Chapter 6

The Political Institution: Competing for Power and Resources

Over the past seventy-five years, Regional State University (RSU) has been transformed successively from a state normal school to a state teachers' college, to a state college, and finally in 1972 (when it had enrolled 3,000 students), into one of five comprehensive public universities controlled by a statewide board of regents. The university includes five colleges—arts and sciences, education, business, health sciences, and technology—and an evening division. Its mission statement is over a page in length and includes extended references to teaching, research, and service and to almost every campus program.

The present enrollment of about 13,500 students represents a decline of about 10 percent in the past five years. Almost all of the undergraduates come from the northwest portion of the state; half commute, a quarter live in residence hall apartments, and the rest rent dilapidated houses in the community. About 1,550 part-time commuting graduate students are in master's degree programs, in education, in computer technology, and in an M.B.A. program that is now seeking professional accreditation.

Most faculty who were at RSU before 1972 received their

doctorates (often in education) from in-state institutions; they have strong commitments to RSU and deep roots in the small city in which it is located. More recently hired faculty tend to have doctorates from national universities and to focus more attention on their discipline or profession than on the institution. Many came to RSU after unsuccessfully seeking appointment at a research university. The elected senate, now dominated by disaffected associate professors who are unlikely to be promoted, spends most of its time opposing actions by the administration—actions often taken without formal consultation with faculty representatives.

President Rita Robinson came to RSU from a career as a campus dean and a state coordinating board officer. Knowledgeable, innovative, and impatient, she is strongly supported by the regents and some segments of the faculty. Her relationships with the senate, as well as with some deans and chairs, are often contentious.

Most students come from the top two-fifths of their high school class, and while a good number are interested in academic matters, most are pursuing vocational interests or are giving primary attention to the active social scene. Fewer than half stay to graduate. Faculty work hard at teaching but tend to focus attention on the more able students. Pressures for publication have increased, and achieving tenure is now more difficult.

Current issues on campus include a request to the regents for authorization to award the doctorate, complaints about faculty work load and lack of faculty research support, debates on salary levels for scarce faculty in some fields, effects on faculty reappointments of midyear state budget rescissions, and a National Collegiate Athletics Association investigation into the recruitment of athletes.

Regional State University as a Political System

People familiar with colleges and universities have often observed that they have many political characteristics. As far back as the turn of the century, an Oxford don turned his wicked wit to writing a set of instructions for aspiring academic politi-

cians. His comments remind us that now, as then, there are ways to get things done in academic institutions even in the absence of collegial agreement or bureaucratic directives.

> This most important branch of political activity is, of course, closely connected with *Jobs*. . . . When you and I have, each of us, a Job on hand, we shall proceed to go on the Square. . . . The proper course to pursue is to walk, between 2 and 4 p.m., up and down the King's Parade. . . . When we have succeeded in meeting accidently, it is etiquette to talk about indifferent matters for ten minutes and then part. After walking five paces in the opposite direction you should call me back, and begin with the words "Oh, by the way, if you should happen. . . ." The nature of your Job must then be vaguely indicated. . . . Then we shall part as before, and I shall call you back and introduce the subject of My Job, in the same formula. By observing this procedure we shall emphasize the fact that there is *no connection whatever* between my supporting your Job and your supporting mine [Cornford, (1908) 1964, p. 30].

At RSU, as at Oxford long ago, individuals or groups with different interests can go "on the Square" and interact by forming coalitions, bargaining, compromising, and reaching agreements that they believe to be to their advantage. These processes of interaction, in which the power to get one's way comes neither from norms nor from rules but is negotiated, identify Regional State University as a political system.

We have already seen how social processes lead the faculty and administration of Heritage College to like each other, interact with each other, engage in common activities, and in doing so share and sustain important values. This is possible because the relatively small size of Heritage and its coherent program permit and encourage frequent face-to-face communication between its members. As a consequence, Heritage possesses

a sense of community in which those inside the college's boundaries are thought of as "us," and those outside are considered "they." "We" become more and more alike, and increasingly different from "them."

In a more complex institution, member groups tend to be more specialized and heterogeneous, with divergent interests and preferences. Subgroups may have their own perceptions of community, but the institution as a whole seldom does. Sometimes these subgroups are work groups, such as academic departments or administrative offices, and sometimes they are based on social factors such as sex, age, ethnicity, or ideology. Those who identify strongly with any of these groups think of each other as "we," and "they" can come to refer not just to groups outside the institution but to other groups *inside* as well.

That is what has happened at Regional State University. The institution grew, became more diverse, added new missions, increasingly received resources from external agencies, and appointed new staff with values different from those of older staff. For example, it has one group of administrators who were hired when RSU was still a state college emphasizing teacher education and who remain interested in developing closer ties with school systems in the region, and another group of "fast-track" younger administrators pushing for a state-of-the-art program in robotics. Older faculty have formed an alliance to challenge retirement policies that are being advocated by younger faculty concerned with the possibility of layoffs, and a group of scientists connected to an "old boys' network" has coalesced to defend recruiting practices that are being questioned by the Women's Caucus. The interests of different groups are reflected even in the seating patterns in the faculty dining room, where members of a small but close-knit set of European émigrés in the social sciences are likely to be found at one table, while issues of campus racism are being debated at another.

Resources at RSU are no longer under the sole control of a small group of administrators, decision making has become diffused and decentralized, and the organization is too complex to control activities through bureaucratic systems such as those at People's Community College. As centralized authority has

weakened, consensus for preferred goals has diminished. RSU has become fragmented into special interest groups, each competing for influence and resources. The influence of any group is limited by the interests and activities of other groups; in order to obtain desired outcomes, groups have to join with other groups, to compromise their positions, and to bargain.

To consider a college as a political system is to consider it as a supercoalition of subcoalitions with diverse interests, preferences, and goals (Cyert and March, 1963). Each of the subcoalitions is composed of interest groups that see at least some commonality in their goals and work together to attempt to achieve them (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980). If the collegium can be metaphorically described as a family, and the bureaucracy as a machine, then the political college or university can be seen as a shifting kaleidoscope of interest groups and coalitions. The patterns in the kaleidoscope are not static, and group membership, participation, and interests constantly change with emerging issues.

Characteristics of Political Systems

Organizational politics involves acquiring, developing, and using power to obtain preferred outcomes in situations in which groups disagree (Pfeffer, 1981b). To consider RSU as a political system is to focus attention on uncertainty, dissension, and conflict. RSU is composed of a large number of individuals and groups that in some ways operate autonomously but in other ways remain interdependent. Without interdependence, there can be no politics, and no power; it is only when individuals must rely on others for some of their necessary resources that they become concerned about or interested in the activities or behaviors of others. Political systems depend on social exchange and, therefore, on mutual dependence. The power of any party depends to some extent on the value of that party's contribution to the political community and the extent to which such a contribution is available from other sources (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980). For example, academic departments at RSU that bring in highly valued external resources such as research grants,

or that have high prestige and increasing graduate enrollments, have more power and influence over the allocation of internal budgets than do other departments (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1974; Hills and Mahoney, 1978).

Power at RSU is diffused rather than concentrated, and many individuals and groups have power of different kinds in different situations. The vice-president for academic affairs is believed to have considerable influence on campus, but the business school at RSU often appears more responsive to its professional accrediting body than to the vice-president; President Robinson has more power than any other individual on campus, but she has been unable to fire a popular but ineffective dean of students; and the Women's Caucus, a group with no official standing whatever, exerts a powerful influence on the actions of the Faculty Personnel Committee. Under most circumstances, neither the accrediting association, the Women's Caucus, President Robinson, nor any single person or group can impose its will unilaterally on the others.

RSU has an organizational culture, as do Heritage College and People's Community College. The culture at Heritage is supported by norms that are pervasive in all parts of the institution; the culture at People's is made coherent through structure and the ethos of rationality. But at RSU, development of a pervasive or coherent culture is inhibited by the various and competing interests of different groups. To be sure, there is widespread public agreement that the teaching, service, and research missions are all important. But agreement in the abstract conceals the fact that people have different ideas about which programs are the *most* important. When resources are plentiful, so that everyone gets what they want, these ambiguities and disagreements cause no problems. But when resources are scarce, their specific allocation becomes vigorously contested, and conflict is inevitable. Last year, for example, various groups had sharply different views on whether a $50,000 budget windfall should be used to begin a freshman honors program, to support released time for faculty research, or to develop a regional natural resources institute to do research and provide consultation to local governments on water quality and environmental safety.

The three programs were all consistent with the institutional mission, but the mission statement provided no guidance for choosing among them.

In this situation, as in many others at RSU, choices have to be made not between good and bad things but rather between competing goods. People in the institution differ about which objective is most important, and even those who agree on the objective often disagree on how it can be achieved. There are no data that can "prove" that supporting freshman honors is "better" than supporting faculty research, and there are no rational calculations, laws, or rules to help decide what to do. In a collegial system such as Heritage, such decisions can be made by consensus, and in a bureaucratic system such as People's by fiat. But these processes are either unavailable or unacceptable in the complex and decentralized social system of RSU. The institution is too large and the interests of various groups are too diverse to achieve consensus, and the socialization and expectations of the various participants make authoritarian decrees unacceptable and therefore unenforceable. If they are to be able to make a decision at all, they must rely on politics.

Subgroups wish to exert influence so that their preferences are reflected in the allocation of institutional resources such as money, prestige, or influence. Since the board of trustees legally *is* the institution, and all legal authority resides in the board, some might say that the preferences of the trustees and the president as their executive officer should always dominate choice processes at a college or university. But at RSU, as at other institutions, legal delegation is not the sole source of authority, and many groups are able to exercise power in different ways. Administrators have power through their access to budget and personnel procedures, to sources of information, and to internal and external legal authority; faculty and other professionals have power related to their specialized expertise, to tradition, and to external guilds (Baldridge, 1971; Clark, 1983). Clerical and blue-collar groups may invoke the power of their unions in order to influence policies. And, as the example of the Women's Caucus demonstrates, it is possible for groups to obtain power through informal contacts and through appeals based on moral or ethical principles, such as equity.

The problems caused by the dualism of controls are manifest at RSU, and there are constant conflicts between administrative and professional authority. Because of this, it is tempting to view RSU as composed of monolithic groups, and to refer to the battles as being between "the administration and others" or "the faculty and others." This view may occasionally be valid, but it is more often misleading. The president and the deans can have conflicting interests, trustees (particularly in public institutions such as RSU) can disagree on many issues, not all students share the same concerns, and faculty in different disciplines and departments are as much divided by their professionalism as united by it (Clark, 1963). Academics are highly ideological, and the ideologies of different academic departments—and therefore the preferences they might have in institutional decision making—are quite disparate (Ladd and Lipset, 1975). RSU "is not one community, but several—the community of the undergraduate and the community of the graduate; the community of the humanist, the community of the social scientist, and the community of the scientist; the communities of the professional schools; the community of all the nonacademic personnel; the community of the administrators" (Kerr, 1963, p. 19). But, of course, the communities are far more complex even than that on a contemporary campus. On any issue, for example, subgroups of faculty transcending department or discipline bring young and old, male and female, minority and white, tenured and nontenured, local and cosmopolitan, into arenas in which their conflicting interests must be addressed. We commonly think of the president as the institutional leader, and it is true that President Robinson plays a part in decision making in many areas of governance. But in each, she is opposed by countervailing forces of different groups (Corson, 1960).

Some groups are stronger than others and have more power, but no group is strong enough to dominate all the others all the time. Those who desire certain outcomes must spend time building positions that are supported by other groups as well. This requires the development of coalitions among various groups, and trade-offs and compromises are often among the costs that must be paid. For example, the faculty senate finally approved President Robinson's proposal for a freshman honors

program after she successfully persuaded the humanities division to also support it. Their support, in turn, required her to agree to have the program reviewed after two years and to express willingness to appoint its director from among the existing faculty.

The idea that political processes in academic institutions are somehow "dirty" reflects the misunderstanding that if people would only act in the best interests of the institution, they would agree on what to do. It assumes that the institution's best interests are either known or knowable, rather than that different people, especially committed to what they believe to be the institution's welfare, can, in good faith, have completely different ideas of what that means and how it should be accomplished. The allocation decision is primarily a political one of who gets what, when, and how, and in a democratic and pluralistic organization, political processes are appropriate means for resolving such political issues.

It might be expected that, because groups contend for power and there are differences in their preferred outcomes, RSU would be typified by constant turmoil and instability. There are several reasons why this is usually not the case. First, organizations tend to develop continuing and quasi-stable dominant coalitions (Thompson, 1967) whose established power serves to inhibit overt conflict. At RSU, the president, senior administrators, and board have for a decade been the dominant coalition; they agree on policies most (but not all) of the time, and general campus recognition of their power inhibits those who would otherwise challenge it.

In addition, individuals belong to more than one group, and they participate in many political processes, each of which involves different people. The existence of a large number of small cross-cutting disagreements provides checks and balances against major disruptions, so that the agitation of political processes can ironically lead to system stability. At RSU, people who engage in total conflict are generally referred to as "crazies." Most people on campuses are not crazies; they participate in conflict segmentally—for example, supporting the administration on one issue and disagreeing with them on another. Even

within the faculty senate itself, which has quasi-stable pro-administration and antiadministration voting blocs, the balance of power is held by a third, "unaffiliated" coalition, whose members align themselves with one or another bloc on the basis of specific issues (Bowen, 1987). As a result, deep cleavages dividing major groups at RSU on many issues are unlikely (Coser, 1956). By permitting groups to assess their relative power, and by encouraging the development of associations and coalitions, political conflict may increase the cohesiveness of RSU.

A central characteristic of most political communities is indifference. Most people at RSU are not concerned about most issues most of the time. Even during the last great budget crisis, which had the potential for faculty layoffs, only a small percentage of the faculty actively participated in governance activities, while another small group looked on with interest; the majority were apathetic (Baldridge, 1971). Most of the time, most of what happens at RSU is routine and guided by existing procedures and informal understandings. But at irregular intervals, and for reasons that are not at all clear, a specific issue emerges and becomes contentious on campus. Sometimes the issue is one of great substance, such as whether RSU should offer doctoral programs. And sometimes, as in the case of whether RSU deans should have reserved spaces in the faculty parking lot, it is primarily symbolic. Similar situations have occurred in the past without activating political interest, and President Robinson has found it impossible to accurately predict campus responses to her initiatives. Political processes at RSU may sometimes be initiated by new issues, or sometimes by the loss of an old coalition or consensus.

Finally, disruptive conflict is inhibited because power in higher education tends to be issue specific. Different groups develop spheres of influence around issues of concern to them (Baldridge, Curtis, Ecker, and Riley, 1978). Deans at RSU leave course development to faculty most of the time, faculty leave fund raising to the president most of the time, and President Robinson leaves faculty recruiting to the deans most of the time. As long as these tacit agreements are maintained, contention is unlikely. All parties recognize that intrusion into tacitly

approved spheres of influence is usually costly, and they ordinarily go to unusual lengths to avoid it.

The political processes at RSU have organizational advantages and disadvantages. If there were institutional consensus about preferences and agreement on how to achieve them, political processes would be wasteful and unnecessary. The costs and benefits of any proposed program could be specified, and calculations would give unequivocal direction to the participants. But since at RSU such a consensus does not exist, decisions can be made only through the exercise of power (Pfeffer, 1981b). A major advantage of political systems, therefore, is that they permit decisions to be made even in the absence of clear goals. Political systems also simplify the influence process, since it need not involve the active participation of everyone in the organization but only their representatives (Weick, 1979). They also simplify budgeting processes. If politics is a game in which power is used to influence resource allocation in support of one's preferences, then the budget is the document on which the yearly score at RSU is kept. "Rational" approaches to budgeting would suggest that the funding of all programs be reassessed each year, with the costs and benefits of each compared to each other, and decisions based on the optimization of stated objectives. Political processes in budget formulation, on the other hand, simplify calculations and usually lead to outcomes acceptable to a majority of stakeholders. Among other things, only those issues raised by specific groups need be addressed (most programs approved in the past are continued, so that budgets next year are likely to be similar to budgets this year), only politically feasible alternatives need to be considered (so that time is not wasted on alternatives that could not be supported), and participants need consider only their own preferences without worrying about others (since other groups will have representation somewhere in the process) (Wildavsky, 1974).

Political systems have another great advantage: their inefficiency provides institutional stability. There is a lot of consistency at Heritage College because people tend to think alike; there is consistency at People's Community College as well because people follow the same rules. In both cases, having similar

data and sharing uniformity of opinion or action make it possible for small changes to be amplified as they move through the system. Everyone knows what is going on, an unexpected situation may become volatile, and balance becomes precarious. But at RSU, people have access to different data from different sources on which they place different interpretations. No one knows the totality of what is happening, and their activities often resemble random movements that cancel each other out and provide stability.

There are, of course, disadvantages to political systems as well. Some groups at RSU attempt to control information as a source of power to achieve their own ends, and this may weaken other organizational functions. Competing for resources means that groups have to present the reasons why their claims are stronger than those of other groups. This ensures that the best arguments are given, but at the same time it may lead to advocacy, the hardening of positions, and difficulty in developing reasonable compromises. Since not all programs get reviewed all the time, programs that are no longer effective may be allowed to continue if no one challenges them. The system therefore has little accountability. In addition, coalitions can arise that are not concerned about protecting the weak. Too, political processes may sometimes be used in situations in which more rational approaches are feasible and could be more effective.

While the instrumental activities associated with obtaining benefits at RSU are one side of politics, there is another side as well. Political processes and structures also have important symbolic elements and outcomes (Edelman, 1967). They permit interest groups at RSU to display or confirm their status, provide individuals with rituals and enjoyable pastimes, protect organizations from disruption by deviant members, and confirm important institutional values and myths (Birnbaum, 1987a, 1987b). It is the constant involvement of various constituents in campus political activity that permits both change and stability. The existence of political instruments for change, and the potential of influencing policy, rather than merely getting one's way, permit people at RSU to work together even as they have disparate objectives.

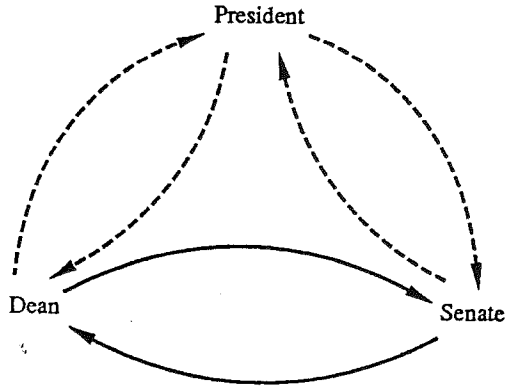
Loops of Interaction in Political Systems

In the previous chapters, we have described how collegial or bureaucratic systems are coordinated through the development of stable vertical or horizontal interactions. Considering RSU as a political system focuses on coordination through conflict. Formal and informal groups change, overlap, are created, and fall apart, as they search for the power to induce outcomes consistent with their preferences. Senior tenured science faculty may comprise a group for the purpose of one policy decision, but it may be fragmented into life science and physical sciences, or gender or age groups, on another issue. There are at least two important processes through which groups are created and develop their positions: one is the formation of coalitions, and the other is the process of negotiations.

Coalitions. If politics is the pursuit and exercise of power to achieve desired objectives, then the purpose of forming coalitions is to join with other individuals or groups in order to achieve a level of power and influence that cannot be achieved by acting alone. Coalitions can involve any number of parties, but the triadic structure is the one about which the most is known. A current conflict at RSU over faculty work load, for example, involves three parties: the dean of the College of Business, who wants to reduce the teaching load of faculty in the M.B.A. program; the faculty senate, which wants to establish precedents for reducing teaching loads in general; and the president, who does not wish to support a policy with such substantial fiscal implications. None of the parties has the power to impose its will if the other two disagree. Normally, President Robinson and the dean are part of the dominant coalition, but in this case the issue is business faculty work load, and the dean disagrees with the president's position.

Coalitions are theoretically possible between any two of the three parties; in Figure 15, I show a coalition between the dean and the senate on this issue. The *actual* coalition that will form in cases such as this will depend on the relative strength of the three parties and whether the relationships between them

Figure 15. Parties to Coalitions in a Triad.



are continuous or episodic (Caplow, 1968). The opportunity to form coalitions serves to balance power in an organization because even relatively weak parties can swing the balance of power and can exact a price for doing so. Particularly in continuous relationships, coalitions tend to be stable over time, but that does not mean that the same coalitions will inevitably form in the same way as issues change. Coalitions can preserve ongoing balances of power (the fact that the president and the dean are both members of the dominant coalition increased the probability that they would support each other on this issue as well), or they can change balances (in this case, the senate and the dean, both weaker members of the triad, formed a coalition that was stronger than the president, who is the most powerful member). Coalitions challenging the formal authority structure are more likely to form in decentralized organizations such as RSU than in others; it seldom happens at People's Community College, where centralized administrative power is considered strong enough to overwhelm any conceivable coalition, or at Heritage College, where power is accessible to all and people believe that their interests will receive due consideration in all decisions.

The formation of coalitions can be extended throughout entire organizations by linking triads together. Although the bureaucratic model suggests that the power of higher-level officers will always prevail over lower-level ones (and therefore that no

these two people is governed by the same interpersonal processes that govern all interpersonal exchanges. All other things being equal, feelings of liking should increase and values become more consistent as they interact and engage in common activities. If only the two of them were involved, they might find common ground that they could both endorse. But as coalition spokespersons, their ability to alter their positions is constrained; they are not just individuals but representatives of groups with different interests. Yielding to the other could be seen as betrayal by their constituencies, and to the extent that they are persuaded by the arguments of the other side, they must return to their constituents and engage in negotiations with them as well. Both representatives find themselves engaged simultaneously in boundary roles in which they are negotiating with both their own constituencies and the opposing negotiator. They are simultaneously part of two dynamic, nonlinear systems in which every action changes the situation and the state of both systems.

Tight and Loose Coupling in Political Systems

The parties to political processes have different preferences. As they interact through negotiations, compromises, and coalition formation, their original objectives change. Since the groups with which they interact are also modifying their positions, the social environment in which they are functioning changes more quickly than they can respond to it. It is impossible to predict in advance which of many alternative outcomes will in fact take place. The actual outcome is likely to be the resultant by-product of many forces and may be neither intended nor preferred by any of the participants (Steinbruner, 1974).

Not only are the outcomes of political processes often not consistent with the preferences of any of the actors, but because they represent compromises and are embedded in ongoing organizational processes, they are usually not as radical as the rhetoric of debate might suggest. Most change at RSU is incremental rather than comprehensive, and while some of the battles may be revolutionary in intent, the changes they provoke are usually neither radical nor dramatic (Baldridge, 1971). In the

political arena of RSU, loose coupling between what is said and what is done is the rule rather than the exception. Since participants in the process know that the final result is likely to be compromise, they usually ask for much more than they expect to get in order to increase the chances of their getting at least a minimum of what they want.

Political outcomes are difficult to predict also because they may depend greatly on the forums in which they are discussed and the timing with which alternatives are considered. What happens in a particular case at RSU may be related to whether the issue is discussed first in the faculty senate or the administrative council, and the conflict related to where an issue is properly to be discussed may at times be as contentious as the issue itself. In addition, when there are a large number of alternatives, the sequence in which they are considered is critical; depending on these sequences, it is possible for an alternative desired by fewer participants to be selected over one desired by many more (Plott, 1982). President Robinson has become aware of this possibility because of two versions of a bill recently introduced in the state legislature that would permit faculty members to join unions and bargain collectively. One bill calls for two sequential elections. In the first, faculty would vote whether or not to unionize, and if the second vote is needed, they would select their bargaining agent. The other bill calls for one election in which faculty could vote for any contending bargaining representative or for "no agent." There are two contending union groups on campus. If the first bill passes, President Robinson thinks the faculty would reject bargaining. But if the second passes, some faculty opposed to unionization might vote for one union in order to prevent the other, less desirable union from winning, and the campus might unionize even though a majority opposed it.

Leadership in Political Systems

President Robinson acts like a political leader much of the time. She gives high priority to informally learning about the concerns and attitudes of the many institutional constituents

and low priority to data and analytical reports (Dill, 1984). She knows that leadership depends in good measure on presence and timing; influence is exerted by people who are present when compromises are being effected and coalitions are being negotiated. "Being there" is critical, and part of Robinson's influence as a political leader comes from knowing where to be. It has also been said that in politics, "timing is everything." Timing refers to the understanding that a political leader brings to the questions of the positions of other campus groups, the possible linkages between one issue and another, and one's own power at a particular moment. Leaders must decide whether to do something now or to wait.

The heavy reliance of political leaders on intuition, experience, and a sense of the particular situation at hand makes it difficult to generalize about what works in specific circumstances. Practitioners and scholars from the time of Machiavelli have offered their counsel on gaining political advantage. College presidents who see politics merely as the exercise of raw power might wish to heed the advice said to have been offered by a former master at Oxford: Never retract. Never explain. Get the thing done and let them howl! But President Robinson sees the campus as a democratic community whose leaders depend on the consent of the governed (Walker, 1979). She believes that persuasion and diplomacy are her most reliable administrative tools. She sees conflict and disagreement as normal rather than as an indication of organizational pathology, and she recognizes that others may hold different views in good faith. She tries not to attack opposing opinions but to use them creatively. The president believes that there are many ways that objectives (for example, excellence or access) can be achieved, and she tries not to become irrevocably committed to any single proposal or program. She strives for "flexible rigidity"; she is willing to compromise on means but unwilling to compromise on ends. Most of all, she is a realist, and tries to understand the dynamics of the institution not as she would like it to be but as it really is. She appreciates the need to bring a degree of rationality to management processes, but she tries to balance this in her judgment with an understanding of the values of others. In her previous

position, for example, she was surprised by the vehemence with which her attempts to "improve budgeting" through apparently neutral technical reforms provoked criticism and anger. Now she realizes that management systems such as budgeting are not merely technical; in fact, they significantly change the balance of campus power and the processes through which individuals and groups express their preferences.

Political systems have many sources of power. President Robinson is certainly *a* leader, but only the naive on campus think of her as the *only* leader. Many groups attempt to exercise influence, and leadership at RSU of necessity must be referred to in the plural rather than the singular. Representatives of each of the various coalitions and subgroups must all be leaders in the sense of representing or altering the interests of their constituencies, entering into negotiations with other representatives, and seeking outcomes acceptable both to their constituencies and to their coalition partners. Of course, not all groups, and therefore not all representatives, have equal power, and the central power figure is the one who can manage the coalition (Thompson, 1967). At most colleges and universities, as at RSU, that individual is the president.

President Robinson's major leadership role is to help the community manage its own affairs, to assist in the process by which issues are deliberated and judgments reached, and to take the actions necessary to implement decisions (Tucker, 1981). This emphasis on giving direction to a community suggests that President Robinson does not rule—she serves. Since a college or university consists of different groups with legitimate interests, she tries to find solutions to problems in a manner that constituencies find acceptable (Walker, 1979). Probably the most famous statement of this political role of the president was Clark Kerr's characterization of the president as "leader, educator, creator, initiator, wielder of power, pump; he is also officeholder, caretaker, inheritor, consensus-seeker, persuader, bottleneck. But he is mostly a mediator. The first task of the mediator is peace . . . peace within the student body, the faculty, the trustees; and peace between and among them" (Kerr, 1963, p. 36).

The responsibilities of mediation as Kerr defined them

transcend merely the institutional and personal survival that peace might bring—they include institutional progress as well. The political leader, therefore, is a person who practices the art of the possible. President Robinson has learned that she cannot always get everything she wants. But she can usually get something. She has become an expert in analyzing differences in the stated preferences of different campus groups, designing alternatives that find a common ground between them, and persuading the conflicting parties that their own interests are furthered by accepting these compromise alternatives (Lindblom, 1980). She tries to develop positions that can be endorsed by the dominant coalition to minimize disruption and maximize satisfaction, while at the same time moving RSU—even if only in an incremental way—toward her own objectives.

In addition to providing what might be thought of as "mediated progress," President Robinson performs many other important services that are often not given appropriate recognition by the constituent community. Two of these are the design of programs that help clarify group values and the facilitation of constituent involvement in governance by reducing the cost of participation.

Clarifying Group Values. The rational model suggests that leaders should first seek agreement on values, and then design programs consistent with these values. It is easy to agree on many of these values, and at RSU, as at most institutions, consensus could be found that values such as "excellence" and "diversity" are good. But the meanings of these terms, and the relative value that they have in any specific situation, cannot be assessed in the abstract. Values can be clarified only by inventing alternative policies and programs, and then selecting between them (Lindblom, 1959). The relative importance of excellence or diversity in a specific situation at RSU can therefore be determined only by designing policies whose various outcomes differ in terms of these values. It is through the selection process that relevant values are disclosed. President Robinson functions as a political leader by having alternatives designed or designing them personally and by developing systems that deliver relevant information concerning them to participants in the political community (Wildavsky, 1979). She minimizes conflict by ensuring that the alternatives she designs are plausible and fall within the constraints of important constituents and by focusing attention during debate on common bonds between participants. She does this so that, while constituencies may struggle to achieve their objectives, at the same time they recognize that they do not wish to destroy the other side or wreck the organization.

Reducing the Cost of Participation. In a political community, mere dissatisfaction with the state of affairs is not enough to activate political interest. Without special incentives (or a degree of coercion), members of a group often will not act to achieve the interests of the group (Olson, 1982). The reason for this is that individual participation is costly (in terms of time and energy, as well as money), and each member will get the benefits of the group activity even without participating. It is particularly difficult to obtain participation when past participation has not been successful. In general, when the chances for success are low and the benefits can be achieved without participating, the rational self-interested person will not participate. Faculty apathy at RSU turns out to be rational!

One of President Robinson's roles as a political leader is to identify the issues that political groups should deal with, to reduce the cost of participation to elicit support, and to provide added incentives or coercion when necessary to induce involvement. This is true not only for President Robinson but for the leaders of other campus groups as well. As an example, one of the contending union organizations at RSU is the Faculty Association of Regional State University (FARSU). Their elected chairperson has developed systems of internal communication and influence within RSU so that faculty members need do nothing more than sign a card and pay a nominal fee to "participate" in the union and through their representatives to influence institutional policy. When faculty are not motivated to join the union by economic incentives, the union may try to provide added incentives by giving only members access to certain bene-

fits or through coercion by bringing social pressure to bear against "freeloaders."

A consideration of leadership in political systems can conclude in no better fashion than by returning to the sage advice of Cornford, our Oxford don, directed toward persons who, like President Robinson, wish to be influential in academic institutions: "Remember this: *the men who get things done are the men who walk up and down King's Parade, from 2 to 4, every day of their lives.* You can either join them, and become a powerful person; or you can join the great throng of those who spend their time in preventing them from getting things done, and in the larger task of preventing one another from doing anything whatever" (Cornford, [1908] 1964, p. 31).

Chapter 7

The Anarchical Institution: Finding Meaning in a Community of Autonomous Actors

Flagship University is a complex institution with two undergraduate colleges, a graduate school, six professional schools, and many research centers and institutes, occupying an attractive, sprawling campus near the state capital. Flagship ranks among the top twenty-five universities in the nation in its level of federal research support, and many of its graduate and professional programs enjoy national and even international reputations. A brief statement of purpose in its bulletin emphasizes the university's search for knowledge and service to the state.

Of the 27,500 students, two-thirds are undergraduates. All in-state students in the top half of their high school class are admitted, but performance expectations are rigorous, and attrition is high in the freshman year. Faculty pay close attention to departmental courses and major sequences, but general education commands little interest and is defined by distribution requirements only. Undergraduate life is not closely monitored, and students live where and how they please. Graduate programs are highly selective.

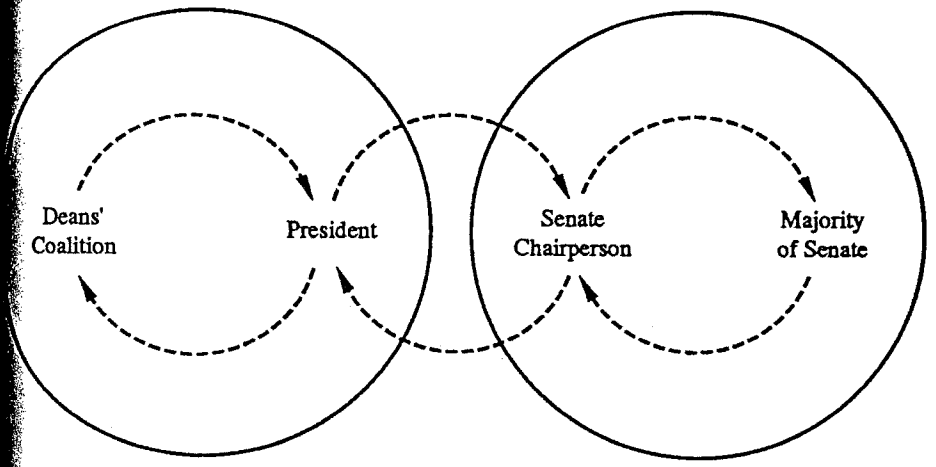
Almost all faculty have doctorates, many from institutions as prestigious as or more prestigious than Flagship. Teaching loads are low, and much undergraduate teaching is done in

coalitions are necessary), a political system makes it possible for lower-level participants to form coalitions that can be stronger than their superiors. At RSU, for example, the dean of the School of Education felt threatened by the possibility that the school's two associate deans were working together to curtail the dean's influence over academic policy. To prevent this, the dean gave special recognition and program support to one of them. The development of this new dean-associate dean coalition effectively ended any possibility that the two subordinates would work collectively to undermine the dean's authority.

Negotiations. Coalitions do not just "happen." Before parties can decide whether to join forces with others, they must try to assess their own power, the power of potential coalition partners, the degree to which the interests of the parties coincide, and the potential costs and benefits of forming alliances. Bargaining processes are often carried on by identifiable people who fill roles spanning the boundaries between institutional subsystems. They interact with each other as representatives of a group rather than as individuals. Negotiators in these boundary-spanning roles must engage in two sequential and continuing processes. In one process, they have to negotiate with representatives of the other group to discover the most advantageous outcomes or compromises that can be achieved. In the other process, they have to negotiate with the members of their own group in order to understand their desires, clarify their willingness to accept potential outcomes, and help them to adjust their aspirations as the political process unfolds. Often, the negotiations with members of one's own group prove to be more difficult than those with representatives of the other side! These interactions are shown in Figure 16, which depicts the interaction of President Robinson and the chairperson of the faculty senate as they negotiate an issue of faculty salaries.

Political processes often involve the interaction of two people who are the representatives of different interests. For example, President Robinson often meets with the chairperson of the faculty senate to bargain over issues of mutual concern, such as the president's proposal (opposed by the senate) to give

Figure 16. Representatives Negotiating in a Political System.



higher salaries to faculty in scarce areas. The president's position was developed in consultation with a coalition that included most of the deans and the faculties of several departments in business and computer science that are unable to successfully recruit; the chairperson's position was endorsed by a majority of the senate, by several humanities departments, and by the Women's Caucus, which wishes to see sex-related salary inequities rectified before paying higher salaries in fields dominated by men. Both sides see their positions as justified and reasonable, and each tends to identify the other's position as self-serving and inconsistent with institutional effectiveness. President Robinson thinks that she can obtain approval from the trustees for her own position even over the objections of others, but she is unwilling to pay the probable cost in terms of campus disruption. The alternative is negotiation.

President Robinson and the senate chairperson meet to argue their cases, and each tries to change the attitudes and behaviors of the other. The processes through which they interact have probably been best described in terms of labor negotiations (Walton and McKersie, 1965), but they are applicable in any social negotiation setting. To some extent, the relationship between

large lectures or by teaching assistants. Scholarly productivity is the key to promotion, tenure, salary increases, and individual prestige. Most issues of faculty interest are resolved through the interaction of deans and faculty at the college level. There is a large academic senate, whose major activities seem to be "pointing with pride" or "viewing with alarm," but the president does consult regularly with an elected faculty advisory committee composed of five senior and respected faculty. While the president does not always take their counsel, he is unlikely to act contrary to it.

President Franklin Foster served as a professor, and then dean, of one of the professional schools at Flagship before being recommended for the presidency to the trustees by a faculty-dominated search committee. He is polished and urbane—equally at home addressing a colloquium of visiting scholars, soliciting alumni contributions, or standing his ground at a legislative budget hearing. He is as proud of the football team's bowl victory last New Year's Day as he is of the number of members of the National Academy of Sciences who grace the faculty. Not an acclaimed scholar himself, his commitment to rigorous standards when he became dean of a weak school is legendary.

Jocks, grinds, radicals, partygoers, student government politicians, esthetes, and groups identified by ethnic, religious, or other factors all form subcultures on the campus. Faculty are likely to associate with colleagues sharing common disciplinary or research interests, and, except at the doctoral level, there is little faculty-student interaction outside formal class settings. Current issues on campus include efforts to influence federal policy to limit the monitoring of grant activity, a campaign to make faculty salaries more competitive, an effort to convince the legislature to support development of a high-technology research park, and a debate about the role of the campus in urban education.

Flagship University as an Anarchical System

"Imagine that you're either the referee, coach, player, or spectator at an unconventional soccer match: the field for the game is round; there are several goals scattered haphazardly around the circular field; people can enter and leave the game whenever they want to; they can throw balls in whenever they want; they can say 'that's my goal' whenever they want to, and for as many goals as they want to; the entire game takes place on a sloped field; and the game is played as if it makes sense" (March, cited in Weick, 1976, p. 1). This soccer-field image may strike a resonant note for administrators and faculty at Flagship. It depicts a setting that to the observer appears chaotic and in which people appear to do what they feel like doing. Yet there is structure to it. Roles are specified, the players stay on an officially designated field (by and large), and they usually throw balls rather than bricks or marshmallows. Moreover, the participants can make sense of what is happening (although their versions may differ) even if the observer cannot.

People at Flagship must constantly deal with issues of attention and meaning. But their rationality is bounded, or limited, and they cannot give attention to the infinite number of elements that exist in the organization's environment. How can they decide which of these elements are the most important? And given the equivocal nature of events, how can they interpret the relationships between the selected elements so that they make sense? Since these questions have no objective answers, observers may come to the conclusion that "processes of campus governance are dictated largely by intuition, irrational precedent, and from-the-hip responses" (Hodgkinson, 1971, p. 1). The model developed to describe this system where everyone does what they wish has been referred to as an organized anarchy. In it, "teachers decide if, when, and what to teach. Students decide if, when, and what to learn. Legislators and donors decide if, when, and what to support. Neither coordination (except the spontaneous mutual adaptation of decision) nor control are practiced. Resources are allocated by whatever process emerges but without explicit accommodation and without explicit reference to some superordinate goals. The 'decisions' of the system are a consequence produced by the system but intended by no one and decisively controlled by no one" (Cohen and March, 1974, pp. 33–34).

The concepts of the organized anarchy are counterintuitive. They defy the common expectations that are part of the

more familiar ideas of organizations as communities, as bureaucracies, or as political systems. To understand them requires suspension of some commonsense ideas about organizations that we "know" are correct—ideas that we have internalized and that are potent enough to filter and distort our perceptions. Among these ideas are that organizational leaders play critical roles in institutional processes, that institutions have goals, that individuals can specify their preferences, that chains of cause and effect lead individuals and organizations to take certain actions in order to effectuate outcomes they consider desirable, that problems are solved by decisions, and that decision making is a primary occupation of organizational participants. In other words, they question common understandings of organizational rationality that presuppose that thinking precedes action, action serves a purpose, purposes are related to consistent sets of goals, and choice is based on logical relationships between actions and consequences.

What might the dynamics of an institution look like if these ideas were not true—at least not all of the time? How might such an institution function if cause-and-effect relationships were equivocal, and autonomous and essentially unpredictable behavior operated within invented yet accepted boundaries and rules? The ideas of open systems, loose coupling, bounded rationality, and sense making discussed in earlier chapters can provide an alternative lens for viewing Flagship University as an organized anarchy.

Characteristics of Anarchical Systems

An organized anarchy exhibits three characteristics: problematic goals, an unclear technology, and fluid participation. When goals are vague, no one knows exactly how the technology works, and decision-making processes are unclear, describing and understanding how Flagship University works becomes extremely difficult (Cohen and March, 1974). Let us take each of these properties and discuss the extent to which they apply to Flagship University, using as our example the teaching activities of its undergraduate College of Liberal Arts and Science (CLAS).

Problematic Goals. The *CLAS Bulletin* states that its goal is to prepare students who are "liberally educated." Within the college, however, there is wide disagreement about what liberal education means; consequently, the college finds itself unable to define this goal more clearly or assess the extent to which it is being achieved. Within the ambiguous framework of the idea of a liberal education, the curriculum in actuality often reflects primarily the interests of individual departments and faculty members. Specific college goals are often stated after, rather than before, programs have been developed. For example, several years after enrollments burgeoned in a new computer course developed by interested mathematics faculty, the college added "computer literacy" to its list of objectives. At Flagship, "goals" are typically a loose collection of changing ideas rather than a coherent educational philosophy. The curriculum at Flagship is not so much a reflection of thoughtful consideration by scholars of the knowledge most worth knowing as it is a beanbag. New faculty enter the institution and drop in their own beans as they begin their careers. The institution discovers what it prefers by seeing what it has already done, rather than by acting on the basis of preferences.

Unclear Technology. We have defined technology as the characteristic processes through which organizations convert inputs to outputs. For example, CLAS employs a number of technologies in its efforts to convert new students into educated graduates, the most familiar of which include large lecture sections, small discussion classes, laboratory sessions, seminars, remedial instruction, and independent study. Each of these technologies has been used over an extended period of time, and all of them appear to be effective. However, no one knows why they are effective. It is not clear specifically what processes in a lecture promote student change and what processes do not. In one recent experiment at Flagship, for example, students seemed to learn equally well if they were taught with a lecture and a book, only read the book, or also discussed the book in small groups. Without strong evidence that one method is more effective than another, choices about technology tend to be

based on trial and error, previous experiences, imitation, and inventions born of necessity (Cohen and March, 1974).

Fluid Participation. There are various formal and informal groups at the program, departmental, and college level at CLAS that deal with curriculum. In some cases, participants are elected so that committee membership changes regularly. Any curriculum issue might go through one, two, or all three levels of review, depending on the topic, the committee work load, the desires of the committee chairs, and the interest shown in particular situations by individual committee members. The attendance of some faculty members is often sporadic, depending on their teaching schedules, the specific days of the week they work at home, and related factors. The dean is an ex officio member of the collegewide committee and may attend except when there are meetings of the college budget committee or of the president's cabinet. Faculty who are not committee members but who have an interest in the agenda may attend meetings, and they often actively participate in discussions. There are probably few, if any, occasions on which decisions on two related issues are made by the same people. People tend to move in and out of various parts of the organization, and their involvement in any issue depends to a great extent on what other opportunities for their attention happen to be available at the same time.

If we looked at other parts of Flagship University, we would find that many of them also have these key characteristics of an organized anarchy. The reasons why colleges and universities often find it difficult to make "rational" decisions should now be somewhat clearer: common understandings of organizational decision making assume agreed-upon goals, a clear technology, and stable levels of participation—and none of these conditions is present at Flagship. But their absence does not mean that there are no patterns. The image that the word *anarchy* creates of an inchoate formless entity must be tempered. *Both* words in the concept of organized anarchy have meaning. Flagship *is* organized. It has a structure, roles, and rules and regulations. Organizational status is related to influ-

ence. There are standardized procedures for information flow and communication that direct people's attention, and many decisions follow prescribed processes. In addition, the institution has a culture and exists within a still larger culture, both of which increase the probability that certain behaviors will take place and decrease the probability of other behaviors. Unlike Heritage College, where major aspects of the culture are rooted in some of the unique history of the institution, Flagship has a culture that is driven by national meritocratic standards based on the professional and expert authority of the faculty. These features of organizational life all constrain the behavior of participants and officeholders, and much—perhaps most—of what happens at Flagship is routine.

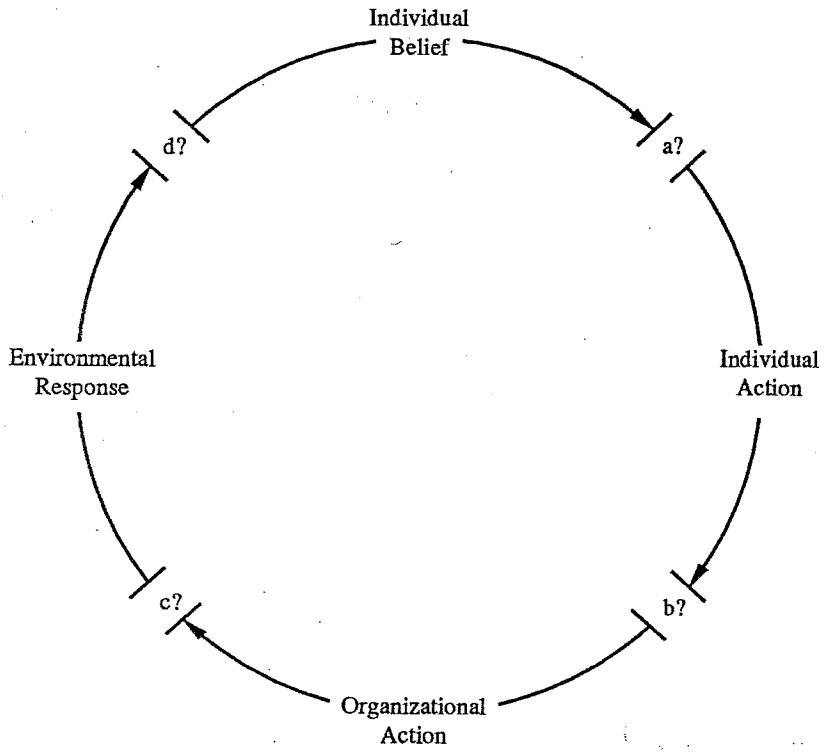
Loops of Interaction in Anarchical Systems

In a rational world, people learn about cause and effect by taking actions consistent with their beliefs, observing the consequences of these actions, and then modifying their future actions as necessary to more closely achieve desired outcomes. The cycle through which this learning takes place (March and Olsen, 1979, p. 57) is shown in Figure 17.

In a simple world, the cycle suggests a readily comprehensible sequence permitting the learning of cause and effect through observation. But in a complex world, there are too many variables and potential interactions to permit complete understanding, and the bounds of rationality interfere both with observation and with interpretation. In particular, errors in thinking caused by organizational constraints or systematic psychological biases, or both, may break the continuity of the loop and lead people to make incorrect inferences and judgments. These breaks may occur between any of the elements of the loop, and four of the problem areas that may lead to incorrect learning have been identified with a question mark (?).

At Flagship, for example, President Foster believes that the physics department is weak and that "something ought to be done" about it. However, his individual belief concerning the marginal quality of the physics department may not lead to ac-

Figure 17. The Organization Learning Cycle.



Source: Adapted from March and Olsen, 1979, p. 57.

tion on his part (*a?*) because of role definitions (presidents at Flagship do not interfere in departmental business), the existence of organizational standard operating procedures (program reviews are a responsibility of the dean, who has them conducted on a five-year cycle), and the fact that Foster has many such beliefs but does not have time to act on all of them. Even if Foster were to act by telling the dean to "do something about physics," it would be difficult to say with certainty (*b?*) whether the dean's subsequent behavior was due to the president's comments. In addition to the president, many persons and groups both inside and outside Flagship influence what the dean does. For example, the dean has also been exposed to accrediting reports, internal data summaries, and informal lunchroom

discussions with faculty over several years about the physics department, any one or a combination of which might motivate the dean to act.

Assuming that the institution takes an action (for example, the dean meets to discuss the situation with the department chair), something might subsequently happen in the physics department (for example, it might apply for and receive a major research grant). But the relationship between the action and the response (*c?*) would be unclear. The application might have been planned long before the meeting, or its award might have been related to unforeseeable events, such as the need by the granting agency to ensure geographical diversity in the disbursement of funds. Finally, the receipt of the grant might be incorrectly seen (*d?*) by the president as confirming his belief that presidents can influence institutional quality by personal intervention in academic activities.

It is possible that in this case the president's intervention *was* in fact responsible for improving academic quality. But it is also possible that because of potential breaks in the loop at various points, the two events were completely unrelated. Acquiring accurate understandings under conditions of such ambiguity is fraught with difficulty, particularly since people are likely to see what they believe, to attribute outcomes to human agency rather than happenstance, and to infer cause and effect when one event occurs after another. When organizational elements are only loosely coupled, "what happened is not immediately obvious, why it happened is obscure, and whether what happened is good is unclear" (March and Olsen, 1979, p. 59).

Tight and Loose Coupling in Anarchical Systems

The traditional organization chart with its boxes representing offices connected by lines representing channels of authority provides one very powerful metaphor for thinking about tight coupling in organizational structure. But a metaphor more appropriate for loose coupling is that of "streams" (Cohen and March, 1974). A stream can be thought of as a flow of "something" that travels through an organization as the Gulf

Stream flows through the Atlantic Ocean. The casual observer would not see it, but it is there. Now consider four relatively independent streams flowing through Flagship University, each only loosely coupled to the others. These four streams consist respectively of problems, solutions, participants, and choice opportunities. Looking carefully at these metaphorical streams can help us understand their composition and the ways in which they may interact with each other.

Problems. Problems are the unresolved concerns of people inside the institution. Problems change constantly, but a snapshot of the problem stream flowing through CLAS at Flagship on a typical day might find, among other things, Professor Smith's failure to be reappointed in the history department because of enrollment shifts and budget constraints, the dean's feeling of job dissatisfaction and burnout, the physics department secretary's difficulty in getting proper room assignments, the comptroller's inability to reconcile this month's enrollment reports, and freshman Green's shortage of funds to pay tuition due this week. These are all problems the individuals concerned wish to resolve, and they must find processes and forums for doing so.

Solutions. Solutions are someone's products. Often, of course, a solution may be developed in order to resolve a problem. But some solutions precede problems and flow in a stream through the organization looking for problems to which they might be the answer. An appealing solution for many faculty in CLAS is "higher standards," and regardless of the nature of the problem, some will suggest greater scholarly rigor as the remedy. A snapshot of the solution stream on a given day at CLAS might include a number of such all-purpose products and answers, such as more computers, a core curriculum, changing from elected to appointed department chairs, more faculty participation in governance, programs for adults, or faculty development. Sometimes the organization itself makes changes that make certain solutions more prominent. For example, the initiation at Flagship of a management information system has led to

the appointment of persons likely to identify "more data" as a solution to all kinds of institutional problems.

Participants. Participants are people involved in a decision. In most organizations, certain people are told that they *must* participate in certain decisions and that they *cannot* participate in others. But Flagship is different, and academics there are free to participate in many decisions if they are willing to expend the time and energy, and need not participate in almost any if they wish not to. The number of things to which academics could give attention is therefore quite large; however, their time is limited. Choosing to get involved with one decision is also a choice not to get involved with another. This choice may be based on the importance of the decision or related instead to the time available when the decision is being made. People come and go in decision processes as their interests and time commitments change.

These three streams flow through CLAS. One is problems looking for places to be aired and resolved. The second is solutions looking for issues to which they might be the answer. The third includes decision makers looking for work. (This does not mean that decision makers are idle. Rather, it suggests that the number of matters to which potential participants could devote their attention is so large that they must make choices about the ones with which they will work and the ones they will ignore. And they must often do so without knowing in advance which will later turn out to have been the most important.) Into this somewhat confusing situation we now introduce a fourth stream, independent and only loosely coupled to the other three. This fourth stream consists of choice opportunities—occasions on which the organization is expected to make a decision. Elements in this stream include such things as the approval of the annual budget, actions on promotions and tenure, the appointment of administrators, the approval of new academic programs, or the adoption of the state-mandated master plan. How can Flagship make these choices if it cannot specify its goals, it does not know the best way to achieve them, and it cannot tell in advance who will participate in the decision process?

Garbage-Can Decision Making. Conventional wisdom suggests that, faced with a choice opportunity on budget, for example, Flagship should go through an elaborate process of data collection and analysis, compare the costs and benefits of various sets of expenditures with projected outcomes, and decide which combinations are most consistent with stated institutional goals.

The concept of the organized anarchy suggests instead that choices at Flagship are made through a process that has been called "garbage-can decision making" (Cohen, March, and Olsen, 1976). The stream of choice opportunities can be thought of metaphorically as offering large receptacles, or garbage cans, through which flow the other streams of problems, solutions, and participants. In the garbage can, specific problems, participants, and solutions coalesce with a particular choice point and they become attached (that is, more tightly coupled) to each other. One way of visualizing the relationship is to think of the streams of problems, solutions, and participants as three fluid and wriggling ropes loosely braided together so that the parts that are in physical contact with each other continually shift. A decision point cuts into that rope to reveal a cross section displaying a pattern containing elements of the problem, solution, and participant streams. The unwary observer may mistake the cross section as reflecting the totality of the rope and believe that there is an inherent logic to the decision being made and the observed pattern of connections. An alternative view suggests that the pattern would have been different had the cross section been taken at a different part of the rope, or at the same part but at a different time. The observed patterns of attachment would then not necessarily be logical, but would depend on such matters as the time the decision was made, the availability of other garbage cans, and the particular problems, solutions, and participants in the streams at the time. This indeterminacy introduces ambiguity and uncertainty into the decision arena. Decision making becomes increasingly difficult when irrelevant problems and solutions (that is, "garbage") become attached to choice opportunities.

Take as an example a typical choice point at Flagship.

President Foster has to decide whether to include two new faculty positions for the school of business in next year's budget. Left alone, the president could make this decision easily on the basis of a limited data set (for example, student credit hours in business have increased 10 percent, projections of enrollment for the next five years seem stable, retirements for the next two years will provide needed flexibility) and on intuitive knowledge (based on more grumbling from the business faculty lately about work load, or a hunch that a new subspecialization will be important in the field). But as problems, solutions, and participants get tightly coupled to the decision in the garbage can, the decision becomes increasingly difficult to make. "Extraneous" elements may become attached to the decision. For example:

Problems: Professor Smith (the nonreappointed faculty member in the history department) asks, "How can you fail to reappoint me because of budget constraints, and then go out and hire two new faculty?" The English department states that the new positions represent a loss of intellectual commitment to liberal education. The faculty senate informs the president that proper committee procedures for considering new positions have not been followed.

Solutions: Those who have tried in the past to initiate faculty retraining programs use the Professor Smith situation as a case in point and suggest that his status cannot be resolved without attending to this broader issue. The general education committee says that the matter relates to the issue of small classes, which they believe goes to the heart of the educational process, and they ask the president to conduct a study of class size in CLAS before making a decision on Smith. Deans of heavily enrolled professional schools restate their case for "every tub on its own bottom" funding. The informal "middle-management caucus" suggests that this incident would not have happened had their proposed management information system been adopted, and they propose that better data be collected for this and future cases of this type.

Participants: One of Professor Smith's students, who is editor of the *Flagship Student Daily Courier,* writes an unusual editorial supporting the professor and asking for a mass meeting

of students. The faculty of the business school, who have never before become involved in budget issues, transmit a resolution to the president asking to meet with him on this and other previously unmentioned funding problems. The affirmative action office sends a memo to the president requesting representation in the process because of its effect on staffing goals.

What started out as a relatively simple choice opportunity appears now to be exceptionally complicated because of the linkages that have developed inside the garbage can. In the garbage can, it is possible for almost any problem, any solution, and any participant to become tightly coupled with any decision, and it is often impossible to predict with any degree of accuracy which will be. Actions similar to those taken in the Smith case in the past, for example, have not activated the same set of problems, solutions, and participants seen in this situation, and an identical case may not do so in the future.

There are three decision styles related to garbage-can decision making: resolution, flight, and oversight. In resolution, problems are actually worked through rationally until they are resolved. Although we commonly assume that this represents normal practice, in an organized anarchy, decisions may be more likely to be made either by flight or by oversight. Both flight and oversight operate by removing the "garbage" (that is, the extraneous material) from the decision. Of course, it must also be remembered that what one person sees as garbage another may see as the core of the decision; garbage is in the eye of the beholder.

Decision making by flight assumes that while problems attached to choices make decisions difficult, coupling between them is loose and the linkage is not permanent. While a problem (for example, the Smith reappointment) can by chance become attached in the garbage can to the allocation decision, in the course of time another decision opportunity (for example, the formation of an Ad Hoc Senate Committee on Reappointment Procedures) may come along that is more "attractive" to the problem. The Smith reappointment problem may therefore leave (take flight from) the resource allocation arena for the senate committee arena (Smith's time and attention are limited,

and he must choose how he will use them), and the allocation decision can now be more easily made. This accounts for the common situation in which a choice that appears intractable over an extended period of time suddenly gets made with little or no difficulty.

A decision by oversight is one made quickly so that people and problems busy in other arenas have no time to get involved in the decision. Had President Foster made the allocation decision before people on campus were aware of it, it is possible that Smith might never have tried to use it as a forum for pressing his case, and none of the other actors and problems would have become activated.

Garbage cans in an organization act like buffers or "energy sinks" that absorb problems, solutions, and participants like a sponge and prevent them from sloshing around and disturbing arenas in which people wish to act. Ad hoc long-range institutional planning committees may be the quintessential garbage cans, temporarily providing "homes" for any conceivable institutional problem, solution, or participant. But there may also be permanent structural garbage cans, such as the academic senate, that function at least in part to draw unwanted participants, problems, or solutions away from decision arenas (Birnbaum, forthcoming a).

What becomes tightly or loosely coupled in this symbolic system is related to a mixture of collegial interactions, bureaucratic structures, ongoing coalitions, chance, and cognitive processes by which people make inferences and judgments under conditions of uncertainty. Flagship, like other universities, can have sophisticated management systems that do not really affect what happens on campus (Bolman and Deal, 1984), approve affirmative action plans that do not increase minority recruitment, and rhapsodize on the importance of teaching while promoting faculty solely on the basis of their research productivity. The anarchical qualities of Flagship allow people to have their cake and eat it too by permitting them to substitute belief for action. The faculty senate can engage in vigorous debate and take a vote deploring grade inflation without requiring behavioral changes in their colleagues, thereby both strengthening

organizational claims of concern for quality and minimizing organizational disruption.

In general, loose coupling permits Flagship to give attention to rationalized myths without disrupting the teaching and research programs of the university. They give conspicuous attention to doing things expected by important constituencies, such as the state legislature, as a "signal to the outside world that all is well. If management is making decisions, if plans are being made, if new units are created in response to new problems, if sophisticated evaluation and control systems are in place, then an organization must be well managed and worthy of support" (Bolman and Deal, 1984, p. 168).

This kind of loose coupling is particularly advantageous in a complex and turbulent environment. An organization that has many semiautonomous units can be more sensitive and responsive to changes in different parts of its environment than can a centralized organization whose parts are tied together. The focus on individual activity and the general lack of management controls make innovation possible, and the loose organizational couplings enable the institution to respond simultaneously to conflicting demands. Since people are free for the most part from close management control and able to engage in personally satisfying activity, they are less likely to become alienated and more likely to be productive.

The management of Flagship can, of course, be highly problematic, particularly when dealing with external audiences. To a great extent, this problem is resolved by avoiding it and substituting symbolic for instrumental administrative activity. Because of unclear goals, the difficulty of developing valid outcome measures, and the ability of many institutions to avoid assessment, "symbolic outcomes may be sufficient given the limited aims or the limited interest of social actors in the organization. These factors, taken together, suggest that symbolic administrative responses may, in fact, be sufficient in most instances" (Pfeffer, 1981a, p. 34).

Flagship is driven not by comprehensive rationality but by the autonomous actions of many individuals and organizational subgroups responding to their own perceived interests or

to the pressures of the market (Kerr, 1982). Each actor can perceive only a small portion of the environment and can pay attention to only a limited set of elements that can be perceived. If the subunits of Flagship were as tightly coupled as they are at People's Community College, these autonomous activities would quickly tear the organization apart. Loose coupling can therefore be seen not as an aberration but as the functional response of an institution faced with multiple and conflicting demands on attention, priorities, and performance. Flagship may have become one of the world's great universities, not in spite of loose coupling but because of it.

Effective Leadership in Anarchical Systems

President Foster's decisions may have little effect on disparate organizational subsystems; changes in the environment may often overpower any changes that are attempted internally; professional participants may take autonomous action; the institution's most important characteristics, such as enrollment or reputation, are difficult to change; and administrators can attend to only a small number of potentially important matters having no way of knowing beforehand (or often even afterward) whether or not these are the most important. The concept of the larger-than-life heroic leader whose wise decisions and forceful administration solve institutional problems and advance the institution's fortunes appears out of place in the organized anarchy. Instead, "managers must rely on images, luck, and sometimes the supernatural to bring some semblance of order" (Bolman and Deal, 1984, p. 3). And while it is common to speak of rational managers, administration in higher education still appears to emphasize intuition, to avoid quantitative data and new management techniques, and to respond to political groups and influences (Dill, 1984, p. 92). Much of President Foster's effectiveness comes from his ability to project a sense of competence, integrity, and dedication to many different audiences. When he appears before a legislative budget committee, for example, his responses are precise, articulate, and straightforward. The legislators cannot really know much about the programs he is advo-

cating, but because Foster *looks* like a university president and appears knowledgeable and on top of things, they assume that Flagship is well run and worthy of support.

The discrepancy between what leaders are presumed to do and how they actually behave led Cohen and March (1974) to say that the presidency is an illusion and that the role is in large measure a symbolic one with only modest influence on campus life. But while it is true that other organizational constituencies exercise influence that can prevent a president from achieving certain objectives, it is also true that at Flagship, and on most campuses, most of the time, the president is the single most influential person. Presidents therefore can often make a difference, even though perhaps not to the extent that they themselves are likely to believe. In part, presidential influence may be related to "style, an ability to cope, well-publicized actions on noncontroversial topics, and dramatic performances that emphasize the traits popularly linked to leadership, such as forcefulness, responsibility, courage, and decency" (Bolman and Deal, 1984, p. 184). However, effective influence in an organized anarchy may also depend on exhibiting specific behaviors that are not the same as the behaviors expected under other models. Like President Robinson at RSU, President Foster at Flagship is a realist. They both believe that their effectiveness depends on acting with a knowledge of how the system *really* works, and not on the basis of how they would *like* it to work. But Foster gives less attention than Robinson to coalition formation and negotiation to get what he wants. Instead, he is more likely to try to shape the values, symbols, and emotions that affect how other people interpret what is happening at Flagship. He spends much of his time explaining and clarifying events to others so that they are more likely to see equivocal events, messages, and relationships as he does. Robinson tries to convince others; Foster tries to change their perceptions.

President Foster attempted to make some dramatic and swift changes when he first took office, but they almost always activated strong opposition and were often unsuccessful. Over the course of his career, he has come to realize that he could use the natural tendencies of Flagship to move it slowly and marginally in directions that he favored, just as he could move his sailboat closer to shore by using the winds and currents in the right way. The "eight basic tactical rules for use by those who seek to influence the course of decisions in universities or colleges" (Cohen and March, 1974, p. 207) seemed to him to be sensible.

Spend Time. Most people are indifferent to most decisions most of the time, and those who are interested in a specific decision can participate only to the extent that they either have or make time to do so. People who are willing to spend time on any decision are likely to have a disproportionate effect on it. They will know more about it than others and will likely be present when the decision is made. Each year, Foster identifies a very small number of important issues to which he will pay close attention, and to the extent possible, he will either delegate or ignore other decisions. One of his current interests is urban education. Because his time is in such short supply, spending it on urban education also has the symbolic effect of demonstrating to others through his behavior, rather than just his rhetoric, the importance that he attaches to this issue.

Persist. A unique set of participants, problems, and solutions can become coupled with a decision in the garbage can today and cause a proposal to fail. Next month or next year, the same program may attract different participants, and the outcomes may be more favorable. Foster does not assume that one of his urban education initiatives that is not well received by the administrative council is lost forever, and he will continue to advance the idea in other forums and at other times. For the same reason, he does not assume that approval of a program today means that it will be implemented tomorrow or that it is protected from defeat next week. He agrees with Hutchins that "it is one thing to get things done. It is another to make them last" (Kerr, 1963, p. 33). Persisting requires focused attention and follow-up on a limited agenda.

Exchange Status for Substance. Because the ability of individuals or groups to significantly influence an institution is

severely circumscribed, there is often more concern for having one's status symbolically recognized than there is for substantive outcomes. Faculty may fight for the right to participate in committees and then not attend meetings; administrators may announce and attempt to get credit for outcomes over which they had little control. Foster believes in urban education and is willing to let others take the credit as long as the programs he desires are implemented. He has created a prestigious and visible Flagship University Commission on Urban Education. Many important politicians and civic leaders have been appointed, and the group has met frequently with the governor and mayor. The commission holds periodic press conferences to announce progress, and new programs are always presented by Foster to the board of trustees as representing yet another triumph of the commission.

Facilitate Opposition Participation. There is a natural tendency to strengthen and support one's allies by appointing them to important committees and to refuse such appointments to opponents. Those who remain outside the decision-making process are not aware of the organizational and external constraints that limit flexibility in complex areas. Foster's commission appointments included several senior faculty who had always spoken against university involvement in the urban arena, as well as outspoken community leaders with unrealistic expectations of university participation. Membership on the commission has sensitized advocates to the reality of constraints and has given opponents an understanding of a politically charged situation that has long-term implications for university enrollments and funding. Participation in the commission by opponents did not completely eliminate either unrealistic aspirations or conservative reservations, but it did temper them, and commission members found it more difficult to later publicly oppose commission recommendations.

Overload the System. The initiation of new programs on a campus is difficult for many reasons. Systems have high inertia and resist change, new proposals tend to collect garbage, veto tactics are a major means through which participants on campus

certify their own status, and sometimes just chance events intervene. In one way or another, almost any individual project can founder. But time and attention are limited at Flagship, and if the system is overloaded with more proposals than it can respond to, at least some of them will be approved through the process of flight or oversight. The commission has made a large number of recommendations, and while some have been the subject of endless campus debate, others were implemented quietly and quickly.

Provide Garbage Cans. There is a limited amount of time and attention available at Flagship. Anyone making a new proposal may find that unrelated problems or solutions (at least from the proposer's perspective) get attached to it and make choice difficult. One way of reducing the chances of that happening is to increase the number of other choices on campus that might prove to be more attractive to those problems and solutions than one's own proposal. These choices might be thought of as garbage cans—that is, as places that attract other people's garbage and keep them away from one's own proposal. At Flagship, there are a great many garbage cans, including the Long-Range Planning Committee, the Committee on the Future of the Undergraduate Curriculum, and the Committee on Faculty Privilege. They are highly visible, they confer status on those participating, and they are instrumentally unimportant to the institution. President Foster has referred many extraneous questions raised about commission recommendations to these committees for "more thorough and complete consideration," freeing the commission to implement the recommendations themselves.

Manage Unobtrusively. Some institutional executives, under external pressure or driven by their own understanding of the meaning of "leadership," seek to manage change through sweeping reorganizations, new academic program emphases, or alternative means for assessing faculty competence or student outcomes. To the extent that such programs are inconsistent with existing cultural expectations, structural systems, and personal interests of other organizational participants, they may

trigger negative responses, become coupled with a wide range of problems, solutions, and participants in the garbage can, and fail.

An alternative way of managing is to identify small and unobtrusive changes that can have large-scale effects without generating opposition. Such changes can often be accomplished through minor changes in the bureaucratic or information structures of the organization, which then become amplified through its other social systems. For example, deans at Flagship always prepare a yearly report for the president describing new academic and scholarly activities using a standard format. This year, President Foster added one line to the format: "Please list all activities related to the Urban Education Initiative." He has decided, at least for now, not to bring any additional pressure on the deans, believing that he can exert the greatest influence by "attending carefully to personnel and structural matters, and then by walking away from them. Not only does this strategy ensure a President plenty of free time, but it also represents the best chance for maintaining optimal control from the point of view of his or her own preferences" (Padgett, 1980).

Interpret History. History provides the rationale and precedent for much that happens on a campus. Since the meanings of what has happened in the past are subjective, different reporters writing at different times may present the same event in different ways. Minutes of meetings, summaries of events, and other memorializations of the past should to the extent possible be written long enough after the event so that they can support actions considered desirable today. President Foster has identified several situations since 1900 in which Flagship professors have been interested in urban affairs, and he has used them in his recent speeches to refer to the "historic association of Flagship with the problems of our cities." The phrase has also found its way into the university bulletin. As a result, there is somewhat less opposition to his urban initiatives than would be the case if they were seen as deviating from traditional campus interests.

President Foster is an accomplished man. He hopes that when he leaves Flagship it will be a somewhat better institution

than when he arrived, but he also realizes that he is likely to be replaced by someone equally as accomplished as he and that the fortunes of the institution are not primarily dependent on what he does as president. To be sure, some good programs have been developed during his presidency, and he has been identified publicly as having been responsible for them. But he has played for too long on the sloping soccer fields of academe to believe that what has happened during his watch was a result of his actions and intentions. He is more likely to see the reality of academic policy making as reflected in a description offered at another institution:

> Each week at the educational policy committee someone would insist that the future of the university rested on our dropping a given requirement or adding a proposed program. And each week we traded anecdotes and guesses about the effects of the proposals. The most compelling arguments were based on the experience of a relative of a friend or a friend of a relative at another school where the proposal or something like it had been adopted. Through the magic of parliamentary procedure we were able to resolve the same issue at several consecutive meetings with any number of different conclusions. Everybody had an equal chance to win, and everybody did win one week or another. But when a proposal went to the faculty for final approval we all stood behind it. The faculty then repeated the same discussions that we had and voted in their own way, basing their votes on their own feelings and their own anecdotes. And the policy resolutions that came out of the faculty meetings became educational policy [Levine and Weingart, 1973, p. ix].

Anarchical institutional processes flourish when resources are abundant and in excess of the level needed to function. They may be expected to diminish in importance when resources decline and difficult choices must be made. However, as long as

rationality remains bounded, effectiveness criteria are in dispute, and nonlinear systems continue to be persistently unpredictable, Flagship is likely to function as the organized anarchy model suggests.

Part Three

Integrating the Models

Four different models of organization and governance—the bureaucracy, the collegium, the political system, and the organized anarchy—have been used to describe different ways of thinking about how institutions of higher education are organized and administered. All four system models are invented social constructs that "make sense" of organizational processes. They reflect our need to impose order and meaning on equivocal events and thereby help us believe that we truly understand the internal operations of colleges and universities. Each of the models is "right," but each is incomplete.

One of these models from time to time may appear to more accurately portray the nature of reality for a specific institution than the other three. But there are no colleges or universities that consistently reflect the "pure form" of any of the models. There are bureaucratic and political elements at Heritage and Flagship just as there are collegial and anarchical elements at People's and RSU. Some elements of each of the models reflect institutional functioning in some ways, at some times, in some parts of all colleges and universities. Because these are nonlinear, dynamic social systems, life on any campus will be predictable at some times but unpredictable at others.