Designing a Support System for College Students with ADD/ADHD/Executive Functioning Disorders

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Abstract
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Disciplines
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Comments

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Introduction

Colleges have seen an increase in the numbers of students with disabilities enrolling in post-secondary education programs. This could potentially be due to the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004. This law defined the purpose of special education as being in place to ultimately prepare students with disabilities for continuing education, employment, and independent living when they graduate (Leake, 2015). To facilitate this process, high school students with disabilities should be provided with transition plans, beginning at age 15, that provide for the development of skills that the student will need to be successful at living, learning, and earning in the community (Leake, 2015). The transition planning process and the special education services that are associated with that process may have ultimately led to an increase in the number of students with disabilities enrolling in college (Leake, 2015).

Mamiseishvili and Koch (2012) report that students with special needs are less successful in achieving college degree completion. For example, only 29.4% successfully complete their four-year programs of study within six years and 32.2% within an eight year time frame. Furthermore, students who transition from two year colleges to four year institutions have poor outcomes towards degree completion. Sixty percent of students with disabilities attend a two year college first, and then transition to a four year institution.

The disability population that this research focuses on is students with disabilities that are not visible. This includes students with Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (Cory, 2011; Embry, Parker, McGuire, & Scott, 2005) and other disabilities such as Executive Function Disorder, Auditory Processing Disorders, and Learning Disabilities. Terms that have been used in the literature include “invisible disabilities” (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Cory, 2011; Embry, Parker, McGuire, & Scott, 2005) or “hidden disabilities” (Dukes & Shaw, 2004; Leake, 2015; Murray, Flannery, & Wren, 2008), referring to the population of students that have disabilities that are not immediately apparent to a person unfamiliar with the student. Disability service providers have indicated that there is a need for institutions of higher education to comply with the federal mandates of the Americans with Disabilities Act (Cawthon & Cole, 2010). This act requires that colleges and universities provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities who self-disclose to the disabilities services office (Cory, 2011). At the small private college where this investigation was undertaken, there are approximately 4000 undergraduate and graduate students who attend the college. There are approximately 200 faculty and staff on campus and 180 college students who have formally identified as being a college student with a disability, although not all of them actively utilize services consistently. Additionally, for varied reasons, there are college students who have not formally identified themselves as having a disability.

In a world with increasing responsibility and diversity that requires more of college professors and instructors than ever before, it is critical that they have an understanding of multiple frames to view difficulties students with disabilities can have while developing the skills needed to manage all the tasks required of a college student. As issues arise within a classroom, having multiple frames to analyze and draw from in problem solving increases the likelihood that a useful solution will be found. Bolman and Deal (2013) have identified four frames that exist in organizations. These four frames are: Structural, Human Resource, Political and Symbolic. The purpose of this paper is to describe
ways to support students with disabilities in a college classroom through Bolman and Deal’s Four Frames and then identify potential strategies instructors can use to assist students in coping with the increasing demands made of him or her in a college setting.

**Framing the Organization**

One can get a full picture of a college by examining the institution through four frames: Structural, Human Resource, Political, and Symbolic (Bolman & Deal, 2013). It can be helpful for leaders to be able to view his or her organization through multiple frames, as Bolman and Deal (2013) state:

> Rather than portraying the field of organizational theory as fragmented, we present it as pluralistic. Seen this way, the field offers a rich assortment of mental models or lenses for viewing organizations. Each theoretical tradition is helpful. Each has blind spots. Each tells its own story about organizations. The ability to shift nimbly from one to another helps redefine situations so they become understandable and manageable. The ability to reframe is one of the most powerful capacities of great artists. It can be equally powerful for managers and leaders. (p. 39)

To best address the issue at hand, faculty can use questions to facilitate analysis of the situation in order to determine which frame best meets the need (See Table 1.1). By utilizing multiple lenses to frame a situation, leaders increase the possibility of successful resolution of the problem (Bolman & Deal, 2013), in this case, how to best meet the needs of students with disabilities on a college campus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: Are individuals’ commitment and motivation essential to success?</th>
<th>If Yes:</th>
<th>If No:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Resource</td>
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<td>Symbolic</td>
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<tr>
<th>Question: Is the technical quality of the decision important?</th>
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<th>Question: Are there high levels of ambiguity and uncertainty?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Symbolic</td>
<td>Political</td>
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<th>Question: Are conflicts and scarce resources significant?</th>
<th>Structural</th>
<th>Human Resource</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic</td>
<td>Political</td>
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<tr>
<th>Question: Are you working from the bottom up?</th>
<th>Structural</th>
<th>Human Resource</th>
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<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Symbolic</td>
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**Table 1.1**

**Choosing a Frame**

**The Structural Frame.** Bolman and Deal (2013) discuss the Structural Frame as individual roles and responsibilities that when working together, create a logical, coordinated organization that achieves goals that have been established. Looking at the structure of our organization, services for college students with disabilities are provided through an office for students with disabilities, similar to other institutions of higher education. Students who come from supportive high school environments may have difficulty with the transition to a higher education institution, where when they arrive, they are expected to act more independently and self-advocate. Even high school students who practice these skills may become overwhelmed when expected to act on their own. Additionally, students who transfer from another institution may find this transition challenging, as they learned and assimilated to a set of procedures and support services specific to one college and then find these support mechanisms and processes vary from institution to institution (Hamblet, 2012). Students are also encouraged to use writing and math centers as supports. Additionally, these centers provide a series of workshops open to all students.

The Structural Frame by itself is not a sufficient support. According to Kurth and Mellard (2006), ineffective and inappropriate accommodations result from an accommodation process that focuses on disabilities rather than students’ contextual and functioning needs (p. 81). Further, in a meta-analysis of studies on students with disabilities, researchers found that the relationship with faculty is critical for student success. A report by the National Symposium for Student Success (2006) indicates consistent support services and trusting relationships with faculty are crucial for the development of skills, including nonacademic, necessary for post-secondary success. Subsequently, the Human Frame is the most significant of the frameworks when supporting college students with disabilities (Kuh, Kinzie, & Buckley, 2006).

**The Human Resource Frame.** According to Bolman and Deal (2013), the Human Resource Frame explores the relationship that an individual has with the organization in which he or she works, and in this case, may attend as a college student. Faculty within the college have expressed a strong belief that helping students grow and learn is a rewarding career. Faculty reported that the work that is done as an educator is both meaningful and satisfying. The attributes that facilitate worker satisfaction and motivation are actively present in jobs within the college. The reward of seeing students achieve success and develop a love for and appreciation of learning in both the classroom and in the school community as a whole is a reward that makes working in an institution for higher education worthwhile.

While there is no reward system that is overtly in place to reward faculty and staff, there are opportunities for individuals to participate in leadership activities, such as department chairmanships, committee chairmanships and advising. Extra-curricular activities that build relationships with students in the school community are also available. Among these, there are many opportunities for faculty to support students with disabilities.

For example, through the health care center, a series of events for students diagnosed with attention deficit disorder were designed to gain an understanding of students’ academic and social needs. This focus group resulted in several faculty across the college combining efforts and developing a closed group Facebook page that provided academic and organizational strategies for interested students who enrolled in the group. Students across the college also had the opportunity to support each other on the page, tell their stories, and discuss strategies that worked or did not work for them. Graduate students with disabilities were also involved and they could share their lived experiences with undergraduates.

Additionally, the department of education put a process in place to develop a student support plan when needed. Through a series of meetings with attendees consisting of the Director of Academic Advising, referring faculty member(s), and the student, a Student Support Plan is developed with a check in process put in place for problem solving and promoting student success. These plans are not developed to be punitive, but to provide supports to ensure student success. Faculty discuss the challenges and difficulties the student encountered, and in collaboration with the student, an Action Plan for Success is developed. Although “Structural” in nature, the human factor is what makes this program a success as the environment is meant to be nurturing and supportive to each student served.
**The Political Frame.** The Political Frame assumes that organizations have coalitions of individuals and interest groups that compete for resources (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Each group of stakeholders competes with other stakeholders to obtain resources. The groups can change depending upon the issue or interest in discussion, but it is important to recognize that the political frame at its roots is about allocation of resources and who has the power to decide where the resources will go (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Individuals can be part of many different interest groups, but ultimately decisions regarding allocation of resources come from the Board of Trustees, overseers of grants and college administration. There are opportunities for faculty to apply for a variety of resources. Assistance from the Office of Corporate, Foundation and Government Relations is available to seek outside grants. Internal mini grants are available for small projects. One such grant provided funding for a resource book, *Handling Your Adult ADHD* provided to interested students in both the School of Nursing and School of Education. As a combined effort, faculty members from both programs facilitated skill development activities on the Facebook page.

Time is a valuable resource and there are competing factors for student and faculty availability. Faculty summer Learning Circles, a competitive process (which did provide monetary compensation to a small group of interested faculty across the college), provided opportunities for discussing how to meet student need in both in-seat and on-line classes. The faculty then presented their findings at the college professional development day. Additionally, a tool kit of resources was developed and posted for faculty use, allowing for sharing resources and disseminating information to a larger audience of faculty who could access the information at their point of need.

**The Symbolic Frame.** The Symbolic Frame from Bolman and Deal (2013) explores organizational culture through “rituals, storytelling, myths and theater” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 16). We have the advantage of being a small community. Many of the teachers and administrators have grown up in the area and returned to work and raise their own families in the neighborhood.

There is a ritual of the college that dates back more than thirty years and is a source of great pride for the entire college community. Every Spring Semester, the college holds a dance marathon to raise money for a local camp for children who have serious illnesses as well as their siblings. The camp gives children an opportunity to participate in a typical camp setting. While there are medical and counseling staff on hand at the camp, children are able to be children and make new friends who understand the stress that he or she is under when at home. All college students have the opportunity to become involved with the fund raiser, which gets local publicity. To this date, students have raised over one million dollars. Involvement in activities like this provides opportunities for college students with special needs to become role models for others in need and to give back to the larger community. It also engages them in campus activities in ways that allows these them to show off their strengths.

Agarwal, Calvo, and Kumar (2014) note that limited opportunities for interacting with peers, both with and without disabilities, can impact graduating from college. They assert that “students need to feel socially integrated in the fabric of student organizations on campus” (p. 34), as student engagement in the college setting is related to persistence and academic success. They also state that psycho-social barriers are challenges to student engagement on the college campus and these barriers are often ignored by college faculty and staff and peers. When students with disabilities decide to drop out of college, they often report lack of social support. Institutions can purposely create a sense of belonging for students with disabilities.

**Summary**

The number of college students with disabilities has increased on college campuses. Examining support services for students with disabilities through Bolman and Deal’s four frames helps to assure we are supporting students in multiple ways. Within the context of each frame, various recommendations can be made in an effort to meet a variety of student needs. By examining the issue of support for students with disabilities through Bolman and Deals’ four frames, including Structural, Human Resources, Political, and Symbolic, we are able to better determine student need and provide appropriate supports than if we were to simply use one lens (Bolman & Deal, 2013). In viewing supports and services for students with invisible disabilities, we can, as a campus community, provide support for students through a multi-framed approach that better meets students’ needs.
References


