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The Promise and Peril of Parallel Governance Structures

Matthew Hartley

University of Pennsylvania, hartley@gse.upenn.edu

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Abstract

A recent survey of 146 postsecondary institutions found that 55% formed change task forces in the past 5 years. This article presents a detailed case of one private college that utilized task forces as a key strategy during a comprehensive change effort. Analysis describes the promise and peril of these innovative decision-making structures. Unburdened by day-to-day operational issues, the task forces focused on the change agenda, provided a "change friendly" environment, and became powerful change coalitions. The case shows how parallel governance structures devolve into "shadow" governance structures. Included are factors that determine how task forces enhance or compromise shared governance.

Comments

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The Promise and Peril of Parallel Governance Structures

MATTHEW HARTLEY

University of Pennsylvania

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Keywords: *academic governance; shared governance; organizational change; procedural justice; leadership*

Cohen and March (1974) have famously observed that efforts to steer an academic institution are as effective as driving a car skidding on ice. Colleges and universities are, by design and inclination, organizations with diffuse power (Weick, 1976). No individual or single constituency has sufficient power to unilaterally advance a broad-based initiative. Also, a multiplicity of interests competes for the time and energy of faculty and staff, producing a diffusion of attention (Hirschhorn & May, 2000). Together, these factors inhibit consensus-building and slow change to a glacial pace. As Clark Kerr (1982) notes, colleges and universities often end up sticking with the status quo because it is the only option that cannot be vetoed.

Of course, colleges and universities can change, and the mechanism that allows for the purposeful redirection of an institution is its system of governance. As Henry Rosovsky (1991) put it, “Governance concerns power: who is in charge; who makes decisions; who has a voice, and how loud is that voice?” (p. 261). The three most influential voices are generally acknowledged to be the

Author’s Note: *Please address correspondence concerning this article to Matthew Hartley, University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education, Higher Education Division, 3700 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104-6216; e-mail: hartley@gse.upenn.edu.*

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board of trustees (or governing board), the administration, and the faculty (especially full-time, tenure-track faculty members). Although diverse views are held regarding the balance of power among these groups (e.g., American Association of University Professors, 1995; Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1998), a central tenet of “good” college or university governance is that all key constituencies ought to have some say in institutional decision making. That is, governance ought to be “shared.” The rationale for this is threefold:

1. Colleges and universities have an established bureaucratic division of labor. Each group has distinct responsibilities, areas of expertise, and/or perspectives. Given their disparate roles, different constituents will bring multiple perspectives to the decision-making process (e.g., the faculty is typically involved in curricular matters, whereas the board and the administration will likely have more to say about fundraising or financing). For larger institutional issues, shared governance requires that all constituencies participate in decision making.
2. Institutions of higher learning are academic communities. They are bound by certain shared professional norms and values (Sanders, 1973; Shils, 1992). Broad-based decision making is less likely to produce policies that run afoul of the prevailing institutional ethos, identity, or perceived mission.
3. Broad consultation and participation is a means of securing political support for a desired change. Individuals who participate in the development of a new policy or program are more likely to support it. Shared governance is a strategy for generating a plurality of supporters from multiple constituents who will work to advance an idea and ensure its success.

These correspond to the tripartite model of academic governance (bureaucratic, collegial, and political), which was described more than two decades ago by J. Victor Baldrige and associates (Baldrige, Curtis, Ecker, & Riley, 1977). This model, coupled with more recent research into the influence of organizational culture (Austin, 1990; Bolman & Deal, 1997; Chaffee & Tierney, 1988; Clark, 1972; Heath, 1983; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Tierney, 1988), has enriched our understanding of how colleges and universities function.

However, traditional conceptions of governance have come under intense scrutiny during the past decade. Critics charge that the system is slow, inefficient, and inadequate to meet the demands of a competitive and dynamic environment. State Boards of Higher Education now argue for greater central control over institutional matters (Carlin, 1999). The accountability movement continues unabated. On many campuses there is increased apathy about participation in university governance and those who do participate increasingly see themselves as serving a particular interest group or constituency (Lazerson, 1997), which makes it difficult for them to transcend their narrowly defined roles and work collectively for the good of the institution. The resulting balkanization has raised concerns about the viability of shared governance as the enduring ideal of academic decision making. David Breneman, former college president and dean of the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, recently con-

cluded, “The collegial nature of most colleges and universities, emphasizing consultation and shared decision making, seems poorly suited to the sorts of wrenching challenges that lie ahead” (Breneman, 1995).

The faculty and administrators at colleges and universities have not been oblivious to these challenges, however. Over the past two decades, colleges and universities have experimented with many new decision-making models—administrative structures that operate independently of the established committees typically associated with shared governance (e.g., faculty senate, board committees, senior administrative teams). However, the literature is silent about a central question: Are these committees a legitimate form of academic governance? Creating a task force may be efficient, but is it an acceptable alternative to using existing governance committees? Furthermore, do these change task forces constitute a “shadow” government, the academic equivalent of the smoke-filled room where the real deals are made before they are brought forth to the larger community as a *fait accompli*? The purpose of this article is, first, to describe the experience of one liberal arts college that used change task forces as the central strategy in its effort at institutional transformation. Second, the benefits and liabilities of this strategy are explicated. Finally, I argue that the success of this endeavor was contingent on developing and maintaining a broad-based consensus concerning the legitimacy of the process and that several specific factors helped enhance or degrade this sense of legitimacy.

CHANGE TASK FORCES AS INNOVATIONS IN GOVERNANCE

Before turning to the case, it will be useful to review the examples of new governance forms found in the higher education literature. Strategic planning committees work on many campuses gathering data on the external environment (e.g., benchmarking) and assessing various institutional functions to ensure they are well coordinated (Baldrige, 1983; Bryson, 1995). Such committees are independent and present their data or propose new initiatives to the administration, the faculty, the alumni, and student leaders alike (Keller, 1997). Another innovation is the use of the “future search” (Brigham, 1996a, 1996b), a kind of academic *Loya Jirga* that brings together a large number of administrators and faculty members (typically 50 to 80 individuals) to build consensus about a new direction for an institution (Brigham, 1996a, 1996b). This structure is short term—gatherings typically do not last more than several days and their purpose is proscribed—to surface common values and to build consensus about the group’s collective aspirations rather than formulate specific operational plans (Brigham, 1996a, 1996b). Large decision-making committees are a third example. These committees are long term. Membership is drawn from across campus (and members tend to be more senior). George Keller (1983) stated that Joint Big Decision Committees (JBDC) were “springing up like mushrooms” (p. 61) in the early 1980s. Similar to strategic planning committees, JBDCs gather data, deliberate, and present proposals. They promote rigorous debate about

institutional direction, both within the community and among the larger institutional community. Keller observed, “More administrators each year believe that openness about new directions is more conducive to rallying faculty, students, and alumni support” (p. 63). Corak (1992) identified and studied 30 such large decision-making committees in the early 1990s. Her research noted three key benefits of using these structures:

1. They were a means of sparking collegial debate about academic issues that cut across schools or departments.
2. The committees were not distracted by day-to-day decision making and could therefore focus on larger institutional issues.
3. They were a way to secure broad-based political support for new initiatives.

Of interest, these decision-making structures mirror forms that can be found in the larger organizational change literature, and corporations use them for many of the same reasons. Jeanie Daniel Duck (1993), for example, describes the use of the Transition Management Team (TMT). Similar to the JBDC, the TMT promotes communication, assists in planning, and coordinates the myriad initiatives associated with corporate restructuring. John Kotter’s (1996) comprehensive research on corporate change reveals that a common element in all successful change efforts is the presence of a “guiding coalition”—a group of individuals, well-respected and powerful people, who oversee the process. Similar to Keller, Kotter (1996) notes the importance of involving multiple constituents in the change effort.

Because major change is so difficult to accomplish, a powerful force is required to sustain the process. No one individual, even a monarch-like CEO, is ever able to develop the right vision, communicate it to large numbers of people, eliminate all key obstacles, generate short-term wins, lead and manage dozens of change project, and anchor new approaches deep in the organization’s culture. . . . A strong guiding coalition is always needed. (p. 52)

Finally, the use of committees dedicated to advancing a change effort appears to be growing. In 1999, the Institute for Research on Higher Education (IRHE) at the University of Pennsylvania surveyed senior academic officers (provost or vice president for academic affairs) from 100 colleges and universities. Of those surveyed, 55% responded that their institutions had recently created ad hoc change committees. Whether these committees are variations of the JBDC or a distinct structural form is unknown. What is clear is that experimenting with governance structures is an ongoing effort on many campuses.

To this point, I have described the challenges of governing college and universities and have noted the use of parallel governance structures as a means for prompting change. In the following sections, I briefly describe my research methods, present a detailed case study of one institution that used task forces as a principal change strategy, and finally, I offer an analysis of the case to explicate

whether Summit College's parallel governance structures constitute good governance.

METHODS

The data presented here describe the experience of Summit College,¹ a small liberal arts institution of approximately 1,000 students located near a small city in the Midwest. The college was selected using purposive sampling (Chein, 1981) to develop an "information rich case" (Patton, 1990). I approached three individuals from the institution prior to visiting and asked them to identify people who could offer a range of perspectives on the change process—both proponents and opponents. To avoid member bias, I added to my list all institutional leaders (e.g., senior staff members, president of the faculty senate) and several randomly selected senior faculty members who had not been recommended to me. I visited Summit College for a week in the fall of 1999. Once on campus, as additional names emerged during interviews, I noted them and attempted to interview these people as well, a variation of the snowballing or chain technique (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992; Patton, 1990). Thirty people from Summit participated in this study. Our conversations lasted between 45 and 120 min., the average length of time being approximately 1 hour.

The interviews were semi-structured (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) and the protocol solicited reflections on institutional life before, during, and after the period in which the institutional changes occurred. A separate protocol was devised for members who had joined the institution more recently (e.g., junior faculty members and students). I used subsequent interviews to crosscheck facts. Use of the "overlap method" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314) was an invaluable means of gaining multiple perspectives on key events.

Erikson (1986) notes that a primary type of "evidentiary inadequacy" is "inadequate variety in kinds of evidence" (p. 140). Institutional documents were an important additional source of data.² The documents corroborated many of the details provided by the participants in the interviews. They also allowed for comparison of institutional language before and after the change effort. Syllabi of new classes, descriptions of new programs, revised promotion and tenure guidelines, and the institutional budget were important artifacts that suggested the extent to which the change had been incorporated into the life of the institution.

Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed. The transcripts, the institutional literature, and field notes constituted the data set. I performed "multiple readings of the entire set of field notes" (Erikson, 1986, p. 149), identified and coded emergent themes, and adjusted the coding rubric as the analysis moved forward and patterns emerged (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

SUMMIT COLLEGE: A CASE STUDY

THE CONTEXT FOR CHANGE

By 1989, Summit College was in trouble. Rapid and turbulent change was rocking American higher education and small liberal arts colleges like Summit were especially vulnerable (Breneman, 1994; Chaffee, 1984). The country was in the grip of a pernicious recession—escalating inflation coupled with rising unemployment (stagflation) had stalled the economy. Furthermore, a demographic shift caused some to project that between 1979 and 1994 the total number of prospective students would decrease by fully 25% (Keller, 1983), a nightmare for tuition-dependent institutions like Summit. These external pressures weighed heavily on administrators and faculty alike. A professor recalled, “We were in debt. We’d been in debt for a number of years and hadn’t balanced the budget, but then we were in *real* big debt.” An administrator described just how narrow the margin of error had been, “Folks who were here before I was used to talk about the ‘death in time’ principal of budgeting where if a benefactor didn’t die, you weren’t going to make the budget.” Enrollments had declined from a peak in the 1970s of more than a 1,000 to fewer than 800 by the 1989-1990 academic year. Summit was in danger of foundering in a sea of red ink.

Even more troubling, the college’s ability to steer through these dark and turbulent waters had become seriously compromised. The board of trustees, the administration, and the faculty had become estranged. A member of the senate remarked, “When there was work that the faculty was charged with—and I’ve been on the senate since about that time—they would do things but it would inevitably end up on a shelf somewhere so the frustration and the cynicism was high.” Others described President James Baron as “aloof” or even “autocratic.” (Indeed, a number recounted stories of faculty members or administrators who had lost jobs for “crossing” the president.) The board was a distant entity, only tenuously connected to institutional life. Infighting polarized the various academic departments. “The college had become very tribal. Feudal might even be a better way to characterize it, and there are stories of people feeling that other faculty members were pirating students.” The governance system had grown anemic. One chair noted, “There really wasn’t a very good system of checks and balances. If I wanted to create a new major, or if I wanted to eliminate something from the department, I could pretty much do it free-reign.” Over time, Summit’s curriculum had become a nebulous collection of courses, bereft of any central idea or unifying coherence. As one faculty member put it, “We just didn’t know who we were anymore.”

In the spring of 1990, an ugly racial incident occurred. An argument between two students escalated into a large brawl in which both fists and racial epithets were thrown. Reporters from a nearby news station arrived on campus the following day. A faculty member described the president’s ill-fated response:

He just opened the auditorium up and said, “Everybody get in the auditorium, we’re going to talk about this.” He let the press in to film what was going on and it just exploded! . . . Of course they showed this on television. And that’s when Jim Baron’s world came crashing down real quick.

The event was intensely painful for Summit’s faculty and staff. They were proud of the college’s progressive history. Nearly 150 years ago, Summit’s founder had conceived of a utopian Jerusalem in the then-wilds of the Midwest. From its inception, the college committed itself to educating men and women of all races. Seeing the debacle depicted as a morality play on the evening news was galling. President Baron’s apparent inability (or unwillingness) to respond publicly about the event rankled a number of faculty members. Humiliated and angry, a group of them began to meet. Eventually, a consensus emerged: Baron had to go. Within weeks, a vote of no confidence was passed overwhelmingly during a full faculty meeting. The faculty brought their grievances forward to an increasingly dissatisfied board of trustees. James Baron resigned after graduation.

During the presidential search the following year, a number of individuals began to argue that Summit had to change significantly if it was going to remain viable. A board member wrote an influential memo that advocated hiring a “mad scientist”—someone willing to innovate and take bold risks. Dr. Douglas Michaels appeared to be the ideal candidate. One professor who served on the search committee recalled,

The thing that really pushed me towards Doug immediately was he was so honest about wanting a total change here. What really stands out in my mind, and it puts it all in a nutshell, is he stood in the auditorium and he said, “If you want incremental change, *don’t hire me.*” This was during the search process!

Another faculty member concurred, “Michaels was clear during the search. He said, ‘I don’t want to come here and just tweak this and fine-tune that.’ ” As provost at his previous institution, Michaels had overseen a comprehensive change effort. Many hoped he would bring that same level of creativity and entrepreneurial energy to Summit.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PARALLEL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Michaels arrived in the summer of 1991. Immediately, he began meeting with faculty and staff members. He queried them about Summit’s problems and he solicited suggestions. Michaels organized a faculty retreat, which was held 2 weeks before the fall semester began. His expressed purpose was to make the case for change and to begin a conversation about what kind of institution Summit ought to become. One senior administrator recalled,

He said, "I want you to answer a basic question for me. Why should any student with a range of opportunities and options that students have nowadays choose Summit College?" And we talked about being a small caring community. "That's the extent of the uniqueness and distinctiveness of Summit College?" Doug said. "That's not good enough!" Well, you know, that made some people happy and others not very happy.

At that time, Michaels was fearful that the apparent consensus for change so evident during the presidential search represented the will of a passionate and vocal minority. Many faculty and staff members were unsure what kind of change Summit ought to undertake. A number were openly skeptical about Michaels's "change rhetoric." A few individuals felt that change was unnecessary and potentially harmful to Summit. One senior administrator member described the situation in the following way:

At the beginning, I saw three groups of people—those who were the naysayers, those who were the fence-sitters (which was the biggest group), and the vanguard. You know, I think we had a good-size group of naysayers to begin with and a medium-size group of fence-sitters and just a little tiny handful of vanguard.

A particular challenge facing Michaels was that some of the individuals most ambivalent about change occupied positions of authority in the existing academic governance structure. A chair of a department at that time explained,

There were a lot of people that had been here for years. They were in charge of the curriculum committee—of all faculty committees. And as the new president came in and said he wanted to do things collaboratively, all of a sudden, a lot of the people who had been here for years were saying, "Why? Wasn't what we had good enough?"

Michaels seemed to have reached an impasse. On one hand, he could try to advance new initiatives through the existing committees and risk having them stalled on procedural grounds or debated to death. Alternatively, with the full backing of the board, Michaels could simply dictate to the faculty what the change agenda would be and fire those who stood in his way.

Instead, Michaels found a third way. His first act was to convene the faculty as a committee of the whole. He charged them, as a group, with the responsibility of establishing a change agenda. A senior faculty member explained,

He said, "I'm not going to tell you what this institution should be. That's your job." And of course there was a sense of "yeah, yeah, right, right—we've heard *that* before," but he said, "I'm just going to give you these parameters and you have to work within these parameters," and he laid them out. They were things like the college has to develop a new vision that's in line with the heritage of the school . . . he wasn't going to turn us over and let us become a truck-driving institute or a military academy that only allowed women.

Another faculty member remarked, “To Doug’s credit, when he came here he said we had to change but he didn’t tell us *how* we had to change.”

To begin the process, Michaels called for the formation of a new multi-constituent committee—the Mission Commission.

He said, “I’m not going to tell you what to do. You *elect* a committee to deal with what should our vision and our mission be. . . . It was a large committee made up primarily of faculty with some staff and administration. They met regularly and then members would go off and talk to assigned segments of the faculty and staff so that they could understand the dialogue and what was going on. Finally, they came up with the idea of Education for Social Change.

The commission met numerous times and solicited ideas from each and every constituency. In the spring of 1992, the statement was read to the full faculty, which voted overwhelmingly to endorse the new vision. A department chair remarked,

People accepted the vision because we all had been involved with the process—we’d met with our vision commissioner (or whatever they were called!) and there was a lot of dialogue. By the time it came out people just felt “this is what we’ve all been talking about.” That’s what I recollect.

Michaels then asked the faculty to begin devising a list of competencies—what would an “Education for Social Change” look like? The faculty formed a working group to identify specific competencies that related to the vision. One member of that committee recalled,

We devised this list and what it turned out was every department, every program, everybody wanted their content on the list! A list was presented to Michaels with 24 outcomes. [He said]: “This is crazy! Most schools do it with 8 or less!” So the committee finally pared down the list to 16.

Next, Michaels invited people to form groups and develop specific plans for how these competencies could be fostered through Summit’s programs. Four “working groups” were established. A participant in one group described the process, “You self-selected to be on a working group, and those working groups brought their work back to the full faculty.” In the summer of 1993, the four plans were presented at a 2-day faculty retreat held on campus. A senior faculty member remarked,

The plans were very, very different. One of the plans was called the block plan.³ There was another plan that was essentially business as usual—it came from some science people. All they wanted to do was emphasize the sciences and add more science requirements. And then there was one from the business department that didn’t have a lot of distinguishing features. The last one was to use portfolios to show what students had learned.

After a great deal of discussion and debate, a vote was taken. No one plan received a majority. According to one observer, “Doug did favor the block plan, but he never, never pushed his own agenda. He really tried to allow this to grow completely out of the faculty so that there was total ownership.” There were additional discussions about the plan—again, no consensus. The final afternoon of the retreat, Michaels decided to act.

Saturday night there was a picnic at the president’s house . . . and [President Michaels] took all the principals that were involved plus a couple of other people and he said, “Come in my back room.” And it was bare knuckles, backroom dialogue there.

Late that evening, the “Summit Plan” emerged. It entailed the establishment of a new core curriculum, the extensive use of portfolios for student assessment, and a 1-month “intensive learning term” each spring, during which students could take one course (a concession, apparently, to proponents of the block plan). The Summit Plan was presented to the full faculty the following day. It received a majority vote.

The faculty then formed committees to advance each element of the Summit Plan. Faculty and staff members could participate in any and all task forces that interested them. Each group elected a “convener,” who was responsible for leading the process.

I was on the working group that created the intensive learning term. We had a lot of input on what it could be and what it couldn’t be and why it would work for some disciplines and why it wouldn’t work for other disciplines, and we had a lot of “I can’t possibly teach a course in 3 1/2 weeks!” and there were a lot of heated discussions on this—whether it should be in January, whether it should be in May, whether it should be part of spring semester or whether it should be something separate, whether it should be courses that were part of the regular ed curriculum or whether it should be these really neat courses that would take us to far parts of the earth. Lots of discussion about it.

Another person described his experience as follows:

I actually convened the general education group and we had a general idea of what a course like “Self and Community” would be like—very general, what its content would be, and then people who were going to teach in “Self and Community” got together that summer and really worked out the whole course in detail to the point where we had a full-fledged syllabus and readings and everything that we wanted. And then we brought that back to the faculty. So we were able to move along expeditiously and get this whole thing put in place.

Among the participants, the committee work generated considerable excitement. A junior faculty member at the time remarked,

I assisted in the development of the curriculum of Self and Community so I had a very critical, very central involvement in that project. So I said, "OK, they're very serious with this Summit Plan business." It went beyond rhetoric for me.

Another junior faculty member spoke of the excitement of shaping the curriculum, "I was real excited . . . I'm looking at this as 'I'm ready to commit my life here! This is something I really believe in!'"

For others, the entire effort ran counter to their conceptions of shared governance.

This is where the contention started to come in. Because it was violating the handbook. It wasn't going through the traditional channels of policy committee reviews it, policy gives it to senate to review, senate brings it to the full faculty for a vote.

An administrator who was very active in the change effort admitted that the process had circumvented existing procedures:

We had to short-circuit that because we all knew that in the past things would get hung up over commas and semicolons. Everything had to be worked out to the "i" dotted and the "t" crossed, and it was just murder getting anything through the faculty that way. And we didn't have the time to do that. Plus, some of the things we were doing were really half-baked! They were there in concept but they were not there in detail. And Doug knew that if we're going to wait for that it's never going to happen—this is the way great things get killed—it has to go through the whole bureaucracy and it dies. And that's where some faculty said this is a violation of handbook, we're not following the handbook, Doug is stomping on the handbook.

A number of times, Michaels was sorely tempted to manipulate the process for the good of the cause. The senate president explained,

In those meetings there were what I came to call "the eight votes." There was always eight "no" votes. I remember the first one the president came out, he was just furious. "That should have been by acclamation! Why wasn't that 100 percent?" And I looked at him, "You don't want 100 percent votes." "Why not?" I said, "If it goes belly up you need at least one 'no' vote so that everybody can say they voted no. Oh no, no." I said, "Don't worry about it." So we developed the idea of critical mass. And that happens to be my political philosophy. I'm leery of acclamation. Unless it's some emeritus vote or something like that. And the next thing was that [Dean Nils Anders] said, "Well, who voted 'no'?" I said, "You don't want to know. You'll destroy everything, building the trust." Each month there was one or two votes that came up on one of these elements and there were eight to ten "no" votes. So then [Anders] starts looking—he started profiling. "Well, it's got to be this person." I said, "No, no." Because I knew who was voting how. "No, they voted for it." "They did?" "Yeah." I said, "What you got is about 80 percent consensus on this thing, 20 percent aren't sure or don't like it at all," I said. "You've got your critical mass."

THE SLIPPERY SLOPE

Some grew tired of Michaels's relentless pushing for change. "They called it 'Michaels-managing,' with the president managing the place by getting involved in all sorts of committees and creating new task forces and everything like that." Indeed, Michaels was willing to disregard existing processes if he felt they were unreasonable. One faculty member noted,

We weren't voting to "approve" a program, we were voting to "endorse" a program—he changed the wording and then the people who were going to be teaching and delivering those programs would work out the details of those programs and eventually bring it back to the faculty.

The "endorsement" (a previously meaningless term) allowed ideas to move forward with the assurance that a majority of faculty members supported the idea, at least in theory.

There were, in fact, good reasons to avoid many of the existing governance committees.

[A few faculty members] had turned into roadblocks—they would actually lay down in front of the plan at times and say "tell you what, that aspect or that initiative of the plan has to get to the policy committee? I think I'll run for policy chair and that will put an end to that!"

By the fall of 1994, Michaels began to deliver a clear message to those who refused to participate in the change effort:

He said, basically, "We are moving forward with the Summit Plan so you need to know that. It will be an uncomfortable place for you to work if you really dislike what we're doing. This may not be the fit. There are 3,000 other educational institutions in this country, one of them has to be a good fit for you."

Ultimately, several faculty members paid a price. One very active change proponent reflected,

Doug did say as we developed the vision and started to develop the plan: "No one will lose their jobs because of this plan." But ultimately, people *did* lose their jobs because of the plan. They lost their jobs because they didn't believe in what we were doing as an institution, and we did this collectively and collaboratively. They lost their jobs because they didn't invest.

A junior faculty member at that time remarked,

There was a group of faculty that I think were viewed by the administration as not being team players. And I think there was a push to, in my opinion, get rid of them, not to kind of bring them on board. I think a lot more could have been done to bring them on board. I think we lost some really good people, really good teachers.

When the curricular component of the Summit Plan was instituted in the spring of 1994, to the dismay of many, an exhausted Michaels retired from the presidency. Some faculty naysayers reacted to the departure by attempting to cast the Summit Plan as Michaels's plan. One administrator explained,

I think there were a few people that had been naysayers or fence-sitters in the past that sparked up a little bit and thought wait a second, there's a chance that this might come unraveled. They didn't gather and talk about things like that but you could hear rumbling here and there, people saying "I wonder if portfolio will stay, I wonder if"—The question became, "Is this Michaels's plan or was it the college's plan?"

The autonomous nature of the various faculty-led committees and the participation of so many individuals in various aspects of the change effort gave the naysayers's claims a hollow ring. The decentralized change effort constructed under Michaels persisted after his departure. As one faculty participant asserted, "This was *our* plan."

However, consolidation of the plan became a priority of the interim administration. Michaels's dean of faculty, Nils Anders, was selected by the board to serve as interim president. Immediately, Anders began to prosecute aggressively a strategy to solidify the Summit Plan. An administrator explained,

Occasionally we'd go down the faculty list and just start checking them off and say "Where do you think they stand on these things?" and we'd watch their behavior and pretty soon the checks started coming off the list. Then there was sort of the dozen people that were the naysayers, and then there were—2 years ago there were six people. And of those six people, there's probably only one left, I think.

As it turns out, the naysayers were neither as unified nor as numerous as some proponents of the change effort supposed.

Some faculty were opposed to the change. . . . Not necessarily to the Summit Plan or the whole nature of it, but that there were parts of it or aspects of it. Or the way that it was being implemented or that it was going to fast. And they were outspoken about it. You know, I think most of us had some question about some part of it but weren't really speaking out about it. These were people who were not afraid, you know. It was interesting because as they left you could see other people rising up on the list.

During one particularly contentious debate, Anders called in several members of the faculty and tried to cajole them into identifying faculty opponents of a particular initiative.

He assumed it was the same seven people voting against him and he actually started playing this game and we got wind of it—who the seven people were that were voting. It was different people! There were probably two or three people that really were voting against everything. But like, I voted against two things. I voted

against [one initiative] and I can't remember what the other thing was I voted against. And it was something that was just sort of a technicality but I didn't really like how it was coming across. And I voted for all the other things. But he decided who it was. And interestingly, I ended up on his list of seven. Yeah. I was definitely on the shit list, to put it bluntly.

The faculty member went on to explain.

The problem with that is that it assumes this totally simplified model in which you have, OK, like the seven people who always vote against every plan. Not sort of like realizing or not believing that it's a different seven people every time. So you're trying to play this political game to sort of shore up essentially your idea, and yet, it just doesn't match what the reality of the situation is!

In the fall of 1994, the interim administration began to determine who would serve on committees. One faculty member who had invested a great deal of time on numerous change committees described her disgust,

The first faculty meeting of that year, first or second, the committee assignments came out. I was a convener, and every convener is supposed to be on the general education committee. The point was you need the conveners to come together because they were the representatives of the different components. I was the only convener that was left off of the general education committee. The list comes out, and every other convener is here, and I'm the only one left off. Then all of these other committees you'd see the same names. It's like, this person is on this committee and this committee and this committee and this committee and this committee. Wait a minute. They're on five committees and I'm on none. Not that I'm dying for committee work, but you want a range of voices. Not the same voices. But of course, that was what they wanted. They arranged these committees so that they would have agreement.

A growing lack of trust in the administration led to acts of subterfuge. Anonymous, nasty letters were slipped underneath the doors of administrators. Of greater import was that a group of disgruntled faculty members began meeting to discuss how to prevent Anders from "undoing the Summit Plan." One faculty member remarked, "The Summit Plan was *our* plan; we've been involved in this and we didn't want to see someone destroy what had been built by everyone simply because they were upset that that they didn't get selected [as the next president.]" In a strategy mirroring the earlier toppling of Baron, the group approached members of the board. One participant in those discussions recalled, "Eventually the faculty turned on Anders." The group decided to distribute a "ballot of no confidence"—a kind of straw poll measuring the support for Anders. They mailed ballots to faculty members' homes (votes were supposed to take place in senate) and had them collected by the secretary of the faculty (the handbook stipulates that the president of the senate, who was mildly supportive of Anders, was supposed to do this). When events came to light, some faculty members contacted the board to protest what had happened. A rift appeared in

the faculty. To resolve the issue, the board looked into the matter. They determined that the vote had been conducted improperly and ordered the ballots destroyed. Both sides described the end result as vindicating its point of view. Anders's dean of faculty remarked, "Five of them resigned when the plot failed. . . . [The board] said that the whole process had been done outside of faculty rules." On the other hand, the faculty members who organized the "ballot of no confidence" feel that the events galvanized the board and that they pressured Anders and his dean to leave Summit College.

ANALYSIS

The events at Summit College underscore the potential of parallel governance structures to spur broad-based change. The case also suggests that altering and amending processes of decision making raises significant ethical issues for leaders. Both Michaels and Anders altered Summit's decision-making processes in an effort to move the institution forward. Their disparate strategies profoundly impacted the perceived legitimacy of their leadership among faculty and staff. In the subsequent analysis, I describe the benefits and liabilities of Summit's change task forces and identify several key factors that influenced perceptions of legitimacy regarding the parallel governance system.

THE BENEFITS OF PARALLEL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

Summit's task forces supported the institutional change effort in a number of ways.

They focused attention. Change task forces were a means of directing the energy and attention of institutional members. Unlike the faculty senate or the senior administrative team, these committees were not burdened with day-to-day concerns. Although the notion of an efficient bureaucracy seems oxymoronic, the task forces were, in fact, unusually flexible organizational structures (particularly for the academy). Various forms were used to perform targeted tasks. The faculty retreat constituted a kind of future search, the Mission Commission might be understood as a large decision-making committee, and subcommittees developed specific operational plans. Furthermore, unlike standing committees, the task forces had a finite lifespan. Once a task was accomplished (e.g., a course designed or policy implemented), it disbanded so individuals could direct their energies on to other tasks related to the change effort.

They improved communication. Structurally, the task forces were an effective form of lateral coordination (Bolman & Deal, 1997), a means of allowing groups across the organization to communicate and work together toward a common

goal. Each committee involved people from several constituent groups. The diversity of membership turned each task force into a ready-made focus group and innovations were filtered through the perspectives of various constituent group members. Members also were able to bring their committee's ideas to their constituents and "spark collegial debate" (Corak, 1992). Members brought ideas back to the committee. The debate enabled the committees to test the extent to which various constituencies supported or resisted specific ideas.

They fostered stronger professional relationships across groups. The committees helped build strong professional (and even personal) relationships among members of various constituent groups. Administrators, faculty, and staff who participated had volunteered to work on these projects. Their common interest and shared sense of purpose invited individuals to transcend their institutional roles—they became more invested in creating the best course or program and were perhaps less inclined to protect turf. The evidence of this is that after all the discussion and debate, once a committee reached consensus, it became a ready-made block of votes in support of its initiative.

They developed political support for the change effort. The committees as a whole helped build political support for the larger change agenda. There were multiple opportunities for people to become involved, and their investment of time and energy engendered greater commitment to the overall effort (Kanter, 1972). "This is something I really believe in!" is a phrase that seems to have been particularly evident among fence-sitters, who were initially ambivalent about the change effort but later became advocates through their participation. An additional political implication of having multiple task forces was that it made it difficult for opponents of change to derail the process. Those adamantly opposed to change were a relative minority. They did not have sufficient numbers to influence each and every committee and were therefore confined to naysaying during the final stage of the policy debate during faculty meetings. This supports Cohen and March's (1974) supposition that creating multiple "choice opportunities" can overload a system and prevent individuals from slowing institutional progress by attempting to assert their own narrow agendas. There were simply too many fronts on which to fight the battle.

THE LIABILITIES OF PARALLEL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

Despite these prodigious benefits, the task forces were no panacea.

They were arguably no more efficient than a well-functioning system of shared governance. Summit's task forces were principally a means of resolving the stalemate that had developed between the faculty and the administration during President Baron's administration. The data is equivocal about whether these new structures produced greater efficiencies in decision making. Ideas were still

subject to a great deal of debate. Support for various initiatives still required the assent of various groups. For all the aforementioned benefits, saving time appears not to be one of them.

The task forces reduced presidential control over the change agenda. Although the inclusive nature of the change process at Summit and the multiplicity of decision-making venues (e.g., committees, commissions, task forces) produced buy-in from participants, the price for that buy-in was an abrogation of presidential power. Summit's decentralized decision-making process was chaotic and the ultimate outcome of the various initiatives was constantly in question. Although Michaels was able to exercise his authority in establishing the new processes (e.g., forming committees) and monitoring their work (e.g., sending the committee back to distill the number of competencies), the price of inclusive decision making was abdicating the role of "visionary in chief." Michaels allowed the collective to determine the specific programmatic and policy changes that they believed fulfilled the ideal of "Education for Social Change." Participation spurred change but not necessarily the specific change Michaels might have wanted (e.g., the block plan).

There is a potentially slippery slope from innovation to manipulation. Once Michaels began to change Summit's governance system, the temptation arose to modify it further in hopes of producing a specific outcome. Some of Michaels's actions were masterful examples of political gamesmanship. He sidestepped the antagonistic old guard by working with the faculty as a committee of the whole. He asked the full faculty to "endorse" newly hatched initiatives rather than follow the established procedure of submitting full-blown detailed proposals for the faculty to "approve." Such strategies allowed the overall change effort to move forward. However, it also left Michaels open to charges of meddling and even manipulation. Furthermore, amending these processes established a precedent that Anders later exploited during his administration when he limited committee membership in an attempt to secure his version of the Summit Plan. When leaders change the decision-making rules, they run the risk of opening themselves up to charges of manipulation and risk damaging the perceived legitimacy of their administration.

ESTABLISHING THE LEGITIMACY OF GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

The issue of legitimacy goes to the very heart of the question of whether these structures constitute good governance, and the disparate fortunes of the Michaels and Anders administrations are particularly illuminating. At the end of the case, although the same structural forms were in place and most of the same individuals were participating in the change effort, something occurred that

badly disrupted Summit College. What caused a number of individuals to conclude that the system of governance had lost its legitimacy?

Legitimacy is an immensely rich concept, and there is robust literature that addresses questions of organizational justice (Greenberg, 1990). It has long been established that organizations function best when members feel that processes are fair (Brockner, Chen, Mannix, Leung, & Skarlicki, 2000; Greenberg, 1990; Lind & Tyler, 1988). Rawls (1971) holds up justice as “the first virtue of social institutions” (p. 3). Although equity theory, perhaps the earliest theory of organizational justice, focuses on self-interest—“Am I getting my fair share?” (Adams, 1963)—Thibaut and Walker’s (1975) later influential theory of procedural justice asserts that people determine fairness by asking two questions: Do I have a say in the process whereby decisions will be made (“process control”) and do I believe that it is possible for me to influence outcomes (“decision control”) (Greenberg, 1990, p. 402)?

Various perceptions of legitimacy emerge throughout the case. One way of understanding what distinguished legitimate from illegitimate innovation in academic governance at Summit is to identify the factors that influenced these perceptions. Naturally, such distinctions cannot always be neatly drawn. For example, when Michaels convened the full faculty and circumvented the standing committees (which were populated by recalcitrant senior faculty members), was this reasonable innovation or manipulation? The answer, of course, is: It depends. For the naysayers, Michaels’s intent was suspect: “Why, wasn’t what we had good enough?” They viewed Michaels’s willingness to establish new procedures (e.g., voting to “endorse” programs or courses that had not been fully developed) as a violation of established rules—“Doug is stomping on the handbook.” Of course, it can also be said that the naysayers’s grievances seemed to never gain much currency within the organization. The majority of institutional members simply did not view these complaints as legitimate. Later, Anders’s actions generated outrage among a group of faculty members. The board, however, sided with Anders and invalidated their “ballot” of no confidence. Legitimacy is neither static nor a uniform concept across a complex organization.

However, the case does suggest that certain behaviors tended to be seen as more or less legitimate than others. Several key factors influenced people’s perceptions of legitimacy during the change process. Together, they formed the foundation for legitimate change—what Summit’s senate president referred to simply as “trust.” When the principles were violated, the institution began to revert back to isolated and antagonistic factions.

FACTORS INFLUENCING PERCEPTIONS OF LEGITIMACY

1. *Broad-based participation in the process.* One of the most important factors influencing perceptions of legitimacy is the opportunity for individuals to participate in the decision-making process. Participation is often thought of simplistically—

that “more is better” and that participation equates with full membership. In fact, there are always constraints on participation. Even in a relatively small college, it is impossible to allow everyone to participate on a given committee. At Summit, not everyone could serve on the Mission Commission, even though that committee was charged with establishing a new direction for the institution. However, people can be given a voice, even if they are not given their own seat at the table. For example, at Summit, noncommittee members elected representatives to serve on the Mission Commission. They were asked to comment on successive drafts and they voted to accept the final draft. Once the institutional vision was set, opportunities for participation proliferated. A large number of committees were established to address a host of programmatic and policy issues. Many individuals had the opportunity to assume leadership roles as “conveners.” Participation produced a sense of ownership in the process because there were opportunities to be a part of the decision-making process.

2. *Locus of control in decision making.* Participation in the decision-making process is one thing; it is another to feel you are influencing the decisions that are actually made. At Summit, Michaels pushed decision making to the lowest possible level. He called on the faculty to formulate the Summit Plan: “I’m not going to tell you what this institution should be. That’s your job.” This represented uncommon faith in the process. Michaels ceded significant control over the development of specific ideas. This was particularly evident when Michaels allowed one of his pet proposals, the block schedule, to be defeated when it became clear that the majority opposed it. However, this process also generated buy-in for the decisions that did come out of the process.
3. *Procedural impartiality.* Participation and influence alone are insufficient means of producing legitimacy. This was particularly evident when Anders removed a few outspoken faculty members from key committees. Although it represented a rather modest administrative adjustment, the symbolic resonance of the act sparked a firestorm of ill will. This points to a third principal for fostering legitimacy—procedural impartiality. It is a leader’s prerogative to manage administrative processes. However, these decisions must be made on practical rather than ideological grounds. Thus, it was understandable for Michaels to limit the number of individuals serving on the Mission Commission. However, Anders’s barring membership on the general education committee because a faculty member did not agree with the administration was viewed as Machiavellian. Michaels appears to have been relatively careful when developing new processes: “He said we had to change but he didn’t tell us how we had to change.” Of course, Michaels participated in the ensuing debates and made his own preferences clear, but he also allowed the will of the majority to prevail. Michaels did not blindly accept each decision that emerged (e.g., raising concerns about the absence of institutional purpose during the first faculty meeting and requesting that the number of competencies be pared down). However, people were willing to accept his criticism because he did not advocate a specific solution—he asked them to re-enter the debate and to refine their work.
4. *Dealing with resistance.* The legitimacy of any decision-making process is perhaps most evident (and most at risk) in times of dissent. All significant change efforts prompt resistance (Duck, 2001; Schein, 1985). Donald Schon (1971) notes, the more radical the perceived change, the greater the opposition is likely to be. Michaels responded to opponents early on by attempting to draw them into the debate over Summit’s future. He also approached several influential fence-sitters and invited them to participate in the change process. Later on, he went so far as to suggest that naysayers ought to find a “better fit” elsewhere. But the locus of

TABLE 1: Positive and Negative Factors Influencing Perceptions of Legitimacy

<i>Positive Factors</i>	<i>Negative Factors</i>
Providing multiple opportunities for participation	Limiting access to influencing the process (e.g., not allowing people to serve on committees)
Transparency and openness	Attempting to control individuals with threats behind closed doors
Promoting debate, even at the cost of losing an argument (e.g., block scheduling)	Manipulating the process or people to produce a desired outcome
A willingness to trust in the outcome of an inclusive process	Attempting to manipulate individuals to achieve a specific end
Drawing in naysayers	Isolating, threatening, or punishing naysayers
Pushing decision making down to the local level and accepting the will of the majority	Attempting to seek your own way ("I'm going to run for chair of a policy committee and put an end to that!")

control remained with the individuals. Nevertheless, there appears to be a tremendous temptation for leaders to combat resistance through coercion and manipulation. Even a frustrated Michaels asked the senate president to identify the faculty members voting against various proposals (the data do not suggest he went further in his attempts to identify them). Anders, by contrast, did, and he acted on his suspicions by attempting to directly influence individuals he viewed as disloyal to the cause. In doing so, he stepped into a hornet's nest. The strategy failed because resistance to change is devilishly hard to pinpoint. Anders lost a great deal of credibility by not realizing (or believing) that different individuals were voting against different aspects of the plan for different reasons. There was no consolidated block of naysayers. As one faculty member remarked, "So you're trying to play this political game to sort of shore up essentially your idea, and yet, it just doesn't match what the reality of the situation is!"

In sum, a clear line can be drawn between the kinds of factors that promote shared governance and those that abrogate it (see Table 1).

CONCLUSION

Summit College's experience suggests that it is possible to develop innovative parallel governance structures that are accepted as legitimate by institutional constituents. The case also emphasizes that leaders play a key role in establishing and maintaining the legitimacy of the governance process. They do this through multiple means—by providing ways for individuals to participate in the decision-making process by ensuring that the process is as free from bias as possible and by modeling just behavior. These same ideals hold for institutional members as well. John Stuart Mill observed,

If we ask ourselves on what causes and conditions good government in all its senses, from the humblest to the most exalted, depends, we find that the principal of them, the one which transcends all others, is the qualities of the human beings composing the society over which the government is exercised.

An old guard that manipulates procedures for its own narrow end is also recognized as acting in counterproductive ways.

Legitimate governance processes do not depend on certain familiar forms. They do rely on basic principles of fairness, a few of which are outlined in this article. The principles that leaders and others adhere to in their decision making determine the quality of governance. The events at Summit make clear that legitimacy is a fragile institutional condition. The distance between innovation and manipulation is a perilously short one.

NOTES

1. Pseudonyms are used throughout the case and certain distinguishing characteristics of the college have been altered to protect its identity.

2. Examples include drafts of mission statements, development materials, course catalogs, admissions materials, minutes from faculty senate meetings, accreditation reports, various memoranda, and reports regarding the change process.

3. It involved using block scheduling so that students would take one intensive course at a time for 3 1/2 weeks.

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MATTHEW HARTLEY, Ed.D., Harvard University, is an assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education. His research focuses on issues of organizational change and academic governance. Before coming to Penn, he was an instructor at Hobart and William Smith Colleges as well as a teaching fellow and research assistant at Harvard University. In addition, he was co-chair of the Editorial Board for the Harvard Educational Review. He recently co-authored a report for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, "Evaluation and the Academy: Are We Doing the Right Thing?" (2002) with Henry Rosovsky, Harvard University.