

A Whole Network Approach to the Delivery of Business Education in Alaska: Principles Applicable to the 2 school and 3 school options

The Strategic Pathways charge in the domain of Management Education indicates vetting alternatives among 'one, two or three' school options. At their core, the options are distinguished by two alternative modes of organizing: the hierarchy vs. the network. The one school model is a hierarchy alternative, while the two and three school models are network alternatives. Effective networks are grounded in five dimensions:

- Involvement at multiple levels
- Network design
- Appropriate governance
- Building and maintaining legitimacy
- Stability

The first two characteristics mentioned above refer to the importance of rich ties across organizations in the network: the connections among organizations in a network must not rely on a single organizational member (e.g. a dean), but should be 'multiplex', that is there should be meaningful connections at multiple levels of organizations (e.g. staff, faculty, students). Conversely, the networking among the organizations should not be so heavy as to raise the costs of coordination too high, and to lose the beneficial effects of the 'strength of weak ties' (i.e. the secondary ties which permit new ideas to enter amidst well-integrated groups).

Appropriate governance is another critical issue affecting network effectiveness. Three forms of governance in an inter-organizational federation are most common: shared/participative, lead organization, and network administrative organization. For relatively smaller networks, the shared/participative mode is optimal. Only with very large networks is a network administrative organization appropriate. We propose that a shared mode of governance begin with an executive committee consisting of the chief management education officer from each university. This executive committee will report both to the Provost of each university and to the VPAR at UA Statewide. The executive committee will be charged with planning for new degrees, resource planning with regard to the overall offering and scheduling of business courses in the interests of UA students statewide, and with creating task-forces to deal with salient and strategic issues concerning management education (to be constituted by members from each campus...thereby furthering the necessary 'involvement at multiple levels').

The literature on inter-organizational networks indicates that building internal legitimacy (among participants) is crucial to the network's success. This includes 'demonstrating the value of network participation to network members, developing trust-based ties between member, satisfactorily resolving conflicts, and building sustainable networks governance and communication mechanisms' (Provan and Lemaire 2012: 645). Thus, developing a successful business education network will require

a considerable task of internal persuasion, team-building around problem-solving, give and take, and effective (& joint) communication among leaders at an early phase.

Finally, the characteristic of network stability: the relationships among core organizations in the network need to be stable and consistent. The network should also maintain a space for organizational flexibility, innovation and experimentation at its periphery. This may be achievable in the context of higher education, by having special programs within a given campus that have a high-degree of autonomy.

Key Assumptions:

1. Standard tuition sharing policy
2. Executive committee functions under the principle of shared governance
3. New and improved revenue model: shared resources and priorities for collaboration
4. Consolidation of authority for business education within the business school at each university
5. Business education must be organized similarly at each university
6. Consolidation of financial resources related to business education at each university
7. Agreement on faculty qualifications
8. New Degree Programs: MS Finance & Accounting, Bachelor of Applied Management degree

Benefits:

1. Non-duplication of programs and courses
2. Quality: rigor and relevance
3. Optimal use of resources
4. Student centered

Cited: Keith G. Provan and Robin H. Lemaire, (2012) Core Concepts and Key Ideas for Understanding Public Sector Organizational Networks: Using Research to Inform Scholarship and Practice, Public Administration Review, Vol. 72, Iss. 5, pp. 638-648