TO: Presidents, Senior Administrators, and Faculty Leaders
Who Would Seek Change
FROM: Niccolo Machiavelli, Former Assistant to Presidents, University of the Medici

Permit me to take a brief moment of your valuable time to introduce myself. I served for years as special assistant to kings, dukes, generals, several popes and, as well, numerous presidents, senior executives and faculty at the University of the Medici. I have significant domestic and international experience—for in this capacity I have also worked with governors, state and national legislators, wealthy donors, foundations, public relations firms, religious societies, city and county officials, law enforcement agencies, and community activists. I have also coordinated activities with ministers of education throughout Europe.

I had the distinct pleasure of hearing your recent address to the Faculty Senate. You spoke of a bold tomorrow, the need for change in your institution, including the manner in which work is accomplished and evaluated. You discussed technology, distance learning, diversity, student services, the need for alternative criteria to evaluate faculty, new relationships with unions, funding, and student and alumni constituencies. You discussed how the role of the university, with the state, the city, and the federal government will change. You cited emerging relationships

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with the business community and argued persuasively, in my opinion, that unless the academic establishment begins to refocus its priorities, the university, as it once existed, will lose the autonomy and freedom to offer sound educational programs.

I am in no position to quarrel with your premises. (I am unemployed at the moment.) I was impressed with your grasp of fundamental issues facing higher education. I am, however, curious as to how you will implement these new ideas. Because I have advised over one hundred senior executives and faculty on change and implementation strategies, I thought you might appreciate my observations. My comments are based on real experiences. They are offered to you as a gift, yours to keep or discard at your pleasure.

Parenthetically, I do not mean to be presumptuous or overbearing in this letter. University executives and faculty leaders are (on occasion) startled at my directness and characterization of the uses of power and influence. I understand you are a gifted individual and would not hold your position and title unless you possessed exemplary traits. Like most intelligent people with whom I have worked, they appreciate candor. (Please ignore my biases though!) I do not want to sound as though I were sending you into an armed battle. Neither should we pretend, if you are serious about your ideals and goals, that people will simply adopt “your” new vision.

Decision Processes in Professional Organizations: Contemporary Realities

The key to being effective and the ability to make change begins first with an accurate assessment of the type of organization in which you work. Secondly, you must appreciate how decisions are made and who, if anyone, implements them.

Universities and colleges have a number of unique characteristics. Fundamentally, they are people-processing organizations, and, in order to handle that complex and delicate task, they usually have large staffs of highly trained professionals. Because people cannot be divided into segmentalized tasks in the same way that physical products can, professionals with a high level of expertise are needed to deal holistically with clients’ needs. Thus it is that the first characteristic of academic organizations is that they are highly professionalized, client-serving systems.

Second, “people-processing” organizations have extremely ambiguous goals, and a list of legitimate activities for a university is extremely long. Because goals are often unclear, almost any activity that serves a “client” may be considered legitimate. Though many activities can be
considered legitimate, many are also questioned. This is important for understanding change processes. If a college or university does not know its specific objectives, then an individual with an idea (and the energy) can often bend the institution in his direction. Ambiguity and contest over goals pave the way for the skillful politician.

Finally, colleges and universities are extremely vulnerable to outside pressures. Because the clients themselves—students—are relatively powerless, society generally demands accountability from the organization. As a consequence, outsiders demand the right to influence internal decisions. Be assured, however, that the public's success varies considerably: in school systems outside voices are often influential; in hospitals or legal firms, the organization has generally listened with deaf ears.

Characteristics of the Decision-Making Process

You operate in an unusual kind of organization. It is one that serves clients, has a highly professionalized staff, has unclear and contested goals, and is subject to much external pressure. The decision-making process can be characterized by the following:

Decision is by committee. Because expertise, not hierarchical office, is the organizing principle, then committees of experts decide many of the critical issues.

Fluid participation. Many of the decision makers are amateurs, engaged in pursuing their professions, not in making decisions. As a consequence, they wander in and out of the decision process, and power belongs to those who stay long enough to exercise it.

An issue carousel. Issues have a way of always coming around again. Decisions do not last long because pressure from outside groups, from clients, and from other professionals push the same or similar issues full circle. Decisions are not made as much as they are pinned down temporarily.

A "subsidiary" process. The longer it takes to make a decision, the greater the number of issues that are piled onto the original subject. People, hoping to accomplish several things at one time, burden simple decisions with countless subsidiary ones.

Conflict is common. Professional groups, clients, and outsiders support divergent interests in setting the ambiguous goals of academic organizations. As a consequence, conflict over goals is common as decision makers cope with the pressures from diverse interest groups.

How can I summarize? The image that captures the spirit of the decision process in an academic organization does not resemble a normal bureaucracy; nor does it look like the "community of peers" that is often
associated with the medieval guild. Several images capture the spirit of the decision-making process. First, the structure of the organization is fluid, can be challenged and is highly political. Second, the decision-making process reflects competing groups and who often conflict. Finally, the unsettled character of the decision-making process can be captured by using the term decision flowing instead of decision making. Decision making has a finality to it; decision flowing sounds like a never-ending process that must be continued in order to make outcomes really work.

Change and the Ability to Make It

In the academic organization, seeking change, or accommodation to new trends, ideas, contexts, political or fiscal realities, is not for the faint-hearted. This is so particularly in your school. At least in your case, you will have some formal authority over internal constituents—but it is not formal authority in the real sense. As one ascends the organizational hierarchy in academic organizations, one has less and less real authority over anyone needed to get the job accomplished. Put another way, if you ever have to “invoke” your authority, you have, in effect, lost it. Success depends on managerial savvy coupled with moral and political persuasiveness.

Most in higher education believe “change” is laudable, but it remains difficult to manage. Said another way, we are busy reacting to change instead of being proactive. We even ask our search consultants to bring us candidates who can implement “change.” In my experience, however, our colleagues in academe do not readily adopt new definitions of what is or is not important, or how work is accomplished or evaluated. (I suspect this may be attributable to the notion that professionals believe that what is good for them is also good for the student.) Everyone will sign on to the platitudes—the real work remains in the details of implementation: persuading; cajoling and, in reality, making it impossible for others not to follow you; exercising power and influence in non-hierarchical and informal settings. Implementation is the realm where the truly successful and effective administrators flourish.

The truth of the matter is that anyone who seeks to transcend the status quo will be met with opposition. Those who can neutralize or overcome opposing constituencies (or individuals) will succeed. Most senior executives and faculty, however, cannot and, for that reason, do not succeed in changing the organization in a positive way (and so they relegate their efforts around the margins of the institution, ignoring or shying away from the difficult structural issues). Of course the worst case sce-
nario results when change is effectuated without accommodating careers and egos of others. There are numerous examples of “negative” or destructive changes.

Rules and Tactics for the “Change-Oriented”

Rule No. 1: Integrity, Wisdom, Selflessness

A new vision cannot be successfully implemented unless the individual (you) motivating others to change is perceived to have the highest of values; e.g., integrity, sensitivity, selflessness, striving for the good of the organization. Creative organizational evolution will not occur unless your constituency perceives you to be sincere, honest, fair; one who understands the university, scholarship and, as well, the role of other core constituents. The one absolute I can offer is this: if the perception exists that you do not have integrity, wisdom, or selflessness, or if this issue is effectively presented or manipulated in a negative way by an opposing constituency, you will lose your influence and ability to manage change in the organization. There are presidents, for example, who are president in title only. This is fine as long as the organizational goal does not entail implementation of a new vision. Within the context of this first rule, I would offer a word about your personal relationships and the importance of managing external constituencies.

Personal Relationships

Protect those individuals and allies who risk their professional standing and administrative careers for you. Many good efforts flounder because senior executives or faculty (who desire institutional transition and convince others to implement it) do not support these individuals when conflict emerges. If those who articulated change (on your behalf) are abandoned, few will trust you again. Professional administrators and colleagues are a pretty smart lot. They can make or break you! You must guard those individuals (and honor formal lines of authority; e.g., those who report to them). Reward the constituents who give you their support. However, while engaging in this action be very wary of your “open door” policy! Few messengers are without a personal agenda. Reward those who are. Never expel the messenger though! Utilize their services wisely. Cultivate informal channels of communication without undermining the reporting or political relationships of others. Moderate your “reaction” to information gained through informal networks. If those around you feel you overreact to “negative” information, they will funnel only “good” news and, like most leaders who encourage or tolerate
only good news, your authority and influence will eventually fracture and vanish, probably while you are busily engaged in what you consider important (and others consider trivial); e.g. designing the alumni magazine or visiting facilities off-site.

**External Constituencies**

As I noted earlier, colleges and universities usually have strong external constituents who apply pressure to the decision-making process. The wise strategist uses support from these external constituencies to influence the internal process. In building coalitions, it is useful to associate with outside groups as well as inside groups, particularly because major decision makers themselves are often tied to outside groups. Insiders, with their limited view of the outsiders’ role, naively overlook the political strategy of cultivating external allies. Legislators, trustees, parents, alumni, and foundations can help change universities. The potential power of external constituencies must never be neglected.

**Rule No. 2: Build A Team**

You will need one. In this respect do not underestimate the value of loyalty as well as competency. New appointments will be important ones, particularly senior nonacademic appointments. Nonacademic administrators are crucial, because without them you cannot maintain your influence and run the institution effectively. Some academic types do not understand this. However, loss of confidence in your regime will come when your primary constituents (faculty, trustees, students, the public, academic administrators) feel they (a) cannot trust university data; (b) they think that student services or student-related issues are out of control; (c) perceive that a crisis (usually fiscal) exists on campus with personnel, auxiliary services, etc.; (d) believe “funding” or “political” problems exist; (e) suspect that some senior advisors are out of control or incompetent.

Your agenda cannot be accomplished in the academic division alone. Good politicians know that much of their job is not influencing decisions as much as it is building a political base for influencing decisions. This means that a dedicated cadre of change agents must be formed, a committed group that exchanges ideas and reinforces each other’s efforts. In addition, a strong change group needs equally strong links to those in viable political coalitions. In this respect, I should discuss the mechanics of building a team. This may entail making new appointments. Here is where many inexperienced administrators and faculty make fatal mistakes!

I advise that you break out of traditional recruitment and appointment processes. Be wary of a search committee’s propensity to find the right
people. Search committees often recommend those who are acceptable to the group (or those who may offend the fewest)! Assembling a team requires you to resist strong pressures to appoint “traditional” individuals. Traditionalists are not often comfortable with nor do they usually understand how to manage “change” or “conflict.” Go outside of the traditional realm. The appointment of excellent and supportive academic administrators will be a task to which you should devote attention. Do not assume a search committee will simply do what you ask. Check the details of “who” serves on the committee, the charge of the committee, read the position description before the position is advertised. I would offer a word here about the concept of accountability.

Accountability

You must demand it. Unless there are consequences for “behavior” you cannot realize your objectives. Many in academe are not held accountable because much of what we do is not readily measurable (so it is difficult to determine success or failure!). People who care more about popularity than being strong managers (or effectuating change) do not hold others accountable. (I have rarely witnessed a situation where a well-liked individual could (a) remain on excellent terms with faculty and staff and (b) initiate change in the school, division or college.) Nor can you succeed with administrators who are vindictive, territorial, jealous, too lax (classic symptoms of “powerlessness”), or those who sanction inappropriate behavior, for example, when the “wrong” people are promoted. Unfortunately, many in academe often do a less than stellar job of evaluating managerial and academic effectiveness. It is not realistic to believe that senior faculty or administrators can be held accountable in an environment where there is little or no agreement on performance objectives. Appoint self-motivated people, set goals, ask for benchmark measures of success, demand more than “acquiescence.”

In summary, your senior team must be provided with a positive emotional atmosphere: reward and encourage them in visible and immediate ways, express confidence, let them do their jobs, promote independence, initiative, and responsibility.

Rule No. 3: Concentrate Your Efforts

A basic mistake made by people interested in change is that they frequently squander their efforts by chasing too many rainbows. An effective political change agent, realizing that change is really difficult, concentrates efforts on only the important issues. Remember that in academe, most people do not care about all the issues. If you care
enough to concentrate, you have enormous power to be effective. The frustration caused by the resistance offered by an immovable system is usually the result of scattered and dispersed efforts. Remember, if "fluid participation" is the rule, then most people wander in and out of the issue. If you stick with one or two critical issues, you are more likely to be effective. Make a list of priorities. Select the top three or four. Force yourself to ask the following questions in regard to these priorities:

- Who else is or will be influential as you endeavor to accomplish this priority?
- Whose cooperation and support will be needed?
- Whose opposition could delay or derail this action?
- In regard to those whose support is necessary or those who will oppose you, analyze:
  - What are the sources of their influence and authority?
  - Who will be more influential in the decision-making process?
  - Under what circumstances will (the) opposition coalesce?
  - Who will be affected by what you are trying to accomplish; e.g., effect on "their" power or status?
- Ask which strategies and tactics will be the most appropriate given faculty and administrative support (or opposition) for the idea or action.
- Ask who will determine success or failure.

In this context, may I offer advice on the notion of timing?

**Timing**

You must get a core constituency to (a) agree upon priority objectives early in the game and (b) agree on measurable criteria for success. Following this you should ensure that (someone) evaluates the effectiveness of actions against these measures. The sooner the process starts, the better. Academic organizations are tolerant of new presidents for short periods of time. They are, in a real sense, skeptical of anyone in a position of authority. The honeymoon will end quickly. Afterwards, a bureaucracy (and your opponents) can destroy creativity. Do not, however, take on the whole community at once! Choose your priorities (your allies and your adversaries) carefully.

Remember also, after one year, your predecessor's problems (largely through "nonaction") become your problems. Be a visionary and a missionary to constituents who object to your goals or who have power to
block new initiatives. Understand where those constituencies derive their status and support.

Rule No. 4: Know When to Engage Conflict

To concentrate is to choose a few issues, and a tactical genius knows which ones to choose. Most of the time, it makes sense to support issues when you know you can be effective. If it is obvious that you will lose, wait. Remember, with the “issue carousel,” the situation will probably return, allowing you time to master your resources for the next battle. There are exceptions to the “fight to win” rule. Sometimes it is wise to engage confrontation because the moral issue is great, or because it is possible to make future martyrs. We do not always fight to win today; sometimes we fight today so that we can win tomorrow. Most of the time, however, the rule is to choose issues with high payoff.

The sophisticated and astute observer can usually tell the difference between who is effective and who is not. A word here about conflict in the academic environment. Don’t avoid it, manage it. Many presidents and senior executives fail to grasp this. Redirecting the priorities, possibilities and, if you will, the mission of a university requires organizational tension. Very simply put, you must convince your core constituencies to support (and buy into) new ways of conceiving and evaluating work and, perhaps, new educational or process outcomes, e.g., new relationships with unions or other core constituencies. This will require those who are “secure” with the current mission or comfortable with present priorities and outcomes, to change. Change can evolve peacefully to be sure. However, when it is necessary to “redirect” institutional priorities, change is more often associated with conflict primarily because folks have a vested interest in the way work is accomplished now.

Remember that your institution is a place wedded to its “traditions.” This cultural trait will manifest itself, cloaked in the argument that “we never did it that way here” or, those who oppose you will hear in your words, “he (or she) doesn’t value my (our) work.” Managing this kind of conflict successfully requires that you:

• Encourage opposing constituencies to choose a course of action early in the game.
• Offer real alternatives for those who oppose you.
• Advance the notion of “mutual interests” rather than focusing on the positions of those who disagree.
• Act decisively, act soon, act in a determined manner.
• If you feel senior administrators will not be supportive, find another
place for them soon. You are probably not going to win them over and you will not succeed as long as they hold their positions.

• Have a strategic plan, stay to it. Pay attention to detail. Develop measurable criteria for success. Remember that most academic folks are trained to make a critical analysis but are not trained to implement decisions. People need guidance and supervision.

• You must love the academic soul. But remember, faculty, as a group, will complain. Offer them some cheese with their whine.

• Find the right incentives. Do not assume others will follow you simply because you are right. People will embrace your vision when your ideas provide them with (intrinsic/extrinsic) rewards.

• How you go about managing conflicting interests and personalities may be almost as important as what you actually do. Be very humane and civil.

• Once a constituency (or an individual) is neutralized or won over, allow for face saving, but do not be obsequious to those who opposed you.

• Declare your program a success; find small successes to celebrate along the way.

• Utilize (rely) on external pressures to encourage internal change. Redirect and manage those pressures. Force convergence of internal and external policy.

• Be wary of showing weakness. Do not readily admit you do not know something. Few are sanguine about following a person who has never “been there” before.

• Colleges and universities are organizations with low tolerance for conflict. Use this resource wisely.

Rule No. 5: Learn the History

Every issue has roots deep in the past. The issue carousel has trotted it past several times before. Consequently, the wise tactician searches for the historical bases of an issue. When was it around before? Who took what position? Who won? Who lost? Knowing the history can reveal what coalitions fight together and what tactics prove useful—information that helps in planning strategy. Under most circumstances, the person who is historically naive about the issue is not effective.

A word here about two issues related to “history.” The first concerns the use of data and research and the second involves policy convergence.

Data/Research

Many ideas go awry because the data and/or research underpinning these issues can be criticized or, worse, is faulty. Just as there is nothing
so good as good theory, there is no substitute for well-conceived and adequately presented institutional research. Be sure your opinions and ideas are based on solid assumptions and that they are defensible. Once anyone demolishes the basis of your (informational or research) objectives, you will lose your influence. In the academic milieu, if people cannot trust your data, they will not trust you.

**Policy Convergence**

Unless institutional policies and procedures reflect new visions and priorities, you cannot succeed. Policies and procedures form the basis upon which others act and, through implementation of policy, how others are evaluated. Once you articulate a new direction, institutional policies must conform to them. A "vision" cannot overcome policy which in itself may serve as a disincentive. Take the example of "fiscal prudence." A seemingly harmless policy that requires returning unused funds to a central account, may undermine this idea. Policies such as these sometimes work as an incentive for an administrator or faculty member to spend funds unwisely or "hide" accounts in an effort to circumvent the policy. (Of course, those who hide moneys will do so for the best of academic reasons!)

The policy criteria upon which people are evaluated will determine, to a large extent, their behavior and priorities. For example, you must endeavor to modify standards for promotion and tenure if you want to redirect the academic priorities of faculty. (No mean feat!) Making even small changes in this realm will require agreement and assistance of deans and department chairpersons. Redirection will come, ultimately, only if new criteria are related to outcomes that the "academic establishment" can support. In this respect, new priorities can be engineered if they are not seen as "imposed" but come as a product of mutual agreement. I am not suggesting this be done in all disciplines, but it must be attempted for some, as I understood your goals.

**Rule No. 6: Strategic Planning**

Your goals cannot be realized without a strategic plan. Everyone knows this. However, what many do not do is demand answers to the "right questions" in the plan. Review key priorities and concomitant strategic planning issues with your senior team. Next, force the team to address the following:

- Have you defined short-term and long-term objectives?
- Is a strategy adequately developed?
Identify the key assumptions underlying your strategy. What evidence are you relying on to ensure assumptions are valid?
Is the action plan feasible given the constraints and opportunities inherent in the situation?
Is the action plan realistic given your sources of power?
- Has the impact of the action plan been assessed? (Is the plan ethical, will it benefit the institution?)
  Are you cognizant of trade-offs, or who will be directly and indirectly affected by your plan?
  Were the risks of the plan analyzed?
- Were all contingencies planned for?
- Are mechanisms in place to ensure the plan is periodically evaluated?
  Can the plan be modified?
- Have you assessed the timing and sequence of decisions?
  Differentiate between urgent and less important matters.
  Does the plan contain incremental steps?
  Do early steps preclude future alternatives?
- Will you be able to reflect on and communicate successes or failures with overarching plan objectives?

I have known of administrators who manage the development of elaborate plans (or “mission” statements) but fail to understand that unless these statements revolutionize the nature in which work is accomplished or the actual behavior of individuals responsible for merging fiscal and academic priorities, these documents will remain abstract concepts. Implementing a strategic plan requires closure on the following issues and actions (basic, yet essential):

- Assuming the identification of participants, accountability matters, institutional goals and objectives, and the timing and sequence of implementation;
  How will new initiatives or programs be introduced in different functional units?
  How will you approach the management of organizational resistance?
  What resources will be required?
  Who will coordinate the plan?
  How will everyone know when the plan becomes an integral part of the values and mission of the organization?
  What steps must be taken in each organizational unit to reflect integration in the way decisions are made, relationships are maintained, and services are provided?
How will the organization (you) respond to any decrease in the will to sustain implementation of the plan? What is the appropriate response to loss of motivation and support? What is the minimum support needed in order to proceed?

- Assuming the plan will enhance the function, efficiency, and productivity of others;
  What actions need to be taken to inform the organization of the plan and its purpose?
  What will be the actual impact of the plan on people, functions, etc.? How will you know when everyone has possessed requisite knowledge and skills?
  How will the consequences of the plan be identified and assessed?
  What behavioral and process changes are expected of employees?
- Assuming the plan will result in development of new standards of productivity, compensation, performance, or evaluation (to reflect desired changes or mitigate unacceptable actions or reactions);
  How will the organization demonstrate the value of the plan?
  Will it connect to performance and productivity?
  At what point in the process are individuals and units expected to adopt new behaviors?
  What behaviors and achievements should be acknowledged and rewarded?
  How will formal and informal rewards be managed? Care should be taken to prevent the process of acknowledging and rewarding from being misinterpreted by others in the organization. (Always one of the challenges posed by compensation systems that purport to reward—competence and merit.)
- Assuming the plan will measure the quality and quantity of change;
  What information is needed? How will this information be acquired to determine the quality of changes?
  How will “change” be reviewed and quantified to insure continual movement toward desired goals?
  What are the agreed upon elements, functions, and services considered most important to the success of the plan? How will they be measured?
  Will it be known that benchmarks have been met?
  Will alternate strategies or assessments of benchmarks be developed?

As you can see, simply writing a plan is only a small first step. Small wonder then that most plans are eventually relegated to a store room in the library.
Rule No. 7: Use Committees Effectively

Most major decisions in academic organizations are made by committees of experts who combine their specialized knowledge to solve organizational problems. Therefore, organizational politics often center around committee politics. Having influence on a committee is frequently equal to having influence over the decision.

How can a committee be used to effect organizational change? First, appoint the right people to the right committee or get appointed by simply asking for an appointment from an incumbent official. If the organization has a "committee on committees," it is wise either to know someone on it or to be on it yourself. Such rule-making appointive committees wield power in all academic organizations, and this can be exploited to the best advantage. In addition, after acquiring membership, it is critical simply to be there. Remember, fluid participation is a characteristic of colleges and universities. The first tactic, then, is to get on the committee, be there with great regularity, stick it out even when others drop off.

The second tactic of committee success is to do your homework. Expertise is vital in a professional organization. If you observe the earlier rule of concentrating your efforts, you have more time to accumulate the knowledge that will put you ahead of others. In addition, it is always useful to make part of your homework the job of being secretary or chairperson of a group. The chairperson can set the agenda and often has the power to call committee meetings, while the secretary controls the memory of the committee. Committees are blessed with short memories, because most members do not recall or care what is recorded in the minutes. Controlling the memory of a committee means reiterating the issues that you consider important, a definite advantage for political bargaining. Doing your homework—whether it is gathering knowledge, learning the history, being the chairperson, or doing the secretarial chores—puts you in a strategically advantageous position.

A third tactical procedure in effective committee management is to keep ideas flowing. Because decision issues, like garbage dumps, attract various irrelevant material, they can be used to the change agent's advantage. Dump new ideas into the discussion and then compromise readily on the unimportant issues. Helping to load the garbage can leaves plenty to bargain over when the deadlines are close and allows you the chance to insist stubbornly about retaining key issues.

A fourth tactical consideration concerns structuring the decision-making process. Decisions do not, in themselves, result in action. More often, we spend a negligible amount of time making a decision and a great deal
of time (sometimes a lifetime) managing the consequences of our decisions! Decisions are effectuated through people. It is a well-known premise that more efficient and concrete outcomes of the decision-making process will result if the human processes used to implement decisions are structured; e.g., committees are appointed, tasks are defined, priorities are set, deadlines are met, and, perhaps most importantly, as decisions are prioritized and legitimized, core constituencies (who are represented on committees) are given a vested interest in decisional outcomes. Task forces, committees, group consultation, all are essential components of governance in higher education. I advocate a decision-making structure that blends ad hoc and permanent constituent members, legitimized through formal appointment. However, unless the consultative process is directed with a firm hand, endless debate may result.

A formalized approach permits administrators to effectuate decisions, when they lack the “status” of president. Used correctly it precludes the “end run” and it mandates that everyone in the room, after discussion, “agree.” As decisions are legitimized by sources (groups) holding increased status, it becomes difficult for your opponents to undermine, ridicule, or sabotage (through inaction) decisions arrived at using this model. The structure is especially effective when implementation, discussion, review, and analysis must cross jurisdictional divisions. It will permit input from the best minds in the organization. Too often do we preclude ourselves from obtaining the benefit of the brightest and most intelligent in the organization because (a) there is no formal mechanism to accommodate their views in decision-making processes and (b) academic and administrative leaders rarely reach out beyond their division or school (or their trusted friends) when studying a critical issue. It remains your job to insure that the best opinions, even those voiced by organizational pariahs, are resourced. This normally does not occur in informal consultative systems or when institutional concerns cross organizational lines of authority.

Rule No. 8: Use the Formal System

Colleges and universities, like other bureaucracies, have complex formal systems to carry out their activities. Often naïve change agents are not aware that they can achieve a desired outcome simply by asking the appropriate official for it. This requires savvy. It requires experience within the organization. It requires knowing where the levers are, and which ones to push.

Inexperienced change agents may fail to realize that most organization officials are eager to please. Success is difficult to judge in most
professional organizations because the tasks are too ambiguous to be assessed. As a consequence, most officials depend upon “social validation” for judgments of success. That is, they are successful if people are pleased and think they have done a good job. The ambiguity of the task, the lack of hard evaluation criteria, and the psychological need of most faculty and administrators for approval gives tremendous advantage to partisans who want to get something done. Do not forget a basic idea: ask for what you want and you will be surprised how many times you get it.

Rule No. 9: Follow Through to Push the Decision Flow

I have said that the concept of “decision making” is a delusion. Decisions are not really made; instead, they come unstuck, are reversed, get unmade during the execution, or lose their impact as powerful political groups fight them. In real life, decisions go round and round in circles, and the best one can hope for in the political battle is a temporary win.

As a consequence, the effective individual knows that he must follow important decisions even after they have supposedly been made. What do most people do after the committee has reached its decision? They evaporate. The person who traces the decision flow on through to execution and who fights when issues are distorted is the person who really has power. The truly dedicated partisan who wants to implement change is a tenacious watchdog, monitoring the steps of the decision and calling public attention to lapses in implementation.

Permit a final word on tactics associated with this rule. Set deadlines in the process of making decisions. Delay is the enemy of change; deadlines are flags that help call attention to stalling. Second, give ideas “sheltered starts.” If placed back into the regular routine of the organization, a new change will be smothered by powerful old routines. As a consequence, the shrewd individual builds a shelter around the change in its infancy. This often means giving the program or idea a home under the wing of a strong, hospitable executive or faculty member in the college. Only later, after the new idea has established roots, should it be placed into the regular structure of the organization.

Several follow-through techniques involve managing people. It is always useful to place your allies in the vanguard of those responsible for executing the decision. If allies embodying your ideas are influential, the change is more likely to succeed. Reward systems are also very important. Do you want things to change? Then reward people whose behavior helps promote the change. Rewards can be straightforward in the form of money, or they can take the equally valuable form of prestige, status, and public acclaim.
Rule No. 10: Glance Backward

Let us assume you have followed my advice and have been effective. The last admonition is the hardest to make: be skeptical about your own accomplishments. Few good changes have eternal lives. A deep ego-investment can be made in a project that does not work. In this sense, following through means evaluating, judging, and deciding whether performance lives up to expectations. If it does not, you must start again. Evaluating your own idea as objectively as possible and listening carefully to the evaluations of others are valuable and necessary skills for true change agents.

Any organization's vitality and creativity depend heavily on the constant influx of new ideas and people. Even the new idea that you worked so hard to establish will, in time, be dull and old. The conservatives of the present area championed ideas that, at one time, were considered radical. The last step, then, is the most ruthless of all: kill your own project when it has outlived it usefulness. This is where most fail. After building their investments they fight like Phoenicians to hang on to ideas long since grown old. Cycles must continue, and the change agent must once more struggle to infuse creativity and excitement into the academic organization.

A Final Word to Academic Leaders

A final word to would-be leaders. There are many books that concern themselves with leadership and mountains of articles. Much of what is written is valuable but it is written, by and large, by those who study the topic. As you are no doubt aware, there is a big difference. My concept of leadership is simple and direct—leaders identify an issue that is perceived by a larger community as an important dilemma or a critical problem. The true leader offers (and implements) a solution. For example, Moses conceived of freedom and a vision of the promised land—and led a group of former slaves through the desert. (And even Moses was allowed only to see Israel, never to set foot there!) Leaders are those who identify and articulate a vision and successfully manage a solution. Implementation demands a “buy-in” and sacrifice from key constituents/community members.

It is my hope you will find a few valuable ideas hidden within my rhetoric. Were it your pleasure, I would be honored to follow up and discuss your reactions to the enclosed. I am, at the moment, planting tomatoes in my garden and would welcome a return to the challenges of advising esteemed individuals such as yourself.
Notes

In the case of nontraditional executives or presidents you will be judged on a different (higher) standard than would a more "traditional" person.

Bibliography


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