

Organizational Theory in Higher Education Discussion Prompts

Module 1: Loosely-Coupled Systems

1. Create a system or ecosystem map of your organization that includes interaction points. This map would identify the various departments/offices (agents) in the university, grouping the agents by influence (leadership within the loosely-coupled systems) and primary motivation and goals (e.g., research interest, student services). This map may provide a birds-eye view of the university and its different agendas.
2. After the map is created, identify the definition(s) in Weick's article that most accurately identifies the loosely-coupled systems at your institution. Identify the benefits or risks of this structure. Finally, describe how might you approach a major change initiative, recognizing the current organizational structure.

Module 2: Organizational Foundations

Consider an area within your higher education organization where you would like to see change occur. The change could be as focused or as comprehensive as you like. Then, utilizing any of the four frames of organizational change outlined by Bolman and Deal (and Kezar), briefly your case for change to executive leadership:

1. Describe the area of change, the need for the change, the anticipated impact of the change, and what you hope to see accomplished.
2. In your short proposal, utilize one or more of Bolman and Deal's four frames (structural, human resources, political, and symbolic) that are also summarized on page 232 of Kezar's article

As you develop your response, it might be useful to consider the following questions: a) Which objections might executive leadership have to your proposal? b) How might the existing organizational culture impact change?

Module 3: Organizational Culture

The discussion for this week is informed partly by our readings on culture and partly by Tierney and Lanford's article on international branch campuses.

Imagine that you have been asked to manage an international branch campus in another country. The institution, which has state-of-the-art facilities, is a branch campus of a prestigious private

university in the US, and the job perks are amazing. You have been offered a 100% bump in your current pay, along with the opportunity to live in a city that offers exciting cultural opportunities, fantastic food, full living expenses, and daily inexpensive flights to adjacent countries that would be fascinating to visit. First-class tickets back and forth from the US will be provided twice each year.

As an added incentive, the individual who previously held the position has had numerous professional opportunities due to his experience as an international branch campus manager. They are currently the president of a beautiful liberal arts college in the US and has a board seat with the United Nations to promote educational development in low-income areas.

However, you have also been told that the international branch campus will not allow certain topics to be discussed, such as equal rights for Indigenous and marginalized people, the platforms of opposition political parties, and recent human rights abuses in any country. Moreover, part of your job will be to ensure that professors do not include readings or foster discussion concerning these topics.

Assuming that everything else about the position is your "dream job," would you take it? Explain why or why not.

Module 4: Institutional Mission and Identity

Morphew and Hartley (2006) depict two ways the literature typically views mission statements. The first is to create a shared sense of purpose that can inspire those working in the organization. The second camp views mission statements as *pro forma* and a collection of stock phrases that serve little purpose in the actual work or values of the institution.

Part One: The president at your institution has noticed that the current mission statement does not have much traction with external or internal stakeholders. You are tasked with creating a new mission statement for public comment. What can you come up with?

Part Two: Briefly answer the following three questions in relation to the mission statement:

1. Why did you construct the revised mission statement as you did?
2. Which constituencies would you speak with?
3. Which values does the revised mission statement reflect?

Module 5: Socialization and Diversity

Imagine you are a graduate dean at a university that has a proud history of producing future tenure-track faculty. Nevertheless, the majority of graduate programs in your institution suffer

from significant doctoral student attrition and a lack of diversity among doctoral students and faculty. How might you accomplish the following two tasks?

1. Increase diversity among doctoral students and faculty;
2. Improve the socialization process of young scholars to their respective disciplines so that doctoral student retention improves.

Module 6: Change and Reform Processes

After you complete this module's readings, return to your answer for the Module 2 Discussion Prompt. What do you now feel are some weaknesses of your original proposal? What might be some unexpected strengths?

Finally, what types of revisions and/or additions would you make to your Module 2 proposal?

Module 7: Organizational Creativity

Administrators rely on creativity to increase the efficiency of processes and programs throughout higher education institutions. However, cultivating creativity can be challenging. Many administrators struggle to balance departmental goals while giving employees the flexibility to be creative:

1. After reading this module's articles, would you amend any of your approaches to supervision and/or leadership? Why or why not?
2. What might be your preferred leadership style(s)?
3. As a future/current supervisor, how would you stimulate creativity within your department?

Module 8: Organizational Innovation

For this final discussion prompt, consider an "innovative" idea your institution previously touted and attempted to implement.

1. What was the "innovation?"
2. Do you feel this idea was truly innovative? (Why or why not?)

3. Which environmental factors of innovation (diversity, intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and creative conflict) did the idea successfully capture? Which dimensions of innovation (time, efficiency, and trust) were thoughtfully considered?

4. In which environmental factors and/or dimensions did the innovation fall short?

5. Was the innovation ultimately implemented successfully? Was it sustainable? (Why or why not?)