairs and academic affairs, of the curriculum and the co-curriculum, has been bemoaned for years and become regular fodder for keynote speakers. Yet, until such time as the artificial barriers between student affairs and academic affairs is

transcended once and for all institutional renewal and the transformation of practice will be superficial (Kuh, in press b).

One approach to transcending barriers, reengineering (Hammer & Champy, 1993), has many practical applications to the organizational and administrative challenges facing student affairs; none any more important that the concept of dismantling "functional silos". In reengineering the linear organizational chart is replaced by "process teams", one result of which is that individuals start making choices and adding value, rather than simply following rules.

At James Madison University, reengineering was combined with the principles laid out in "The Student Learning Imperative" (ACPA, 1994) to reinvent the way the out-of-class leadership curriculum is delivered. One initiative saw six administrative units, all previously semi-autonomous providers of selected aspects of leadership education and development, merged into a process team responsible for the entire leadership education product. As a result, staff in leadership education, service-learning, organizational advising and development, Greek life, programming and student government now are creating new learning opportunities, exploring learning styles, and testing new pedagogies, sharing resources (both financial and intellectual), and collectively transcending the boundaries between student and academic affairs. By taking away the functional silos

which previously separated these staff and programs, the university created an excited group of change leaders who are creating new opportunities and helping students flourish - rather than defending their turf. As Randy Mitchell, Director of the University Center at James Madison often puts it, "If you are busy defending your turf, you probably aren't planting many seeds".

5. Change is also most likely to occur and be embraced when there are clear and oft stated expectations for individual performance - if the organization must change the individual should be expected to play his or her part, and the performance bar relative to change should be set high. If one has a choice to go against change, go with change, or go toward change, the organizational expectation for the latter must be loud and clear enough to guide action and predate rewards.

Successful colleges and universities continually seek out change, and the repeated demand for quality associated with that desire leads to a greater willingness to change among staff and faculty. Repetitious high expectations need to be seen, heard and supported via policies, procedures, and rewards systems. Organizational leaders must sound the cry for proactive change at all public gatherings, not only stating the "whys", but reinforcing and rewarding efforts that exemplify the high standards which have been articulated. According to Pritchett (1994), most people will fulfill our beliefs about

what they can and cannot do, thus when commitment to change is expressed as a top priority, commitment typically occurs, even from people who are afraid at the onset of the change.

In addition, expectations regarding change should be stated clearly in the organization's mission statement. If the true value of change to the organization is reflected in the foundational documents of the organization, people will feel better about the change process. To an individual, the future can be fearsome if the organization is tied to the status quo; in an organization where change is a normative behavior, fear is reduced.

Expectations for change should also be part of the performance appraisal process. If change is fundamental to the mission and success of the organization, then employees should be evaluated and rewarded accordingly. The inclusion of this evaluation criteria shows the seriousness with which the organization values change. An example of this value can be found in some of the performance appraisal instruments at James Madison University. One particular appraisal clause reads, "Develops and implements innovative ideas and actions that improve operations and/or function of the department". At this university, where individual embrace of and involvement in change is expected, such appraisal criteria are emphasized.

6. In organizations that approach change in a healthy way, governance is characterized by partnerships, not patriarchy (Block, 1993), and leadership occurs at all levels, not just at the top (Rost, 1993; Bennis & Nanus, 1985). In fact, in organizations committed to change, in which people freely create and embrace change opportunities, leadership is not positional or hierarchical, rather it is a collaborative process of mutual influences (Rost). Accordingly, anyone who participates in the change process is practicing leadership. The challenge then in the modern student affairs organization is to create a climate where staff at all levels will take ownership of the change process.

Change efforts often fail because the wrong people - top managers - are driving the change process (McLagan & Nel, 1995; Block, 1993). Rather, in effective organizations change is enthusiastically chosen by people throughout the organization. However, it is critical to understand that diffusing leadership throughout the organization is not the responsibility of staff, but of those who govern the organization; every person in an organization has a capacity for leadership and a natural desire to generate change, yet assuming that role often is dependent on an organizational culture which encourages individual freedom and broad participation.

An interesting use of metaphor to describe the participative nature of leadership is offered by two noted leadership theorists, Peter Drucker and Max DePree (O'Toole, 1995). Drucker likened an organization to a symphony orchestra and the leader to the conductor of that orchestra - controlling, commanding, above the musicians and able to bend their will to match his. In contrast, DePree compared the organizational leader to the leader of a jazz band - a working member of the ensemble, a tone-setter who allows each player to contribute to the common good through his or her own unique abilities, through improvisation and through a readily shared spotlight which encourages the players to create, to take chances, and to innovate.

Such is the modern student affairs organization. If staff are expected to lead and embrace change, the safety of the jazz group must be reproduced for them, where an unplanned note is a good excuse to explore. Conversely, the constraints of the highly structured orchestra, where an unplanned note is a disruption to the score, a source of conductor displeasure, and a threat to the sanctity of consistency and control, must be avoided.

The environment which allows leadership to emerge at various organizational levels must also support leadership identification and development. Aside from formal training in leadership topics, deliberate attempts to create leadership opportunities - committee

assignments, self-directed work teams, job rotation programs, collateral assignments, or simply a chance to overhaul a product or system - for staff at all levels are necessary if staff are to find safety in the leadership experience. Collectively these opportunities increase individual responsibility, create a sense of ownership, and allow more people to see the big picture of the organization - each of which in turn increases the likelihood that staff will be innovative and positive about organizational change opportunities.

7. Rhetoric does not create a change environment, a single champion does not create a change environment, a mission statement with words espousing change does not create a change environment. What truly creates a change environment are people who are willing and able to shape the future, even while struggling to get the present in order. A willingness to change is an affective response to organizational life, and the attitudes that change-oriented people hold in their work can be contagious. And any change comes not from ideas but from people with ideas. People with ideas who populate an organization, however, are not there by accident but by design.

There are two ways that an organization can have change oriented people in its ranks: a) Hire those who already exhibit a change orientation, and b) Train current staff in the attitudes, skills

and knowledge associated with change. The hiring function is a critical management function, yet too often the task is approached with a lack of import, thus wasting an opportunity to add to the change capacity of an organization. Rather, candidates for positions within a changing organization should be screened and hired partially based on their level of change acceptance/potential. In the modern, change-oriented organization, hiring decisions should be based more on a candidate's character than their education, experience and skills (Hammer & Champy, 1993). A crucial aspect of that character is the attitude toward change.

The second means of having change oriented staff is through training. Student affairs practitioners need multiple opportunities to learn about change, to practice change and to evaluate change efforts. Change simulations can provide non-threatening avenues to explore attitudes, test skills and to develop personal change strategies and techniques. Additionally, case studies and change management models can boost staff confidence. If a natural reaction to change is resistance borne out of fear, careful training can lower resistance and drive away fear by teaching and reinforcing appropriate behaviors.

8. Change environments typically occur in organizations which adjust quickly and recover easily from turbulence, upheaval,

disruptions, reorganization and various external forces. Effective student affairs organizations are resilient, whether they are characterized as "learning organizations (Senge, 1990) or as flexible and responsive (Hammer & Champy, 1993), and their resiliency gives staff confidence that risks are worth taking and that innovations which do not work will be discarded, with no reprisal to the innovator, and another approach tried. Without organizational resiliency decision-makers will be fearful of change, thus assuring organizational paralysis.

Marks and Shaw (1995) provide a glimpse into a resilient organization. In the resilient organization several commitments are made which, when combined, allow people in the organization to find intrinsic value in change, as well as the personal strength to reduce the stress associated with change. First, the emotional impact of change is not swept under the rug, rather the sources of stress are explored with staff and the positive potential associated with change is illustrated. Second, individual faith and confidence is boosted by providing real opportunities for influence and reward. Third, supportive teams are formed, allowing staff to draw on each other in positive ways, thus producing a human synergy which can drive the change process. Fourth, organizational dialogue is fostered. Honest communication builds trust, adds the spirit necessary to enhance

creativity, reduces areas of uncertainty and introduces bad news in an atmosphere of dignity. Finally, organizational learning is sought in order to stimulate risk taking, open boundaries, encourage involvement and action, and increase collective adaptability.

Student affairs practitioners who are expected to lead and embrace change have to know that their change efforts, regardless of size or impact, are going to be supported by the upper levels of the organization. New programs and services, new technologies, new pedagogies will only emerge if upper management clearly indicates and models resiliency. Having a staff member take one risk is difficult enough; having them risk again after an unsuccessful bid is impossible unless organizational support for experimentation, and failure, is present. Otherwise, change, if it occurs at all at the grass roots level, will be incremental and mediocrity will ensue.

9. Finally, student affairs environments which foster change behaviors are characterized by continuous communication and negotiation of meaning. Organizations, through their people, must develop the capacity to adapt, respond and grow as the environmental forces that shape them change (Senge, 1990). Learning must be preceded by understanding - knowing the organization, knowing the environmental forces, and having the information necessary to develop a clear picture of organizational

niche (Senge, 1995). Without such understanding the fear of the unknown rises up and real change rarely occurs.

Such understanding can be achieved in two ways - continuous, effective communication and through negotiated meaning. Continuous communication can take a variety of forms, but in all cases the communication must be multidirectional, open, and constructive. O'Toole (1995) refers to the communication which fosters change as productive dialogue and recommends a change oriented environment consisting of frequent communication opportunities which are accurate, genuine, proactive, multidirectional and expressive of the values of the organization. Additionally, opportunities to negotiate meaning, to allow people to explore organizational issues deeply enough so that they can influence how the issue is understood and acted upon by the group, must be frequent and sincere.

Successful change efforts in higher education result from people throughout the institution piecing together their collective beliefs about change (Curry, 1992). This group action is the process of negotiating meaning; it involves constructing a history, a current picture, and a vision of the future. Were change simply a matter of one person's views being enacted, negotiation would hardly be necessary. However, widely-owned change must come from a variety

of places in an organization, thus flexibility, intervening factors, and room for interpretation must be built in. Each person or group in an organization views change from a particular perspective and designs an approach to change accordingly. In a student affairs environment safe for change, those perspectives and designs are open for discussion, are flexible enough to accommodate a variety of viewpoints, and are part of the organization's overall desire to be a learning community. If the environment is coldly objective, change from various levels of the student affairs organization will be stifled; however, if staff have the opportunity to talk about the organization, its values, and its future, new change initiatives will emerge regularly. If we can temper our sense of urgency and our quick-fix mentality with a commitment to shared meaning and the collective aspirations of staff (Rogers & Ballard, 1995), the confusion and frustration which breeds fear can be eliminated from our organizations.

In all that we have described, we have asserted that change can occur in student affairs under certain environmental conditions which we have called "safe". It is important to note that the word "comfort" was never substituted for "safe". Once again, the metaphor of the roller coaster can be revisited. While modern engineers have produced incredibly safe rides which protect riders from the simplest injuries to the gravest dangers, today's roller coaster would hardly be described as

comfortable. Rather, it pushes us to the limits of our senses and our sensibilities, to the boundaries of disorientation and the cusp of hysteria. In fact, engineers have found ways to stretch the senses far beyond the imaginable, thus assuring thrills while eliminating spills.

Comfort, in fact, is one of the greatest barriers to change in organizations. O'Toole (1995) describes "the ideology of comfort and the tyranny of custom" as major barriers to change, and Schroeder, et al., (1983) describe the need of student affairs practitioners to test the sacred totems of the field. There is a certain confidence borne of custom and comfort, yet they also bear resistance to change. Only leadership characterized by integrity, honesty, mutual respect and listening can overcome the ideology of comfort and the tyranny of custom and make real change possible.

Regardless of our formal role in the student affairs field, we have the opportunity to impact the change capacity of our organizations and improve educational practice. Whether we are a senior student affairs officer, an entry level residence hall director or preparation program faculty the responsibility and obligation for creating an environment which encourages change is ours. Today is just a warm-up. Student affairs is constantly changing and tomorrow promises to be even more turbulent, and although we cannot change the wind, we can adjust the sails (Ward, Mitchell, & Barnes, 1995). We know that undergraduate

education must be transformed and we know that the world of higher education is looking to see if student affairs is willing and able to do its part. But we need the people above, below and around us to lead change, to embrace change, to feed the transformations that signal progress and organizational health.

We can have those things if we put our imprint on our organizations' ethos, trust people, celebrate the future, use organizational values to guide change practices, transcend the barriers which separate us from other educators, set high expectations, cause leadership to bubble up throughout the organization, build a community of change masters, communicate and negotiate, and be resilient. This is the challenge which change brings us, and it's what we must do - now.

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