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Expectations, Challenges, and Frustrations: Faculty and Administrator Perceptions of Quality and Assessment

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A resurgence in defining and measuring quality is taking place in the United States as a result of a longer than normal economic recession, unprecedented availability of comparative information, and seemingly limitless consumer choice. In business, quality is definable via a target budget, schedule, and/or meeting expected performance requirements. In education, however, defining and assessing a desired end state is considerably more difficult, with interpretations as varied as individuals. For higher education especially, Cohen and Brawer (1996) identify some of the reasons for the heightened interest:

Alarmed at the rapid increase in per-student cost, especially [where] the public pays most of it, and prodded by constituents who deplore the low success rates for minority students, the legislatures and appointed officials in many states have insisted on more direct measures of college outcomes. What proportion of the matriculants obtain degrees? How many pass licensure examinations? How many are employed in areas for which they were trained? And – most disturbing of all for a professional group that has taken pride in its vaguely defined goals and processes – how much did the students learn? (p. 186)

While research shows that Americans still have faith in their institutions of higher education (

The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2004) they have, nonetheless, become understandably mistrustful of any organization – business or otherwise – that claims to be unable or unwilling to link outputs with inputs.

Background and Literature

The concepts that underpin the quality and assessment movement gained notoriety in the 1980's and early 1990's with seminal works by industry icons such as Philip Crosby (1976, 1984, 1992, 1996), Joseph Juran (1988, 1992, 1995), and most notably, W.Edwards Deming (1982). These works specified methods for assessing and improving industrial productivity, quality, and statistical process control (used mostly to predict and eradicate defects in manufacturing). "Knowing only this much is sufficient to make many educators very wary of anything to do with Deming [and quality principles],

especially those educators who are primarily concerned with the human dimension of schooling" (Owens, 2001, p. 219). This body of literature also places the burden of defining and assessing quality squarely on management. For example Crosby (1976) defines management as being "responsible for establishing the purpose of an operation, determining measurable objectives, and taking actions necessary to accomplish those objectives" (p. 25). Another perspective added that management is responsible for encouraging innovation and breakthrough as well as controlling it (Juran, 1995). Juran (1988) also emphasizes that quality is too revolutionary an idea to be handled by mere delegation and that managers make quality a top priority via the establishment of quality policies, goals, and objectives, providing resources and training, serving on quality teams, reviewing progress, stimulating improvement, and giving recognition. Perhaps the most referenced outline for defining, managing, and assessing quality is provided by Deming's (1982) "14 Points for Management" (p. 23). These points speak both directly and indirectly about quality as a responsibility as well as a process. Notably, Deming (1982) urges management to continue to focus on customer needs and desires while instilling constancy of purpose toward product improvement into the entire organization.

While Total Quality Management (and later, Continuous Quality Improvement) seemed appropriate paradigms for industry, the autocratic undertones were neither easily applicable, nor endearing to academic professionals. At this same time, new competition from the professional and for-profit sector, increased public demand for measurable productivity, compounded by drastic reductions in federal funds, led higher education scholars (Astin, 1991; Birnbaum, 1988; Bonvillian, & Dennis, 1995; Ewell, 1991, 1993; Garvin, 1988; Lewis & Smith, 1994; Seymour, 1992, 1993; Stauffer, 1981; Terenzini, 1989) to identify, define, and ultimately weigh the benefits of applying quality and assessment principles to the profession of education. Some (Ewell, 1991; Palomba & Banta, 1999) emphasize that reports such as

Integrity in the College Curriculum by the Association of American Colleges in 1985,

Involvement in Learning from the National Institute of Education in 1984, and

Time for Results published by The National Governor's Association in 1986 were specifically written to urge higher education to accept the mantra of quality, increase curricular coherence (Ewell, 1991), and provide for a standardized assessment of exactly what students are able to do (that they weren't able to do before) as a result of their education (Banta, 1996).

This time in higher education is also characterized by some (Birnbaum, 1988, 2000) as being rife with fads and inappropriate attempts to impose corporate management styles on educational institutions. Especially opposed to such practices, Birnbaum (2000) reflects:

Higher education has to do with teaching, learning, and knowledge. Is it important to focus attention on managerial support activities? If a new academic management technique is adopted and it turns out that it does not do what it claims, so what? Why should we care if decisions about efficiency and effectiveness are made in one way or another? (p. xii)

Still, institutions of higher education relied on their own version of quality control. The resource orientation (Seymour, 1993), while not a mechanism for addressing the changing external environment of education, holds that the quality of an institution of higher education can be determined by its internal resources: the number of books in the library, the number of faculty with terminal degrees, size of the

endowment, reputation, etc. However, internal measures of quality were no longer the primary measures of satisfaction demanded by increasingly discerning higher education consumers. "It has become evident that students, the primary customers of the institution, need and want more than library books and an impressive set of faculty degrees enumerated at the end of the college catalog" (Seymour, 1992, p. 7). Though this view of assessing quality is a traditional and defining characteristic of higher education, some institutions began to yield to a performance view of excellence in education motivated by increased competition, soaring costs, external calls for accountability, and an acknowledgement of education's service orientation. This means that the quality of an institution of higher education can be determined by its definable and assessable outputs – efficient use of resources, producing uniquely educated, highly satisfied and employable graduates, for example. This view is popularly termed the value added (Astin, 1991) approach to determining quality in higher education. This approach stresses agreeing upon, teaching, and measuring a set of student competencies that should be gained through a baccalaureate education (Bennett, 2001).

The necessity for improved quality and accountability continues in higher education with reports like

Measuring Up 2004 by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education [NCPPHE], and

The National Forum on College-Level Learning from the Pew Charitable Trusts. These reports show that American higher education is, to put it mildly, "under performing" (NCPPHE, 2004, p. 6). Researchers (Callan & Finney, 2002) consider this justification for an increased assessment of the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of America's "educational capital" (p. 31).

Purpose

It is not unreasonable to posit, then, that the increasing external pressure for higher education to comply with what is characterized by some as a yet another management fad (Birnbaum, 2000) is being felt by all those inside the walls of the academy. While there is a sufficient amount of information on the quantitative aspects of quality and outcomes assessment in business, the fact that there is only a small amount of empirical data on how academic professionals perceive it necessitates further documentation.

The purpose of this study was not to evaluate the means or methods by which outcomes assessment and quality are being enacted in higher education, or take sides in the raging state and federal policy debate on institutional accountability and efficiency, but rather to describe the reactions, feelings, and perceptions of one particular institutions internal stakeholders to the increasingly shrill rhetoric on such topics. The present research sought to provide a voice for current faculty and administrators who will be responsible for implementing these renewed calls for assessing educational quality: specifically, their perceptions of the value, challenges, opportunities, and frustrations involved. Finding that voice meant finding an institution who was struggling to fully embrace the principles of quality and outcomes assessment.

Institution

Mid-Atlantic A & M is a small, private, not-for-profit, Baccalaureate College-General located forty miles from a major metropolitan area in the Middle Atlantic United States. This institution is distinctive as it has unable to effectively identify with the assessment movement for some time thus recently incurring

the wrath of the local Department of Education and, to a lesser degree, its regional accrediting body; both of which expressed concern over, among other things, graduates of the teacher education program, a larger than acceptable proportion of whom were unable to pass state certification examinations. This institution currently enrolls a total of 1450 students, with a freshman class size of approximately 400. The college was founded in the late 1800's with the mission of retraining inner-city boys in the areas of plant and animal husbandry. While the college has maintained its emphasis on agriculture, science, and related fields, it continues to expand into other more traditional areas of study such as business, computer science, criminal justice, liberal arts, teacher education, and more recently, graduate studies. Though these programs attract students with varied backgrounds, the college is known as a farm school and, as such, attracts a student body whose background is in farming or a related field. The preponderance of the students at this institution are often the first in their family to attend college. The acceptance criterion for incoming freshman is relatively lenient with average SAT scores at or below 1000. It is a tuition driven institution with almost 70% of the revenue budget generated by tuition income. The tuition per student (including room and board) is approximately $35 thousand per year. The size of the college's endowment is approximately $13 million.

There are 285 full-time and permanent part-time employees. Including the President and excluding Department Chairs and assistants, there are eight top administrators.

There are approximately 90 faculty total: 30 full-time, tenured, all others part-time, or not on the tenure track. The tenured faculty are unionized through the local chapter of the American Association of University Professors [AAUP]. The institution considers itself a teaching institution and therefore faculty carry a rather high course load (up to seven, three credit courses per semester). Additionally, the college does not necessarily require faculty to hold a Doctorate, and does not require nor expect faculty to research or publish in their field.

This college is planning, with some trepidation, to more proactively undertake quality and outcomes assessment initiatives organization wide, for the first time. While their regional accrediting body does not track assessment data by institution type, there is some evidence that small, private, non-selective colleges in general are less likely to embrace quality measures when compared to public institutions (Birnbaum & Deshotels, 1999). The landscape of higher education, however, has changed over the past five years and most if not all institutions are required to show adequate progress toward measuring student and institutional outcomes. A recent re-write in the assessment standards for accreditation by Mid-Atlantic A & M's regional accrediting body shows that like institutions who have not been historically committed to quality and assessment are openly characterized as having insufficient effort in this area and are often, as is the case here, required to provide follow-up reports prior to re-accreditation.

Participants

Twelve participants were purposefully chosen from among the population of current faculty and administration. This number was significant as it represents more than one-third of the available population of tenured and tenure track faculty and administration. In a study such as this, it was also important to select informants that represented both the homogeneity and heterogeneity of the population. Purposeful sampling is a strategy in which "particular settings, persons, or events are selected deliberately in order to provide important information that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 70). Therefore, care was taken to choose participants from a variety of

academic and administrative departments while including key administrative informants, each with at least some knowledge and/or opinion on assessing quality in education.

Participant Characteristics

Overall, the participants (Table 1) were male, 50 years of age, tenured or on the tenure track, with an average of 10 years of service to the college. All but three had earned Doctorate degrees, and all but one had, now or in the past, spent a significant amount of time involved in the governance of the college.

What is "It": Quality and Assessment Activities at Mid-Atlantic A & M

Throughout the research process, the researcher attempted to define what specifically this college meant by quality and outcomes assessment. Though a moderate amount of documentation (meeting minutes, administrative memorandums, quality manuals and text books on reserve at the library, etc.) was found, there appeared to be little documented evidence of existing or proposed, organized, campus wide prescriptions for quality or assessment activities. The researcher could find no specific forms to fill out, no collective assessment processes in place, and no explicit guidelines to follow. However, the rhetoric and rumors appeared sufficient enough to induce campus wide anxiety and confusion.

For example, some participants mentioned that the administration was "dictating time policy" as a preliminary act of quality and assessment. Though not an approved or even documented policy proposal, the researcher uncovered that there was a rumor circulating through the faculty ranks that the administration was planning to mandate a standard eight hour workday for faculty, regardless of their teaching schedule.

In another case, the researcher uncovered that a professional academic department at the college had independently undertaken measures to standardize their syllabi and align their curriculum. For instance, all like courses in this department would share a common syllabus, a mandated set of goals and objectives, a compulsory textbook, and an obligatory sequence of topics. There was no evidence that this departments work was formally approved, officially acknowledged, or collectively disseminated as a model for the larger college community.

Yet another case was uncovered in which the chairperson of the college's signature technical academic department, who is genuinely interested in quality and assessment activities, applied to the administration for a small stipend to develop a web-enabled database that would identify and track student outcomes (students successful navigation through the departments quantitative courses was one of the areas most in need of tracking, according to this participant). The application was denied by the administration.

Data Collection and Analysis

The qualitative research method employed was a descriptive, single case, design. Qualitative research methodology was appropriate as this type of research is descriptive, action-oriented, and aims to help practitioners understand the context in which participants act (Maxwell, 1996). Qualitative research methodology was also ideally suited to answering questions about individual perception.

The primary mode of data collection was the interview. Participants were asked questions such as: "How will the introduction of quality and assessment influence the goals, roles, and mission of this college?" "How are faculty and administrators of this college preparing for the implementation of quality and assessment?" "Who are the key players and what are their individual (possibly varying) goals and motivations?" "How will the culture of this college change in an environment of increasing demand for demonstrable quality and outcomes?"

Some basic documents were also reviewed during the conduct of the study. Reference documents such as the college's strategic plan, curriculum reports, institutional reports, meeting minutes, and accrediting documents were all accessed through the college's library. These documents provided a ready made source of information that added context to the study, enhanced information gained during the interview process, and served as a method of verification.

This study assigned meaning to the data through the descriptive account of the perceptions of respondents, and through the generation of categories and sub categories. All qualitative data can be quantitatively coded in an almost infinite variety of ways, allowing for any number of judgmental syntheses and analyses (Trochim, 2000). To assist in the analysis, a coding scheme was devised for interview data (Table 2) whereby participant responses to each of the major research question threads were assigned a numerical value; (1) for an affirmative answer, (2) for a neutral response, and (3) for a negative reply. This allowed the researcher to systematically search for patterns and to compare data within and between the emergent categories, aiding in the inductive development of theoretical concepts (Maxwell, 1996). The resultant conceptual links between the responses enabled the development of a grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) that, when combined with the participants characteristics, attempts to not only illuminate the perceptions of this college's stakeholders to the rhetoric surrounding the first time implementation of quality and assessment, but to provide an explanation for why these particular individuals behave the way they do.

Findings

One overarching theme emerged early during the data collection process and was further refined during data analysis. It was is clear that while both faculty and administrators believe there is some value in the theory and implementation of outcomes assessment and quality measures at this college and in higher education in general, the perceived value of the totality of the movement at this particular institution of higher education is uncertain mainly due to a persistent culture of resistance. Though the level and strength of the resistance varies, what is most important for the purposes of this study is an analysis and subsequent understanding of why participants resist.

The resistance manifested itself early, and in two principle ways. Faculty resisted because they misunderstood the goals of quality and assessment and their potential to compliment the mission of the college, while administrators – who also manifested a similar degree of misunderstanding – resisted primarily because they felt quality and assessment activities are already taking place, making additional change efforts unnecessary. Further deconstruction of this information using the aforementioned coding scheme yielded a continuum of resistance that the researcher posits may be additionally explained through correlating patterns between participant's answers and their personal and professional characteristics. While resistance is still the predominant aspect of organizational life at Mid-Atlantic A & M, it appears that the participant's age, number of years at the college, and tenure

status also have a substantial effect on individual perceptions of quality and assessment.

A Misunderstanding

When asked how the introduction of quality and assessment will influence the goals, roles, and mission of the college many faculty respondents expressed enmity over the lack of a unified, consistent, and well communicated mission to begin with. A 59 year-old, tenured professor stated that an increased interest in producing higher quality programs was actually counter to the mission that the college was founded on. He stated:

The basis of the mission of the college [was] to take in students who would otherwise not have and opportunity for higher education; but we've divorced ourselves from that in many cases. And many people want this to be an exclusive college, well, that really wasn't the mission, nor is it a viable option to compete with those colleges who do have competitive reputations.

A majority of tenured faculty also professed an affinity for this "original" mission though somewhat more implicitly when they voiced concern over this college's lack of a clear definition of assessment and its relationship to the mission of the college. Illustrative comments came from a 46 year old, tenured professor who stated:

There's no commitment to the basic ideas of definitional support. What's the substance of it? What's the reasoning behind it? Why isn't it being communicated universally so that everyone is on the same page everyone is working from the same set of definitions and everyone can therefore contribute. How am I expected to contribute to something whose definition I don't understand? I mean what am I supposed to do?

A non-tenured professor explains why he perceives that an inherent conflict exists between not only the faculty and administration, but also measuring learning, and the tenets of a quality education:

Assessment it seems to me is interested in the kinds of learning that can be measured on multiple choice tests and scored by machine. Assessment is interested in electronic scoring for essays. These are frightening things because they require everyone to think alike; which is they require everyone to not think.

It is clear to the researcher that one of the major factors contributing to this resistance is the faculty's misunderstanding of not only the college's mission, but the goals of quality and assessment. For faculty, expanding the mission (whether implicitly or explicitly) and implementing quality and assessment principles are seen as mutually exclusive activities. Mid-Atlantic A & M's regional accrediting body, in its

Standards for Accreditation document, rebuffs just such a notion when it states that assessment principles are complementary to the college's mission:

Clearly defined mission, goals, and objectives guide faculty, administration, staff, and governing bodies in making decisions related to planning, resource allocation, program and curriculum development, and definition of program outcomes. [These] goals and objectives [should] focus on student learning, other outcomes, and institutional improvement.

The minority group of participants composed mainly of administrators also resisted, but for a slightly different reason. These individuals perceived (somewhat erroneously) that the college was already properly engaged in assessment activities, and that the college's "original" mission, goals, and roles should not need to be altered. One administrator, like each of the key administrative informants before and after her, summarized bluntly that outcomes assessment merely:

Establishes criteria for success. . . It proves what we've been doing all along.

Other key administrative informants also assumed that the technical nature of the college and its faculty make concepts like quantification and verification readily acceptable, needing little or no explanation. One administrator explained:

Part of the culture and philosophy of [Mid-Atlantic A & M] is sort of hands on verifying, very lab intensive. So philosophically, I guess we are at least in large parts of the curriculum already doing. . . those kinds of things. So it may in fact be easier for us in some circles to take this issue on.

The view from the faculty's perspective is quite different. A tenured professor with 11 years at the college stated that an understanding of assessment principles is not second nature to most members of the organization and that there needs to be a continuous campaign of reinforcement from the top administrators:

Really every time [the top administrator] would make a speech, he should really mention it for two minutes – outcomes assessment. College administrators as they get up and talk to the faculty or the college community, they really need to use some of these buzz words too so at least you know that this is something that they're not going to back down from.

This information revealed that administrators also manifested a degree of misunderstanding with regards to the mission of the college and the goals of academic assessment and quality assurance. But once again, the literature identifies their minimalist activities as a sign of the misperception of the goals of quality and change. Crosby (1984) warns that changing a culture is not merely a matter of technique, it is a matter of convincing people to exchange their long held values, beliefs, and attitudes for new ones; ones that will produce a longer lasting and positive effect on product quality and customer satisfaction.

Class Warfare

When asked how the college community is preparing for the implementation of quality and assessment and what the motivations of assorted key players are, perceptions varied considerably between faculty and administrators. In response, a more profound validation of the pervasive culture of resistance was evidenced by the severely bifurcated nature of the population; what a professor characterized as "class warfare" between the faculty and administration.

For instance, key administrative informants indicated that they perceived much preparation to be taking place – evolving administrative infrastructure, organizing multiple conferences, bringing consultants on campus, and advertising for a new assessment coordinator – while faculty perceived that little or no genuine planning was underway. One member of the faculty indicated that, on this issue, however, "the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing". A professor turned the question on the researcher

by asking:

One of the things that bothers me about this place is. . . why the secrets? Why does it have to be contentious around here? Why is this a turf war?

He continues to voice his frustration thusly:

Please tell me what [the administration's] activities have been so far and I'll be more than happy to give you my impression of it. . . in terms of how the administrators are preparing, I have no idea. . . [But] don't tell me I need to fall in line and be a team member when you know g-d dammed well you have known things and have not done things, and have omitted things that were important to me doing my job. . . Show me that you've cleaned up your act and then you can be in a position. . . you do your job and we'll do our job. If you want to come back over to the faculty, no sweat, come back over. In the meantime, just do your g-d dammed job.

Though having only been employed by the college for two years, one professor represented the faculty versus administration sentiment further when he implied the existence of differing agendas. He stated:

I think the process hasn't gone far enough yet for us to have anything cohesive in place. . .Knowing the [Administration], I would guess that [they] have goals that are not completely incompatible with [their] own agenda. What [their] agenda is, I have no direct knowledge.

Even as some faculty participants acknowledged the administrations preparatory efforts, they intimated that these activities have had a negative rather than positive effect on their perception of the value of quality and assessment. For example, several faculty members stated that while there were some satisfactory, one day in-service sessions on the topic of outcomes assessment, held over the past two years, there was no administrative follow through. A professor described his frustration with the administration when he stated:

The last [in-service on the topic of assessment] in May was excellent. But was there any follow up to that?

One faculty member mordantly identified his displeasure when he rather eloquently stated:

Well, we had a very nice workshop; I believe it was last spring. Umm. . . it was rather Shakespearean, in fact. It was full of sound and fury signifying nothing.

While faculty – who perceived that little to no effective preparatory activities were taking place – somewhat consistently identified major conflict between the goals of assessment and the administration, the administration themselves indicated that they perceived little or no conflict between themselves, the various goals and motivations of quality and assessment, and the faculty. One top administrator felt that the mere creation of a new administrative position whose major responsibility would be that of a bridge between the faculty and administration would preemptively lessen the risk of conflict. He stated:

I think [the creation of this new position] shows our commitment. You know we've submitted a position to work with the faculty, to work with the administration, to explain [it] to the faculty. . .

Another administrator offers a more mundane interpretation of the potential conflict but none the less fails to acknowledge the high level of resistance present between the faculty and administration when he stated:

I don't know that they're at conflict, but I don't know that their integrated. Sometime we could be working at cross purposes in developing criteria etcetera, so there could be some conflict there.

The researcher offers one explanation as to why this bifurcation, a somewhat common occurrence in higher education, is so heightened at Mid-Atlantic A & M. Like most institutions of higher education, faculty and administration typically function independently of one another. The faculty feels that all activities that have to do with the transmission of knowledge – teaching, learning, assessment, etc. – are their domain exclusively while they happily defer the responsibility of running the organization to the administration. Outcomes assessment is especially incendiary because it is largely an instructional matter that is not emanating from the faculty (despite the existence of committees at Mid-Atlantic A & M) but rather, is perceived as being imposed on them from the top down; a management style that is rare – and potentially dangerous – in higher education. Quality and assessment forces a convergence of two previously independent areas with incompatible decision making models (Birnbaum, 1988). The administration as well as various outside agencies are now exerting influence over intellectual matters, subsequently pressuring faculty to both defend their intellectual territory and undertake additional logistical and procedural responsibilities. Even though all the participants believed that verifying instruction is an important goal of assessment, this new relationship is a major source of faculty-administrator conflict at this college and is one of the foremost contributors to its pervasive culture of resistance.

Entrenchment

Much has been, and continues to be written about the effects of tenure. One of the strongest proponents is that of The AAUP. The AAUP's

1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure as well as other literature (Benjamin, n.d.; Chait, 1997; Wheatley, 1995) lists academic freedom and professional integrity as the main purpose for tenure in higher education. According to Wheatley (1995) academics have a duty to challenge existing beliefs and pursue research without fear of losing their jobs. However, tenure (and it's accompanying conventions) is also an impediment to quality and change in higher education as it, for example, limits individual and collective flexibility and exacerbates the bureaucratic tendencies of the organization (O'Toole, 1978).

In this study, tenuous patterns emerged from the data that appear to correlate participants' age, number of years at the college, and tenure status with their perceptions of the value of quality and assessment, and ultimately change. These responses further identified a collective entrenchment in old ways of thinking as a possible contributing factor to the college's overall culture of resistance.

Much was said by "young" faculty (who were chronologically younger than the average age of 50, and/or those with less than 10 years at the college, without tenure) about faculty who, as a second year professor put it, "are teaching classes using notes they wrote thirty years ago". When asked if the college will alter it's mission or change it's culture in response increased calls for the assessment of academic quality, this individual went on to say:

I don't think it's going to change anything significantly. The people who are amenable to change may find some change in it but they're going to find a way to adapt new requirements to what they believe in, those who teaching has calcified will probably do nothing more than lip service to it.

Speaking from the perspective of a new employee, this 53 year-old faculty member stated bluntly that talk of outcomes assessment and quality will not alter the way the older, tenured teachers conduct themselves. His reasoning was unique among participants partly because he framed his response in terms of the college's rural location and its tendency to hire and indefinitely retain only people with similar views:

We seem to be a small town type of college; very ingrown, most of the faculty have been here twenty years or more I believe, and so it's maybe ingrown, maybe a little inbred. I would guess that people with similar viewpoints came in and over time they got very comfortable with each other and don't want to change anything.

This majority opinion – that the college's mission and/or culture will not change significantly – was proffered by mostly tenured individuals, who were much older (average age 53 years), with more than 13 years at the college. A tenured, top administrator aged 63 years also reasons that the college will not change, but offers a different rationale (mirroring the misperception held by administrators that the college is already sufficiently engaged in assessment activities):

I don't think that assessment will change what our mission is or what we do. Essentially, when a student is finished here, what do they know and what can they do? And we're trying. . . for ourselves [and] also for business and industry that hire our students to be able to prove, 'yep', we're not just saying we can do it, we can show you through our assessment tool. It's a tool. I don't see it changing our mission.

A 59 year-old, 16 year veteran professor at the college stated ultimately that:

I don't think that it will change because it's been this way for a hundred years and a lot of justifications for things is, 'well we've always done it this way'. So I don't think it's going to have a major impact.

While two tenured faculty members stood out as they categorized the assessment movement as "a management fad" that "would die a natural death".

When asked how such entrenchment could be overcome, a 36 year-old professor and chairperson – who identified more than half of his full-time faculty as tenured, aged 60 years or older – admitted that he felt somewhat powerless to change things:

I'm just going to ride it out; I'm not going to change them. You know they're doing what they're doing now for thirty-five years; I'm not going to change them. There are a lot of things in my life I still haven't accepted that I'm not going to change, but, you know, this is one of those things that I can say, 'I'm not going to change them'.

Participants in the minority who felt that the mission of the college could or would change as a result of the imposition of quality and assessment were largely young (38 years-old on average), untenured faculty, who were employed less than 10 years at the college. A 35 year-old, untenured, professor with only five years at the college attempts to articulate why younger faculty may be more willing to accept

change while older faculty resist:

Certain faculty members certainly see the mission as more occupational and less academic. But I think for those faculty members who are maybe of a younger generation, maybe have more education, I think there is that philosophical push. But I think it depends upon who you're asking. I think your audience is definitely going to be a factor in that, their background would have to be a factor in that. And certainly I think the length of time. . . if you have faculty members that have been here forty years, thirty years, I mean, they're going to have a different vision because the college has changed and sometimes their not necessarily wanting to see the college change because [they're] back to the farm school mentality.

A 37 year-old, untenured professor, who came to an educational career only two years ago from industry, echoed the sentiment when she stated simply:

I think it will; I'm hopeful that it will change but it's hard to get through to some of the older faculty. They've never had other jobs and they seem to be on their way out the door anyway. We need some fresh ideas around [here] and maybe this is it.

One explanation the researcher offers for this phenomenon is that, similar to Lewin's (1951) force-field concept of organizational resistance and change, older individuals who have been at this college for a long period of time and have thus earned tenure are, by their very nature, more entrenched in old ways of thinking and are less flexible than their younger, non-tenured peers. These individuals, when faced with internal or external change, strive for the status quo through the use of a myriad of restraining measures such as the creation of rigid rules or belief systems (i.e. an affinity for the "original mission", or adopting a "that's the way it's always been" mantra, etc.). Older, tenured faculty at this college also have the comfort of job security, an extremely lenient post-tenure review, and for the most part can hold on to their perceptions and remain inflexible without jeopardizing their relationship with the institution. Younger, non-tenured individuals are still in the process of building a relationship with their employer and are acutely aware of the need to be perceived as positive and accepting, in order for the college to accept them (via the granting of tenure, promotion, etc.). It follows too that since these individuals have only been employed a short time at the college, they are both less aware of and less likely to be invested in the college's "original mission".

Implications and Recommendations

The findings presented illuminate the perceptions of one college's internal stakeholders to the first time implementation of quality and assessment principles. While specific policies or procedures have yet to materialize, it appears that the mere talk of implementing quality measures and assessing teaching and learning has had a noticeable, negative, effect on the institution and its members, especially faculty.

Both faculty and administrators believe there is value in the theory and implementation of outcomes assessment. The researcher has concluded, though, that an overall culture of resistance (exacerbated by a widespread misperception of the mission of the college and the goals of quality and assessment, the predominance of older, more inflexible organizational members, and a lack of communication and support from the top administrators) presents a significant barrier to their first time implementation at Mid-Atlantic A & M. Were a systematic, unified, transparent, and well communicated mission with appropriate rewards in place, the researcher posits that stakeholder trust and engagement could be

increased, and a culture of acceptance would gradually supplant the current culture of resistance.

Recommendations

The impetus for improving quality at Mid-Atlantic A & M mirrors the overall trend in higher education. External factors such as amplified scrutiny from accrediting agencies and the market, reduced availability of private and public funds for marginally performing programs and schools, increased tuition and persistent unemployment and under-employment for recent graduates, and even the prospect of four more years of

No Child Left Behind legislation have conditioned the public to be especially mistrustful of educational institutions that cling to the resource view of quality and claim to be unable to show, in concrete terms, the value of the educational process. Though many at Mid-Atlantic A & M are aware that such forces are driving the quality and assessment movement on their campus they remain, for the most part; entrenched, obdurate, and resistant. It is clear to the researcher at the end of the inquiry that this inability or unwillingness defies the basic principles of continuous quality improvement and poses a threat to Mid-Atlantic A & M's growth, and possibly it's survival.

Though generalizability can not be explicitly claimed in a qualitative study such as this, the data collected during this inquiry allows the researcher to posit that there are two key implications for the higher education administrator confronted with the imposition of quality and assessment in a culture of resistance:

1. The administration is responsible for fully and actively educating the college community, thereby taking responsibility for the institutions pervasive culture via its shared expectations, challenges, and frustrations.

2. The higher education administrator must take a systems approach to organizational change and build an environment where self-interest is not paramount (Senge, 1990).

While it was apparent that this college's administration understood the general strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats inherent in implementing quality and assessment for the first time on their campus, faculty felt that the collegial dissemination of this information was sorely lacking. As a result, the rift deepened between and among faculty and administrators, and the culture of resistance was exacerbated. The research suggests that higher education administrators can not blindly assume that faculty will autonomously seek to understand administrative issues in the same way they approach intellectual problems within their disciplines. This assumption along with a documented communication problem proved fear inducing at Mid-Atlantic A & M. Information starved faculty, with neither the background nor interest in educational pedagogy, resisted talk of making expectations explicit, standardizing syllabi, reporting program retention and employment rates, and measuring learning outcomes not so much because these things were incongruent with the tenets of good teaching, but because they were not duly informed of their logistical scope.

For Mid-Atlantic A & M, as well as other organizations dealing with this type of resistance, a successful communication and educational strategy is needed. Beyond merely transmitting information, such a strategy must provide for the normative education (or re-education) of organizational participants. Effective communication is essential to an organizations health and is a powerful mechanism for eradicating fear; at a minimum gaining compliance, and at a maximum, affecting transformational

change. The traditional business literature on quality and particularly the contemporary interpretation of these concepts in the higher education literature (Ford, et al., 1996; Rowley & Sherman, 2001;) shows that the prognosis is not good for institutions (of higher education or otherwise) whose leaders do not feel compelled to communicate clearly to their constituents.

Finally, administrators must understand that institutions of higher education are highly political systems. The reality of organizational life in higher education is that the day to day activities of faculty are carried out almost entirely independent of the administration. A professional organization such as this – whose members are for the most part motivated by self interest – is naturally less responsive to the external environment and resists change fervently as territory protection is the primary concern. The further fractured nature of this particular college makes implementing any organization wide program extremely difficult.

But hope for organizational change at Mid-Atlantic A & M or any other institution of higher education experiencing a culture of resistance is not lost. The researcher concludes, however ideally, that the nature of education and especially educators implies that they are – underneath their pessimism, aloofness, and resistant natures – altruistic and concerned about issues larger than themselves. This was evidenced at Mid-Atlantic A & M by the almost complete agreement among participants that the improvement of teaching and student learning was the best motivation for quality and assessment. Knowing this, the higher education administrator must make special efforts to address change in a way that is consistent with this nature. More than just distributing mouse pads with institutional objectives printed on them, the administration must seek campus-wide input into the process in order to compose a shared vision, thus increasing the potential for group commitment from all stakeholders. When such a holistic and participative approach is taken, the foundation of the political environment – self-interest – begins to crumble (Senge, 1990).

Suggestions for Further Research

This study illuminates the need for further inquiry into the specific implications of managing change (including cases of resistance, frustration, and failure) in higher education. Much has been and continues to be written about corporate change management and organizational development. There is however, a vast sea of cultural, logistical, political, and normative differences that separate the American corporation from the academy. A socially responsible, loosely coupled, decidedly political organization, with a highly educated workforce, where collegiality, employee governance, and life-time employment contracts are the norm, requires a significantly different change strategy than that used in the standard autocratic, financially driven, at-will corporation. An institution of higher education is therefore understandably less responsive to the external environment as it actively resists change. A lack of understanding of this dynamic on the part of leaders makes the challenge of implementing any organization wide program in higher education an extremely difficult one. How, then, can institutions of higher education foster innovation, encourage risk taking, entrepreneurship, and accountability within the confines of such an inimitable organizational structure?

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Table 1.

Participant Characteristics

Order Interviewed	Current Age	Years at College	Sex	Current position
1	59	16	M	1
2	35	5	F	3
3	53	8	M	2
4	36	11	M	3
5	46	12	M	1
6	60	10	F	2
7	56	2	M	1

8	63	7.5	M	2
9	40	7	M	3
10	61	32	M	2
11	43	7	F	1
12	37	2	F	1

Table 1.

Participant Characteristics (continued)

Career Path	Tenure	Discipline	Highest Degree Earned	Involvement In Governance
2	1	5	3	3
1	1	1	3	3
3	2	5	3	4
1	1	3	3	3
3	1	2	2	2
2	2	2	3	4
1	2	1	3	2
1	1	4	3	5
1	1	3	3	3

1	1	4	3	4
3	1	5	2	2
3	2	1	2	1

Key to Table 1.

Participant Characteristics

Order Interviewed	Current Age	Years at College	Sex	Current position
Number	years	years	M/F	1-Fac
				2-Adm
				3-Both

Key to Table 1.

Participant Characteristics (continued)

Career Path	Tenure	Discipline	Highest Degree Earned	Involvement In Governance
1-Grad school	1-Yes 2-No	1-Human 2-Bus	1-Bach 2-Mast	1-Never 2-Committee
2-High school		3-Science 4-Agric	3-Doc	3-Chair 4-VP/Dean
3-Bus		5-Educat		5-President

Table 2.

Participant Responses

Order Interviewed	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4
1	3	3	1	3
2	1	3	1	2
3	1	1	3	1
4	3	2	1	3
5	3	3	1	3
6	2	1	2	2
7	3	3	2	3
8	3	1	3	3
9	1	2	2	1
10	3	1	2	3
11	1	3	1	3
12	2	3	1	2

Key to Table 2.

Participant Responses

Order	Question	Question	Question	Question

Interviewed	1 Mission change?	2 How Prepare?	3 Conflicting interests?	4 Culture Change?
Number	1-yes 2-maybe 3-no	1-much 2-little 3-none	1-yes 2-some 3-no	1-yes 2-some 3-no

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