

Defining Enrollment Management: The Human Resources Frame

Jim Black

Bolman and Deal (1991) describe the human resource frame as focusing “on the needs of people as well as their roles, skills, interests, values, and interactions” (Black, 1999, p. 16). In today’s vernacular, terms like human or intellectual capital are commonly associated with the human resource frame. Regardless of the terminology, the pervasive view by management gurus and higher education thought leaders is that people matter. Some have gone so far as to claim that our faculty and staff are the only sustainable competitive advantage we have. Competitors can replicate even our most distinctive programs, innovative solutions, and cutting-edge strategies. The competitive difference is in the execution. And it takes people to execute; preferably well-trained, knowledgeable professionals who are executing with an eye towards precision and quality combined with a focus on the customer.

Such high-performing individuals and organizations do not happen by chance. There must be a commitment to individual as well as team learning. Indeed, staff learning must become a strategic direction of any enrollment management organization to achieve optimal results. If staff learning is a strategic priority, it will require resources, time, and perhaps, restructuring. For example, at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, an admissions position was sacrificed to create a manager of organizational learning position. Eighty percent of a limited pool of discretionary funds has been redirected to staff incentives for engagement in learning activities. These activities range from topical salons, book clubs, workshops, internal conferences, guest lectures, leadership programs, new staff orientation programs, and a student-

for-a-day experience to social events. Participating staff earn learning points which are recorded in a student services intranet. Staff can produce a learning transcript for any purpose and can redeem points for awards such as a gift certificate to the local mall, a travel grant to a conference, tuition for a class, or a massage from a professional massage therapist.

Staff learning alone is not enough. Often, jobs must be redefined. Every new position, every vacancy, and every training session represents an opportunity to enhance the technological proficiency and service orientation of the organization (Black, 2001). Enrollment management organizations need to be flexible—defining jobs to meet the changing needs and expectations of all students. Rigidly defined jobs can bring the gears of enrollment management organizations to a grinding halt (Black, 2001). “Bridges (1996) suggests that it is the very rigidity of our staffing structures, the very nature of jobs themselves, that is at the root of the challenges we face in dealing with change” (Kalsbeek, 2001, p. 188).

According to Black (2001, p. 4):

Preventing this kind of gridlock is essential but not simple. Savvy enrollment managers look for and exploit degrees of freedom. They create fluid jobs that move from project to project or opportunity to opportunity. By de-jobbing work, organizations become vastly more productive than those where staff are limited by narrowly defined job descriptions and a silo-based mentality.

Organizational silos and other structural boundaries, including narrowly defined jobs, prevent integration. The purpose of integrated enrollment services is to ensure information, processes,

and transactions are intuitive to the student. The structures that support or house these services should be invisible to the student. Frankly, they do not care how we are organized. They simply want to pursue their educational goals without the frustration of dealing with institutional bureaucracy. “So, student service organizations that blur the boundaries between departments and the jobs that exist within them are most likely to have satisfied students” (Black, 2001, p. 4).

Student or customer satisfaction should be a driver for human resource management in enrollment organizations. A student-centered focus should permeate every aspect of human resource management—job descriptions, hiring, evaluation, incentives, recognition, accountability, and learning. With student satisfaction as a driver, enrollment managers can rally the staff around a common organizational purpose. This purpose serves as a cornerstone from which the enrollment management division can build a high-performing organization.

Peter Senge (1990), a recognized authority in management and in particular, learning organizations, is an advocate for continuous improvement. According to Senge, organizations should constantly be assessing the current reality and comparing it to their vision. The gap between the current reality and the vision is the genesis for creating tension necessary to propel an organization forward. How staff and their leaders respond to the gaps determines the level of improvement possible. If the tension created from this gap analysis is seen as a threat rather than an opportunity, the results will be counterproductive. On the other hand, when viewed as an opportunity, staff will use the tension to improve the operation as well as themselves.

People do matter. How we choose to manage this precious human resource determines, to a large degree, our enrollment results. After all, staff represent our capacity to produce enrollment results (Black, 1999). By nurturing our human capacity and treating it as our most valued institutional asset, enrollment leaders invest in an enduring strategy—that of building human capital. Jim Goodnight, president and CEO of the SAS Institute, said it best when he professed that at the end of the day, ninety percent of his company’s assets walk out the door. He fervently believes it is his responsibility to ensure they want to return.

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