The dynamics of planning and collaboration of custom training within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System (MnSCU)

By:

Dr. David Kingsbury
Bemidji State University

Contributing content experts & participants:

Dr. Shari Olson
Mr. James Retka
Northland Community and Technical College

Mr. Chad Coauette
Mr. Shannon Snell
Alexandria Technical College

Mr. Rich Kelly
Hennepin Technical College

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I. A brief overview of collaboration and planning within the dynamics of customized training within the Minnesota State College and University system.
There has been a great deal of discussion of the role of collaboration and partnership in higher education for the last several years. There is an ever increasing dialog that suggests that individuals, education, private business and non-profit organizations come together to solve the issues that need to be addressed in our society. In the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system (MnSCU), a number of different attempts to collaborate have been attempted with varying degrees of success. In some areas the ability to create success has been wide reaching and useful. Examples such as the Transfer Curriculum and Articulation between schools come to mind. In other areas, collaboration between private sector efforts and higher education has been a bit more problematic.

One method of creating strategic alliance between schools has been done based upon regional geography. Hence the organization of customized training efforts is currently aligned to the Minnesota Regions occupied by the Initiative fund. The reality however is that due to technology and communications, organizational structures are changing. Over thirty years ago, futurist Alvin Toffler described a new paradigm. In 1975, in testimony before the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, he stated:

“We need to think in terms of the creation not of a single center, or a single world government that will someday govern the nations of the world, but rather in terms of self-regulatory networks of transnational institutions… The nation-state, far from being crucially important for solving problems, is increasingly becoming an obstacle. Too small to cope with transnational realities, it is too big to deal effectively with the main sub-national problems…As the super-industrial revolution advances, the high technology nation-state begins to lose control at both ends.”

The point that Toffler is describing here is that hierarchy is declining in role and effectiveness. The old geographic command and control systems no longer work very well. The old structures often do not give identities to the membership of the organization in the same sort of ways that it used to. This changing structural reality is also pointed by Thomas L. Friedman in his book, “The World is Flat” where he states… “when the world starts to flatten out and value increasingly gets created horizontally (through multiple forms of collaboration, in which individuals and little guys have much more power), who is on top and who is on the bottom, who is exploiter and who is exploited, gets very complicated. Some of our old political reflexes no longer apply.”

II. The participants and focus group tools used to identify the dynamics of collaboration efforts, and the framework used to understand the results.
Collaboration is a growing and positive movement that is occurring in higher education that has evolved in the past few years. Historically we had three separate higher education systems where now we have one. How do we make sense of that new infrastructure, and what then could be the methodology of creating new strategic alliances that will be brought to bear on the many issues facing us?

The mission of the focus group was to tease out the dynamics that influence collaboration of custom training in the Minnesota State College and University system. How would the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system deal with a challenge that would be of the scale so large that one campus site could not deal with it in an effective or efficient manner?

To that end representatives were brought together to address the issues and dynamics that influence the forming of strategic alliances and collaboration within MnSCU. The schools and experts involved were:

**Northland Community and Technical College,**
Dr. Shari Olson,
Mr. James Retka

**Alexandria Technical College**
Mr. Chad Coauette
Mr. Shannon Snell

**Hennepin Technical College**
Mr. Rich Kelly

The focus group was also to explore the practices that have allowed this geographically distant group to work together in a collaborative fashion. To accomplish these purposes focus group activities were conducted during a twelve hour period using action research tools such as an affinity diagram and an interrelationship digraph. The research question explored was “What are the dynamics influencing collaboration in the Minnesota State College and University system?” The second group effort was “what are some of the best practices that could increase collaboration across the system?” The results of the efforts were quite revealing of possibilities for collaboration within custom training programs housed with in the MnSCU system.

The results of the exploration were the identification of three root issues that effect collaboration between the local campus custom training programs across the MnSCU system and three possible outcomes that could occur if collaboration could occur on a systematic and interchangeable basis.

**The significant root issues affecting the collaboration efforts are:**
A. The communication style and policy implementation fit between the office of the chancellor and the individual colleges and universities.

B. The variability of mission and vision across the college and university structures compared to the office of the chancellor and

C. The variability of the organizational structure for outreach and workforce development of each individual campus.

It is important to note that these root issue findings are not critical of any single entity within the MnSCU system but a reflection of what is, and how the component parts currently exist and operate. To understand these root issues it is important to have a framework with which to view them. The framework of Bolman and Deal from the reference “Reframing organizations: Artistry, Choice and leadership” has application for these driving root issues as well as some suggestions for collaboration which we will state later on in this paper. The framework has four visions of how organizations operate. In this framework an organization can have all four visions operating, but given the particular issue, one form of the framework might prove to be more useful than another. *

A. The structural frame
In this framework, organizations are rational and exist primarily to accomplish established goals. Coordination and control are essential and problems come from inappropriate structures and can be solved through restructuring or developing new systems.

B. The human resource frame
In this view the organization exists to serve human needs and a good fit between the individual wants and the organization needs is essential for the organization to function. In this model organizations need the people to accomplish its goals and the people need the organization to fulfill their needs.

C. The political frame
For viewing the organization through the political frame one sees the organizations as coalitions composed of varied interest groups. The goals of the organization come from negotiation and quest for power to control scarce resources.

D. The symbolic or cultural Frame
In this framework the organization uses events on a symbolic level. The reality is not what happens within an organization, but what it means. Faced with uncertainty and ambiguity the members of the organization create symbols to resolve confusion, increase predictability, and provide direction.


In the analysis of the group using this framework, it was the perception that different operational framework structures exist within the MnSCU system. Those structures are:
A. The individual college and university mission and vision
Each individual college and university has its own structure and its own individual mission and vision that may or may not be a close fit with the vision of its individual president or provost. Each campus is organized in a different manner than each other. Each college and university has its own politics, culture, and brand. No two campuses are alike in culture, mission, geography and economic context.

B. The office of the chancellor structure
The Office of the Chancellor is organized in a rational and structural manner and often implements policy based upon developing new systems, structures and activities. While the “Office of the Chancellor” staff is sensitive to the political environment surrounding higher education, the methodology of policy implementation is often done using structural approaches.

C. Governing process of the individual college or university
The individual campuses are organized and run in a political manner using a union/democratic approach through campus approaches such a faculty senate and with meet and negotiation between senior management and faculty unions and other unions as well. Often the campus staff believes the campus is running on a rational and structural approach, but in reality runs into political issues on policy implementation.

The framework of Bolman/Deal can be used to understand the dynamics of how the system functions. One example of this dynamic would be a policy that is meant to be carried out across all MnSCU colleges and universities issued from the office of the Chancellor. The policy would be framed within the structural approach and designed to have the entire system of MnSCU achieve some worthy goal that has been requested or formed by the Office of the Chancellor. The rational goal is then communicated to each individual campus. Each campus operates in a political framework. Therefore the policy and goal is viewed from each campus political subgroup in relationship its power to control scarce resources. The results of this conflict in frameworks can end in confusion for each campus structure to carry out such policy and goal.

If this analysis has any utility in understanding the complexity of dynamics in collaborating, what could be the outcomes of collaboration across the MnSCU system and how would any group accomplish such results?

III. Possible outcomes of collaboration throughout the MnSCU system and suggestions and strategies to bring such collaboration to reality.
In the focus group activity the possible outcomes of collaboration were identified and seen as having a great deal of application to the custom training effort in workforce development as well as wider utility across the MnSCU colleges and universities.

**The three major outcomes that could be achieved by collaboration are:**

A. The development of MnSCU system capacity and the resultant intellectual capital  
B. The creation of an environment where relationships and collaboration are an everyday reality of how system wide work gets accomplished and,  
C. Statewide purposeful impact in the education and training of a dynamic workforce that competes in a global marketplace.

The conclusions of the group were that the frameworks of the Bolman/Deal model are an approximate reality of the MnSCU system, and that at any given time one or more of the frameworks would be functioning in the carrying out of policy and the achievement of goals. Therefore the group designed a strategy that would “create an environment whereby collaboration would be more likely to happen”, since it is difficult to legislate or force collaboration upon groups of organizations within a fairly fluid framework. While it would be impossible to use all strategies and tactics to achieve goals, it is suggested that any group trying to achieve large policy and organizational outcomes consider using the following “best practices” that would operate in the various frameworks that exist within the MnSCU system. We have organized each set of strategies based upon the individual root issue identified.

**IV. Strategies and tactics that will create collaboration across MnSCU colleges and Universities**

The results of the focus group was to create a number of strategies that could be applied to each of the individual root issues that effect collaboration within the MnSCU system. While some of the applications would apply to large and generic issues, it should be remembered that the conclusions are more closely focused upon the development of the incumbent worker as served by the individual campus custom training programs. It is also recognized that many of the individual strategies and tactics are already being used by professionals within the MnSCU higher education system, both within the Office of the Chancellor and also on individual campus sites.

In the development of the list of strategies, the group decided to create methodology that could be applied according to the framework that appeared to be operating for the collaborating organizations.

The following questions from the Bolman/Deal model could give some assistance in which strategies to choose. (Table 15.2)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Frame if answer is yes</th>
<th>Frame if answer is no</th>
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*Table 15.2*
Are individual commitment and motivation essential to success?  
Human Resource, Structural, political, Symbolic

Is the technical quality of the decision important?  
Structural, Human Resource, Political, Symbolic

Are there high levels of ambiguity and uncertainty?  
Political, symbolic, Structural, Human resource

Are conflict and scarce resources significant?  
Political, symbolic, Structural, Human resource

Are you working from the bottom up?  
Political, Structural, Human Resource, symbolic

The concept would be to determine which framework seems to be the dominant operating theme of the organizational sub group and then apply those strategies and best practices that would best fit that circumstance. The group brainstormed different strategies for each of the three major issues that seem to face groups hoping to collaborate within custom training programs of the Minnesota State College and University system.

A. The communication style and policy implementation fit between the Office of the Chancellor and the individual college and university.

Structural

- Operations should reinforce that individual college or university structures operate within political and symbolic frameworks and therefore rethink organizational strategies to incorporate new patterns of alignment such as discipline, topic, size, type of higher education institution, technology, and not just geography


- The Office of the Chancellor staff should collaborate with campus staff to explore the development of new capacity and realignment opportunities that cut across
campus structures knowing that sometimes it will be new creations that spin off from old dynamics.

• Create forums and areas where higher education partnerships can and will be formed.

**Political**

• Identify issues that allow everyone to be a winner and creates growth.
• Let collaborations renegotiate issues within the partnership structure
• Reduce policy or goals that create winners and losers between colleges and University campus sites.

**Human Resource**

• Identify, support, and grow within the system and campus structure, champions that support collaboration and provide support to college and university leadership.
• Create and provide opportunities for college and university leadership internships within the office of the Chancellor on a systematic and periodic basis. Create opportunities for Office of the Chancellor staff to intern periodically on campus sites.

**Symbolic**

• Identify opportunities for celebrations of our successes and partnerships such as graduations, grant signings, collaborative events.
• Create symbols and benchmarks that help communicate collaborative approaches across MnSCU
• Create metrics and recognition for collaboration outputs across system campus structures and
• Create human interest stories in our system internal publications that recognize collaboration efforts and tell the story of success in higher education.

**B. The variability of mission and vision of the college and university structures**

**Structural**

• Create funding models that support collaboration that accomplish workforce development (consider pilot tests of such models to specific applications)
• Incorporate the values of collaboration within the local college work plan
• Measure the accomplishment of collaboration goals from the local college work-plan
Human Resource

- Identify projects of scale that can only be accomplished through the collaboration of individual colleges and universities.
- Identify values common to the system and create champions to further those common values of collaboration.

Symbolic

- Have the chancellor create and award recognition to those colleges and universities that support collaborative efforts.
- Make some positive examples of those colleges and universities that are benchmarks for collaboration.
- Create field trip opportunities for faculty and staff to visit other college and university sites to see facilities, campus buildings, curricula and equipment.

Political

- Recognize and support the development of college and university “political capital” from work force development at the local level of the campus.
- Identify and communicate our common shared values through the entire system.
- Provide a framework that identifies common values of the system and supports collaboration.
- Celebrate and understand the vitality of our structure of higher education system, and use those differences to create new models of higher education. EG. Universities, technical college, community college, comprehensive community and technical college.
- Create opportunities to create a shared vision and agenda that links the various colleges and universities together in collaboration.
- Hold system meetings that move people around the various MnSCU campus sites to conduct business on a periodic basis and
- Have the chancellor speak to the issues of collaboration on a systematic basis across the various colleges and universities.

C. The variability of the organizational structure of each individual College or University
Structural

- Research the variability of organizational reporting lines of business outreach “custom training” efforts throughout and across campus type institutions and identify productive structures
- Provide consistent policy and in-service for Minnesota Higher Education leadership on purposes of fund 120 and workforce development
- Benchmark and analyze best practices of custom training structures and disseminate models to campus leadership to emulate.

Political

- Identify and celebrate the role of business and training outreach to the individual college or university

Human Resource

- Create curriculum bridges between custom training, extension and the day school programs
- Create simple incentives that reward traditional day school faculty for working on collaborative custom training projects
- Provide campus senior management professional development opportunities on collaboration and business outreach and its payback to the local college or university

Symbolic

- Develop a series of stories at the local level that give meaning to collaboration and disseminate such stories locally and state wide
- Encourage the local colleges and universities to hold open community celebrations for collaborative custom training projects and
- Encourage and create policy to involve custom training staff to participate in the shared governance process at the local college and university.

In summary, the members of the task force on collaboration reached consensus that the frameworks matched many of the activities and best practices that had made the manufacturing collaborative efforts successful. In the development of the manufacturing collaborative, most if not all of the strategies had been used at one time or another. It is not an all inclusive list of strategies and tactics, but a useful one that if done with purpose and understanding should help grow the collaborative spirit within custom training of the Minnesota State Colleges and University system. In addition the focus group concurred that an understanding of the framework and best practices of the collaborative might have application to broader policy and operational issues within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system.

Attachment #1
Results of Meeting and analysis of Report conducted on January 9th at the Office of the Chancellor.

The agenda for the meeting was:

1. review project purpose
2. Goals of the individuals within the project
3. Review of literature
4. Study results
5. Out of the results, which projects to select
6. design of projects
7. Example Challenge, China project, Kraus Anderson University, Fastenal Project
8. Who do we include in the projects

Those in attendance:

Richard Tvedten
Mary Rothchild
Shari Olson
Chad Coauette
Richard Kelly
David Kingsbury
James Retka
Michael Murphy

Summary and recommendations from the report

The various suggestions for possible actions were reviewed and prioritized using a nominative group process. Each individual was allowed to select three optional suggestions that they thought would make the greatest difference in enhancing collaboration across the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System. In doing so a project was selected from each of the major finding results that came from the report. The following items are the listed priorities of the group and would be recommended to be put into an action plan for the Office of the Chancellor’s professionals in the area of Workforce development. Metrics should be created for each of the action plans as well as a calendar of implementation and action steps.
A. The communication style and policy implementation fit between the Office of the Chancellor and the individual college and university.

Symbolic

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- Create symbols and benchmarks that help communicate collaborative approaches across MnSCU
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Structural

- Research the variability of organizational reporting lines of business outreach “custom training” efforts throughout and across campus type institutions and identify productive structures
- Provide consistent policy and in-service for Minnesota Higher Education leadership on purposes of fund 120 and workforce development
- Benchmark and analyze best practices of custom training structures and disseminate models to campus leadership to emulate.

Human Resource

- Provide campus senior management professional development opportunities on collaboration and business outreach and its payback to the local college or university