Applying Multi-Frame Organizational Thinking to Institutional Research: Structural, Human Resource, Political, and Symbolic

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Presentation Overview

- Background and Literature Review
- The Four Frames
  - Structural Frame
  - Human Resource Frame
  - Political Frame
  - Symbolic Frame
- Applying the Four Frames to Institutional Research
- Case Study: Summer Bridge Academy Assessment from a Four-Frames Perspective
Why Applying Multi-Frame Thinking Important for IR?

- Important to be aware that users of information often operate from one of more perspectives.
- Institutions are composed of individuals who have their own perspectives of what the best course of action should be when institutional researchers present information designed to address complicated issues.
- Learning to apply all four perspectives may increase understanding of how institutional research is interpreted by users with diverse perspectives.
- Explicating multiple views of reality will result in more compelling presentations and actionable results.
P. T. Terenzini (1993)

- Technical and Analytical Intelligence (factual knowledge or information, and methodological skills and competencies).
- Issues Intelligence (institutional management issues in four areas: students, faculty, finances, and facilities).
- Contextual Intelligence (understanding of the history and culture of higher education in general and of the particular campus on which one works).
Knight, Moore, and Coperthwaite (1997)

Conducted an empirical investigation and found that adequate assessment of an institutional researcher’s competence requires an understanding of organizational culture, expectations of the function of institutional research, and leaders’ personalities and priorities.
Light (2001) argued that researchers can offer compelling and defensible evidence that can challenge and even overturn widely held beliefs.

Knight (2003) asserted that the landscape of institutional research is broad and requires a diversity of professional skills and knowledge in several domains including accountability, assessment, information support, faculty activity and productivity, enrollment management, and use of technology.
Structural Frame Core Assumptions

- Assumptions are grounded in rationality.
- The correct formal arrangements will help reduce problems and enhance organizational efficiency.
- Organizations exist to attain clearly articulated goals and objectives.
- Institutional problems can be resolved through careful analysis.
- Organizations function best when rational and logical thinking prevails over personal preferences and external political pressures.
Structural Frames will focus on...

- How results will help organization achieve established goals and objectives.
- How to increase efficiency and enhance performance.
- Rationality rather than personal and external pressures.
- Structures designed to enhance organizational functioning (e.g., goals, technology, workforce, and environment).
IR Data Reporting and Processes

- Emphasize importance of carefully controlled, rigorous studies.
- Use and present quantitative methods.
- Explicitly show how results enhance understanding of progress made toward specific organizational goals and objectives.
Human Resource Frame Core
Assumptions

- Focus on the dynamic interactions between organizations and people.
- Emphasize the importance of good organizational-person fits.
- Believe that organizations should invest in people and develop policies that sustain high commitment, involvement, empowerment, and diversity.
- Advocate organizational practices that help attract, retain, and empower all organizational members.
Human Resource Frame will focus on…

- Results that shed light on levels of high commitment and involvement among students, administrators, faculty, and staff.
- Policies, programs, and services that promote diversity.
- Findings that have implications for effectively retaining and empowering students, faculty, and staff.
IR Data Reporting and Processes

- Present findings on student, faculty, and staff satisfaction, involvement, engagement, and commitment.
- Present findings that enhance motivation and involvement.
- Employ empowerment evaluation and participatory action research approaches to enhance stakeholder involvement.
- Encourage audience participation and involvement when presenting findings.
- Present findings in face-to-face meetings to stimulate dialogue and active exchanges.
Political Frame Core Assumptions

- The word “politics” is not viewed as evoking negative images of individuals who tend to act in self-interest, advocate self-promoting agendas, and cave into political pressures rather than acting in the best interest of the institution.

- Politics is “simply the realistic process of making decisions and allocating resources in a context of scarcity and diverse interests” (Bolman and Deal, 2003, p. 181).

- View organizations as dynamic political arenas comprised of competing individual and group interests.

- Assume that goals and decisions result from bargaining negotiation, and jockeying for position among competing stakeholders.
Political Frames will focus on...

- How results may help resolve complex organizational involving diverse stakeholders.
- How results may lend insight into making decisions about allocating scarce resources.
- How results may help resolve interpersonal conflicts and enhance understanding of organizational dynamics.
IR Data Reporting and Processes...

- Present compelling results that may challenge prevailing ideas and agendas.
- Acknowledge that results may be interpreted differently depending on values, beliefs, and agendas.
- Consider the fact that results may be used for bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for position among stakeholders.
Symbolic Frame Core Assumptions

- What an event *means* is more important than what actually happens.
- Events have multiple meanings because people interpret experience differently, and culture has a fundamental role in holding an organization together and uniting people around shared values and beliefs.
- Individuals primarily operating from this frame believe that people create symbols to resolve confusion, and promote faith and hope.
- Stories that help people discover meaning and purpose are paramount.
Symbolic Frame focuses on...

- What the results mean, their implications, and how they help stakeholders discover purpose.
- Research and assessment as a symbol of organizational culture.
- How findings may convey important aspects of organizational culture and values.
IR Data Reporting and Processes

- Tell stories to help stakeholders discover purpose and find meaning in results.
- Use and present qualitative research methods.
- Explicitly discuss shared values, beliefs, and organizational context.
- Use emotional appeals.
Case Study: The Summer Academy Bridge Program Assessment

- **Structural**
  - Quantitative quasi-experimental designs.
  - Goal-based evaluation.

- **Human Resources**
  - Empowerment of faculty in assessment.
  - Focus on faculty, advisor, mentor, and student satisfaction.

- **Political**
  - Concerns about what students are served and resources.

- **Symbolic**
  - Importance of assessment in program planning.
  - Focus on students’ stories.
Next Steps

- Empirically test series of hypotheses that internal and external consumers of IR research view and interpret IR reports through four frames.
- Determine if dominant frames influence decision making based on results.
- Investigate if applying multi-frame thinking to IR helps to enhance understanding and use of results.
Questions, Comments, Suggestions, and Feedback!
References


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