

J. Douglas Toma: Building organizational capacity: strategic management in higher education

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In today when higher education institutions are required with managerial efficiency, economic benefits, and international competitiveness (Shin and Harman 2009), institutional performance-based accountability has been and continues to be a major factor affecting higher education funding and planning (Alexander 2000). In the extremely competitive context of higher education, identifying and implementing an effective management framework and approach have emerged as significant issues for leaders and senior managers at universities and colleges.

While much of the literature focuses on illustrating the interplay between the development of higher education and external forces (e.g., Rhoads and Torres 2006; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004), *Building Organizational Capacity* is devoted to thoroughly dissecting the internal structure and management strategies within these institutions. The purported structure is likened to a web with the institutional purpose—its mission and aspiration—located at the center of the web and other elements of the structure webbing out from and connecting to each other. The web-structured institution management model presented in the text is innovative, providing an integrated conceptual model for better understanding the nature of and dynamics among the internal elements within higher education institutions.

Building Organizational Capacity defines organizational capacity as the administrative foundation for establishing and sustaining initiatives intended to realize an institution's vision. Building organizational capacity (BOC) depends on an institution's capacity to effectively align various elements within the institution. Toma, the author of *Building Organizational Capacity*, intends this book to serve as a diagnostic tool for leaders and senior managers of universities and colleges. In the book, Toma identifies the critical institutional elements that demand attention, illustrates the interrelations among those elements, and generates a checklist to facilitate leaders and managers in ensuring that the fundamental bases are covered. In other words, Toma presents this book as a system thinking and strategic management approach that can guide administrative leaders through

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the complex maze of planning and implementing academic initiatives in real-world situations.

Extending his previous discourse on fostering a positive culture within the institution to gain a competitive edge (Toma et al. 2005), Toma in this book further explores eight critical elements of the BOC framework: institutional purpose, structure, governance, policies, processes, information, infrastructure, and culture. Toma defines each of these eight terms as follows: institutional purpose is the mission and aspirations that are deeply embedded in the institution; structure refers to the organization of the institution; governance determines who within the organization makes what decisions; policies are the rules that govern the operation of the organization; processes include both the formal and the informal means for accomplishments; information includes generating and communicating data; infrastructure encompasses the institutional assets of various perspectives; and culture is the essential norms and beliefs of the institution. While the eight elements are loosely coupled in institutional constitutions and operations, they are also interactive and concurrent for BOC.

Building Organizational Capacity consists of 10 chapters. In Chapter 1, Toma reviews the prominent literature on strategic management and system thinking and briefly addresses management trends such as planning, programming, and budgeting systems (PPBS) of rational models and total quality management (TQM) of quantity models. All of the aforementioned models have been shown to have failed in the irrational and ambiguous world of higher education (Birbaum 2001), yet they have provided valuable and useful information for BOC. In Chapter 2, Toma discusses the emerging challenges facing the institutions of higher education and the management strategies that have been implemented in response to those challenges. Since the emergence of neo-liberalism in the 1980s, US universities and colleges across all types have grown into institutional isomorphism (Clark 1983) while striving to increase internal efficiencies. Toma contends that, even though BOC may prove useful in the neo-liberalized environment of higher education as institutions search for the right efficiencies, it is not intended to drive universities and colleges away from the traditional academic values, such as faculty governance. The intention of BOC is to strengthen the administrative foundation so as to better align the fundamental purpose and the significant initiatives of the institution.

In Chapters 3–10, Toma highlights each of the eight critical elements of BOC using case studies from various colleges and universities. Each of the eight chapters consists of a definition of and detailed information about one given element, an empirical case study that elaborates how that specific element interacts with others within the context of an institutional initiative, and also a checklist for administrative leaders to ensure that all critical elements and areas have been considered and addressed. These case studies aim to bridge BOC with practice, allowing administrative leaders to capture the complexity of the organization in which they work and to minimize the ambiguities inherent in applying a theoretical framework to a real-life situation.

At present when institutional accountability is increasingly emphasized, *Building Organizational Capacity* is a comprehensive and informative reference for the key parties—leaders and senior managers at universities and colleges as well as students in programs of higher education. The case studies in this text are generic and reflective of broader trends in US higher education; however, they may be limited in terms of their applicability to those challenges confronting institutions outside of the US. Despite the fact that globalization has led to a prevalence of institutional isomorphism across national boundaries (Marginson and van der Wende 2007), universities and colleges in various countries retain context-specific management mechanisms. For example, institutional

management emphasis in some Asian countries (e.g., Korea, Japan, China, and Malaysia) embraces the “state model” rather than the “market model” that is used in the US (Shin and Harman 2009). The discourse of BOC involves broader concepts that must be defined within the institutions’ historical/political context. This reviewer and international readers look forward to the exploration of the applicability of BOC to higher education institutions outside of the US

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