

A Synopsis of
ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE WORKFORCE DIVISIONS
AND THE IMPACT OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE:
A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

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The structure and processes of many bureaucratic organizations are not typically congruent with an entrepreneurial enterprise. Although community colleges can have differing applications of traditional bureaucracy, most still maintain a firm hierarchical structure, use vertical communication channels, follow clearly written rules and procedures, promulgate clear plans and schedules, and add administrative positions as needed in response to changing conditions (Owens, 2004). While the hallmarks of traditional bureaucracy include control, role clarity, and specialization, modern organizations increasingly seek to achieve speed, flexibility, integration, and innovation as benchmarks of entrepreneurialism (Ashkenas, Ulrich, Jick, & Kerr, 2002). This research sought to discover how the organizational structure of community colleges affected the entrepreneurial orientation of workforce units and whether the integration or separation of workforce units led to greater entrepreneurial orientation of workforce personnel.

Corporate entrepreneurship research provided a construct for a multidimensional examination of an organization's performance potential or entrepreneurial orientation. Research revealed that organizations that were entrepreneurially oriented had an environment that allowed an individual or team to bring forth an idea or vision and carry it through to completion (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). Hornsby, Kuratko, and Zahra (2002) identified five internal organizational factors that contribute to entrepreneurial orientation: (a) the appropriate use of rewards, (b) management support, (c) availability of resources including time, (d) the existence of a supportive organizational structure, and (e) risk-taking.

This qualitative grounded theory study examined the organizational structure of workforce units within the context of community colleges to answer the following questions:

1. How does community college organizational structure influence the entrepreneurial orientation of workforce units?
 - a. Is there evidence of innovation or entrepreneurialism throughout the workforce unit?
 - b. Is there evidence that workforce employees feel clarity around their role, their level of autonomy, and time for entrepreneurialism?
 - c. Is there evidence that workforce employees perceive management support for entrepreneurialism?
 - d. Is there evidence that the workforce employees perceive the organization as open, meaning to navigate boundaries and systems to move projects through to completion?

Community colleges invited to participate in the study came from a list of community colleges that participated in the 2008 workforce study conducted by Van Noy, Jacobs, Korey, Bailey, and Hughes. Of the four institutions selected to participate, two had separate workforce units and two had integrated workforce units. From September 2009 through February 2010, the researcher

conducted telephone interviews with 14 workforce personnel at the program director level or above. Aspects of autonomy or an individual's ability to be self directed was explored through the participant's description of their role in workforce as well as through their control or involvement in creating curriculum, marketing materials, and contract generation. Innovativeness or the participant's ability to bring forward new ideas, be creative, or participate in experimentation was elicited through question four which focused on brainstorming and organizational receptiveness to new ideas. Competitive aggressiveness or the "propensity to directly and intensely challenge competitors" (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996, p. 148) and was elicited in questions two and three, which required responses about new opportunities and examination of existing systems. Pro-activeness or the ability to shape the organizational environment toward entrepreneurial activity was the focus of question five on rewards and reinforcements. Lastly, risk taking or the propensity for the organization to venture into the unknown or commit assets was elicited through question eight on new contract generation.

Using Nvivo 8 software and following the parameters of grounded theory methodology, open coding and axial coding of qualitative data led to three emergent theories applicable to both integrated and separate workforce models. Both models (a) were organizational anomalies within the functional structure of the community college; (b) required organizational structure that supported access and expediency; and (c) suffered from organizational dysfunction born of working within a paradigm created around credit education. These emergent theories revealed various inadequacies of both models within the community college and support the notion that as community colleges seek to be entrepreneurial, workforce units that have functioned as market units can provide valuable insights about the community college organization.

Qualitative data collected for this research revealed that separate model workforce units demonstrated stronger characteristics towards entrepreneurial orientation than their integrated model counterparts although they suffered from significant disconnect to the larger organization. Integrated models exhibited fewer characteristics towards entrepreneurial orientation but seemingly used college-wide resources more effectively. Research questions framed around the constructs of entrepreneurial orientation and the resulting qualitative data revealed differences in entrepreneurial orientation of separate and integrated structures.

This research suggests that it may be time to consider major organizational change for the community college that seeks to be entrepreneurial. A shift in organizational focus from function to market accompanied by organizational restructuring is proposed. A matrix organizational chart for the community college is proposed using existing functional departments that report to market leaders. Success may hinge on the understanding that organizational growth cannot be pushed, but requires the removal of factors that limit it (Senge, 2006).

References:

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