

# Structuring for High Performance: A Case Study of Market-Based Faculty Work

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**Abstract:** *The need for higher education to be more responsive in meeting the growing needs of a global marketplace, while simultaneously becoming more efficient, necessitates a reexamination of faculty roles and responsibilities. Using data from a case study that examined faculty work through the conceptual framework of high performing organizations, the author considers how one for-profit university organizes faculty responsibilities and structures for “high performance.” The author illustrates how the institution employs three interconnected strategies to develop and execute institutional goals and priorities that contribute to faculty performance within a market-based educational context.*

## Introduction

Throughout the past decade and continuing to the present day, the emergence of a knowledge economy has shaped our higher education system; likewise, a focus on meeting the market-based needs of a global society has contributed to its continued expansion. Postsecondary enrollments increased by 32% between 1997-2007 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). While most of the enrollment growth, in real numbers, has occurred in the “traditional” higher education sector (i.e., the four thousand private non-profit and public colleges and universities), a closer examination by organizational type reveals that enrollment rates

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in the for-profit higher education sector have outpaced those at traditional non-profit institutions by a significant margin. For instance, between 2005-2008, enrollments at degree-granting for-profit institutions increased by 50% while enrollments at traditional institutions increased by only 14%” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

Without question, for-profit colleges and universities (FPCUs) have come under increased scrutiny by Congress and the public alike. One need look no further than the numerous articles appearing in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Inside Higher Ed*, and other media outlets almost on a daily basis to understand the issues facing the for-profit higher education sector. Reports by the Government Accountability Office (2010), U.S. Department of Education (2004), and inquiries by the U.S. Justice Department (Blumenstyk, 2007) have shed light on a number of questionable, and sometimes illegal, tactics FPCUs utilize to conduct business. Federal agencies have investigated high profile FPCUs, such as the University of Phoenix and DeVry for improprieties related to questionable hiring practices, recruiting violations, and misuse of financial aid monies. Nevertheless, the increasing number of regionally accredited degree-granting FPCUs continues to rise as they increase their share of overall student enrollments (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Put another way, FPCUs are no longer operating at the fringes of postsecondary education. As scholars contend (Breneman, 2006a; Tierney & Hentschke, 2008), for-profit institutions have established themselves as long-term players in the higher education landscape.

The intent of this article is to neither advocate for nor disparage for-profit colleges and universities. Rather, my purpose is to examine how one for-profit university structures and organizes faculty work within a profit-seeking educational context. More broadly, this article examines the implications for faculty work when revenue generation—whether through investors, students, contracts, and grants—becomes an overriding priority of an institution. In this case, the institution under examination is a for-profit university. In what follows, I present data from a case study of one for-profit university that I refer to as National Collegiate University or NCU (a pseudonym). Given the nature of FPCUs as market-based business enterprises, organizational activities partially center on the efficient use of human and financial resources to increase profit generation and foster organizational growth and expansion (Hentschke,

2010). My point is not to imply that the manner in which FPCUs structure faculty work is one that traditional colleges and universities (TCUs) should employ. I argue, instead, that the sector in which postsecondary institutions reside (non-profit vs. for-profit) provides a basis from which to structure institutional work activities in ways that contribute to a sector-based notion of “high performance.”

To begin, I offer a brief context in which FPCUs reside and offer a perspective on faculty work at FPCUs. I summarize the literature on high performing organizations and highlight previous discussions regarding higher education’s intent to increase institutional performance through efficiencies that, in part, revolve around faculty work. Finally, I offer a framework from which to consider how faculty work is structured for greater efficiency and productivity at one for-profit university, and discuss the implications for other postsecondary institutional types. I premise my argument on two assumptions. First, that faculty work reflects an institution’s ideological principles and values about the function and purpose of higher education. And second, that the desire to create high performing colleges and universities ought to take into account how faculty work is structured and organized. As others have suggested, the need for higher education institutions to become high performing while responding to the needs of the global marketplace, and preparing citizens for participation in a democratic society, necessitates a reexamination of faculty roles and responsibilities (O’Meara & Rice, 2005; Rice, 2006).

## Literature Review

### The Dual Roles of For-Profit Institutions

The extraordinary growth of the for-profit higher education sector can be attributed, in part, to their focus on offering consumer-valued “products and services” and skills-based education. Coupled with increasing student enrollments, FPCUs have dramatically increased their share of the multi-billion dollar U.S. higher education market over the past three decades (Tierney & Hentschke, 2008). For-profit colleges and universities are bifurcated by nature, that is, they function in both the realm of (profit-seeking) business and industry and in the (non-profit) traditional higher education arena. Moreover, as profit-seeking institutions, FPCUs strive to meet the needs of three sets of constituencies: 1) students seeking the requisite skills to be successful in

the job market, 2) employers and businesses seeking to employ well-qualified individuals, and 3) institutional owners/investors seeking a return on investment. Like other proprietary business enterprises, FPCUs seek profitability by developing approaches to organizational management that focus on maximizing institutional resources to increase efficiencies and performance. They consider loose coupling (Birnbaum, 1988; Cohen & March, 1974; Weick, 1979) to be counterproductive to profit generation (Lechuga, 2006) and see that it hampers their ability to function as “high performing,” i.e., the ability to be responsive to the demands of students, employers, and investors (Lechuga, 2008; Ruch, 2001; Tierney & Hentschke, 2008).

### **Faculty Work at FPCUs**

The literature on faculty work life at for-profit institutions is sparse. Nevertheless, a brief discussion about the roles and responsibilities of faculty members at FPCUs is warranted. Faculty work-life differs by institution (Breneman, 2006b, Lechuga, 2006.) and involvement in curriculum developments. Two primary misnomers about faculty work at such institutions exist and are worth some focus. The first is that faculty members are primarily part-time employees. This may be true for the most visible institutions such as the University of Phoenix and Walden University, but many of the institutions with relatively lower student enrollments—two-year and less than two-year colleges—at times employ a greater number of full-time rather than part-time faculty (Lechuga, 2008). Curricular offerings differ by institution and can influence the type of faculty FPCUs employ (Tierney & Hentschke, 2008). Nonetheless, FPCUs as a whole generally hire faculty with professional field experience in the subject areas in which they teach (Lechuga, 2008).

The second misnomer regarding faculty work at for-profits is that they have relatively little input with regard to the curriculum and teach from “course syllabi [that] are centrally produced [and] effectively franchised—the ‘McEducation’ of criticism” (Breneman, 2006b, p. 82). While this is true at the most visible institutions with large student enrollments, faculty employed by institutions such as the University of Phoenix have some input into course development. As Breneman (2006b) states,

Course syllabi are produced collectively, with input from individual instructors as well as full-time faculty in each

[subject] area. . . . Once adopted, experienced faculty members are free to deviate and customize a course to some degree, providing they can demonstrate that the students are covering the material prescribed for the course. (p. 82)

For example, at the University of Phoenix, new faculty are provided with the prescribed course syllabus, course materials and guides from which to use for their course. Once they have established themselves as competent instructors, they have some leeway in making changes to the course.

Moreover, the generalization that faculty have no input regarding the curriculum is exaggerated. The faculty at the majority of FPCUs often develop their own courses; such courses are then subject to approval by a chief academic officer and an accreditation specialist for new programs (Lechuga, 2006). Given that faculty members at tradition colleges and universities are accustomed to creating their own courses and utilizing course materials of their choosing, the criticism of FPCUs regarding development of the curriculum has implications for academic freedom. Since FPCUs do not concern themselves with research, however, those at for-profits consider academic freedom to be somewhat irrelevant (Lechuga, 2008; Tierney & Hentschke, 2008). This perspective, in part, is what allows FPCUs to be more agile and high performing.

### **High Performing Organizations**

The notion of high performing organizations (HPOs) is not new to scholars in business and management disciplines; its underlying principles are also familiar to many organizational theorists in higher education. Over the past three decades, scholars have defined high performance in numerous ways and have provided various theoretical approaches to understand the relationship between institutional structure and performance. Measuring organizational performance is, without a doubt, challenging. Scholars have defined HPOs using various sets of organizational indicators or traits as a basis for measuring performance (Child, 1972; McKenna, 2002; Staw, McKechnie, & Pfeffer, 1983). Indicators can include the structure of organizational activities, the concentration of authority, the control of workflow, and the size of support components, e.g., support staff (Pugh, Hickson, Hinings, & Turner, 1968). Financial and non-financial indicators also can contribute to the performance of an organization (Reimann, 1974). Although trait

approaches to understanding high performance are valuable, it is important to recognize that the sole use of “success” indicators to measure performance assumes that organizations are similar in nature (Dennison, 1984) and are rational entities that are able to meet a similar set of goals (Pfeffer, 1981). A reliance on traits and characteristics also fails to consider the fluid nature that exists between the external environment and internal dynamics of an organization (e.g., fluctuations in the job market, needs of employers, and/or managerial philosophies). External market forces, legislative and accreditation barriers, and the needs of employers are key to understanding the paradigm from which FPCUs operate, which includes the parameters of faculty work.

An alternate approach from which to consider high performance is to view organizations as fluid and complex entities that are often difficult to characterize. Numerous scholars have examined specific organizational characteristics in conjunction with cultural components to gain a more comprehensive understanding of operational modes (Akin & Hopelain, 1986; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; McKenna, 2002; Saffold, 1988; Vaill, 1984). Examining aspects of both product and process can contribute to complex insights regarding organizational performance (Bolman & Deal, 1997). For example, Rummler and Brache (1990) argue that many organizations fail to perform well when their structure does not provide a clear understanding about the ways individuals should interact to accomplish organizational goals or when they structure activities in ways that isolate individuals.

### **Higher Education Institutions as HPOs**

In discussing the notion of high performing colleges and universities, I propose that what is most important for understanding how one defines “high performance” is the *context* in which the definition resides. Characterizing postsecondary institutions as “efficient and productive” (i.e., high performing) necessitates researchers to examine particular organizational aspects while taking into account institutional norms and values specific to institutional type. For instance, the manner in which FPCUs define high performance differs from TCUs because each institutional type functions in different contexts, each with their own norms, practices, and values. Tierney (1998) defines high performance in higher education as an institution’s ability to restructure its core activities and reconsider traditional notions of academe—more specifically the tenure system and the activities associated with faculty

work-to better serve the broader needs of society. Drawing upon the notion of learning organizations (Senge, 1990) and reengineering (Hammer & Champy, 1993), Tierney (1998) urges scholars to explore new ways of responding to the current challenges facing higher education.

Similarly, Chaffee (1998) takes an approach that focuses on restructuring colleges and universities to meet the needs of a specific constituency (i.e., students). In asking institutions to reconsider the people they serve, Chaffee (1998) argues that the “student as customer” perspective allows institutions to better align their missions and goals to improve service to their students. Her arguments are not framed from the perspective that universities should acquiesce to student demands. Instead, she introduces the notion of the caring university—one that is more astute in responding to the new needs of students and society. Emphasizing this idea within the context of faculty work, she states, “[A caring university] knows and intervenes if a field is changing faster than the faculty and courses are changing” (Chaffee, 1998, p. 36). While acknowledging that taking such steps would be challenging, she asserts that her examples “are nothing more than the ultimate outcome of a university that increasingly knows and values both the internal and external customers it serves” (Chaffee, 1998, p. 36). The author contends that colleges and universities who understand their customers and recognize their needs are able to operate in ways that meet those needs.

A discussion regarding the structuring of faculty work for high performance should take into account the norms of the institutions, the various internal dynamics, and the external forces that influence how faculty members do their work. Organizing faculty work at FPCUs for high performance, defined here as *work activities structured to maximize faculty productivity to best serve the needs of students, employers, and institutional owners/investors*, ought to consider the mission and goals of the organization, the context in which the institution resides, and the needs of various constituencies.

## **Methodology**

### **Data Collection**

Data presented here were taken from a comprehensive study that utilized a qualitative case study methodology to explore faculty work and faculty culture at four for-profit colleges and universities, one of which I will present here. I conducted semi-structured interviews lasting between 60-90 minutes; this served as the primary data collection mode. Interview questions focused on understanding faculty roles and responsibilities in addition to organizational practices that influenced faculty work life. A semi-structured interview format was chosen because of the exploratory nature of this study, which allowed for variations in participants' responses (Patton, 1990). Follow-up interviews with several participants subsequently took place by phone or through e-mail communications. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. Ancillary data were taken from publicly available and/or legally obtained sources, such as company documents, Security and Exchange Commission filings, institutional self-studies, and accreditation reports. As is the nature of qualitative inquiry, findings are not representative of all participants.

### **Participants**

Fifteen faculty members participated in this particular case study and were employed by an on-ground, satellite campus of National Collegiate University (NCU). I selected faculty members with the assistance and approval of the campus president. The president provided me with a list of potential participants and their contact information. Snowball sampling (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001), in which participants helped to identify other faculty that would be beneficial to my study, was also utilized. Participants included seven part-time instructors and eight full-time faculty members' disciplines that represented the fields in which the largest number of bachelor's degrees were awarded at FPCUs (National Center for Postsecondary Statistics, 2009). Five faculty members held doctorates and the remaining ten held master's degrees. Only faculty members who taught in academic degree programs that led either to a Bachelors, Masters, or Doctoral degree were interviewed. Table 1 provides a general overview of the faculty participants by employment status, fields of expertise, and highest degrees held. Note that two of the



faculty participants taught courses that focused on general education requirements, such as English composition, literature, and philosophy. Also, note that NCU refers to full-time faculty as *core* faculty whereas part-time faculty are identified as *practitioner* faculty.

**Table 1.** Distribution of NCU Faculty by Academic Discipline and Employment Status

Discipline	Core Faculty	Practitioner-Faculty	Highest Degrees Held
Business	2	1	Doctorate (2) Masters (1)
Education	1	1	Doctorate (1*) Masters (1)
Information Technology/ Communications	1	2	Masters (3)
Health Sciences	1	1	Doctorate (1*) Masters (1)
Psychology	1	2	Doctorate (1+1*) Masters (1)
General Education	1	1	Masters (1) Doctorate (1)
Totals	7	8	Doctorate (7) Masters (8)

*Note.* \*Designates doctoral degrees in-progress when interviewed with anticipated completion within 12 months

## Analysis

Data were first subjected to a line-by-line analysis to facilitate the initial coding process and were subsequently grouped into broad categories that would serve as the basis for the development of themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). I utilized an interpretive approach during data analyses to develop an innate understanding of the social setting of the NCU, and based study findings on the events, accounts, actions, and experiences of participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). An interpretive approach allows for social actors, in this case faculty members, to be actively involved in

the study by furnishing evidence through their own interpretations or meanings of their social environment; each participant made meaning of her and his world based on personal experiences. Implicit in this approach is the belief that the social actors are continuously interpreting their social environment. My job as a researcher was to understand how faculty members created meaning of their everyday experiences and to provide social science explanations to those experiences.

Data first were analyzed using line-by-line analysis and open coding to reflect the numerous issues and topics of which participants spoke. For this particular case study, 37 codes were initially established. Axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), a coding system in which the researcher analyzes causal relationships between the initial codes and groups them into categories, was used to develop 12 broad categories based on similarities across the initial codes. After grouping data into categories, I focused on refining and collapsing the categories into six topical themes through a selective coding process. Selective coding involves identifying core categories and systematically relating them to other categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The aforementioned coding processes are usually associated with a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, Strauss & Corbin, 1998). However, data analysis for this study derived core categories during the selective coding process using the conceptual framework of high performing organizations. Seven categories emerged, which included such examples as “efficient practices,” “surveying the market,” “employer-involvement,” and the like. Finally, I collapsed data further into the final three conceptual level themes (Huberman & Miles, 2002) – 1) Unit Collaboration; 2) Networked Communication; and 3) Ideological Consensus.

### **Triangulation and Trustworthiness**

I ensured the credibility and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1989) of the data by reviewing multiple data sources. These included institutional self-studies, marketing materials, and other publicly available documents. The data sources aided in the triangulation process, which allowed me to “examine conclusions (assertions, claims, etc.) from more than one vantage point” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 257) and to make certain that findings were “worth paying attention to” (Lincoln & Guba, 1989, p. 290). Periodic rechecking with participants during and after an interview

helped assure that data was not misread. By leaving the lines of communication open between the participants and myself, I was able to address inconsistencies that arose during subsequent interviews. This type of procedure helped ensure that the conclusions were believable and communicable to readers.

I utilized member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1989) which provided participants the opportunity to view and edit their interview transcriptions. Additionally after all interviews had taken place, faculty were provided with study findings in order to provide feedback and increase the credibility of the data. *Peer-debriefing* provided me an opportunity to share my findings with a peer researcher familiar with the study. This peer offered comments and suggestions on how to improve the study. An *external audit* also was conducted, in which a completed draft was submitted to a researcher unfamiliar to me and to the topic, to provide an unbiased perspective of the research study. I incorporated the feedback from the external auditor to more clearly articulate the arguments I set forth in this text. Finally, I evaluated data across interviews to confirm that it was not misread (Mason, 1996; Merriam, 1998).

## Findings

As previously mentioned, high performing organizations are characterized not only by financial indicators but also by their ability to be responsive to their changing environments (Chaffee, 1998). In the case of NCU, findings focus on how NCU defined and organized faculty work to foster high performance within the context of for-profit higher education. Three major themes emerged from the data analysis: 1) Unit collaboration, 2) Networked communication, and 3) Ideological consensus. After exploring each theme, I conclude by discussing how scholars might consider ways that TCUs can structure faculty work to be high performing without compromising the fundamental principles of academe, i.e., academic freedom, shared governance, and faculty autonomy.

## **Unit Collaboration**

Participants viewed themselves as working in a distinct, yet coordinated unit or team. The method used to create new academic programs illustrates this notion. Developing a new degree program requires coordinated planning by various organizational units to identify several factors up front; institutional units are in parenthesis. They included market demand (market research teams), budgetary needs (financial administrators), course content (faculty and program advisory boards), and student interest (marketing team and academic administrators). Rather than delegating curriculum development activities solely to individual faculty members, a number of organizational units from within the institution engaged in the process. Each unit played a different role with a specific function during the process. A part-time faculty member explained, “We have programs, we have a number of teams, each college has a [national] dean, and associate deans, and a small administrative staff that surrounds that dean. The dean’s [job] is to enhance a number of degree programs” by working with teams made up of different units from throughout the organization.

Organizational units extended beyond the institution’s borders to external constituencies in the form of external program advisory boards, usually consisting of employers. A part-time faculty member in business explained, “When you get to the major courses or the programs of study, the faculty drive the [curriculum development], but they consult with their advisory board...with those professionals who are out working in the field to find out what we should be doing.” He continued, “We have an advisory board for childcare [program], for the optometry technician program, etc.”

Faculty participants considered themselves a unit and viewed collaborating with other units as teamwork. For instance, a full-time faculty member from education explained, “We truly do work as a team in our college. It’s cool, you know, because I come from a K-12, the traditional academic world, and it’s not the same.” When discussing why she enjoyed working for NCU she stated, “There’s this huge collaboration and, truly, the people that work there [keep] me there.” Another part-time faculty participant spoke of the collaboration and exchange that also occurred within the faculty unit: “We will have a drawer in the faculty file cabinet where I will pop in PowerPoint slides,

I've done this for a particular class, and if anybody wants to use them they don't have to ask. Most of us are very un-proprietary [sic] with our stuff." An informant summarized the idea of "faculty as a unit" by simply stating, "It's just collegial sharing that goes on."

On the one hand, being employed by an FPCU compromises faculty autonomy and decision-making authority (Lechuga, 2006; Ruch, 2001), but only from the perspective of tenured or tenure-track faculty members employed at TCUs. On the other hand, there is an alternative educational paradigm at play; one in which work is organized around units, resulting in a reduction of individual autonomy yet allowing for tighter coupling across the institution. Put another way, less autonomy leads to increased coordination of activities within and across organizational units. Furthermore, the manner in which NCU organizes work roles requires a system of communication that enhances intra-organizational performance activities.

### **Networked Communication**

Integral to NCU's (National Collegiate University's) high performance is the notion of an *information interdependency* between different units of the organization. Vertical and lateral distribution of information is required for institutional planning purposes, which fosters alignment of work activities between organizational units and across the institution as a whole. No single unit was responsible for gathering all the necessary information. Instead, units worked together to consider the various data points and determine the best course of action. As a full-time faculty member and program chair explained:

[NCU] does marketing studies in the area, and [makes] contacts with both potential students and businesses. Then [they] determine what is needed for the community, and generally something will or will not be offered based basically on the idea of whether it is going to fly or not.

As a revenue-centered organization, NCU dedicates a relatively large amount of human and financial capital to identify specific "in-demand" employment areas and to determine their revenue generating potential. One informant discussed how "the [research department] has their

websites and whatever, and there's a whole research team to figure out what is the best market."

The research department distributed their data to central administrators who assembled curriculum development teams from branch campuses throughout the country to create courses and programs that meet the needs of students and employers. A program chair described the process:

I will receive a phone call from the [national level] associate dean, who says, "we are teaming this particular course, who do you think from your campus can make a valuable contribution?". ... So, I'll prepare a list, a short list of those [faculty] that I think, you know, that know the course. They're experts.

Faculty members, including part-time instructors, are sought out by national-level deans with the assistance of branch campus VPs and program heads to participate in activities where their expertise is valuable.

The aforementioned external program advisory boards were also part of the communication network. They provided valuable input at the national level, which is then used by curriculum development teams. "All of the colleges have an advisory board staffed by representatives of the fortune 500 companies and some smaller ones as well." The advisory boards participate in focus groups. As a full-time faculty participant explained, "The meaning in our program and the deliverables in our program are set by a focus group that is put together by the dean and the curriculum development team and they put together a career path for the particular program that meets the needs of the employers for graduates." The curriculum development teams then "debrief the focus groups" and utilize that information to develop courses and programs.

Given the corporate nature of NCU, hierarchical decision-making was the norm; yet, participants commented that faculty input was welcomed at all levels. Faculty members expressed satisfaction with the accessibility and receptiveness of senior administrators to hear ideas about new courses or potential changes to existing courses. "I can go right to my national dean and say 'I've got this crazy idea' and she'd say, 'Let's hear it.' So there's an open line of communication." Given that faculty possess professional expertise in a given field; participants felt

comfortable offering ideas not only to their immediate supervisors but also to curriculum development specialists and deans at the highest levels of the institution.

By networking communication channels across the organization, NCU was able to foster high performance through unit interdependency. A networked communication system provided the necessary components to cultivate and increase organizational performance—a concept that is aligned with Meyer’s (2007) perspective on effective organizational performance. However, the notion of networked communication had its downsides. Participants were reluctant, at times, about the manner in which NCU made academically based decisions. For instance, a number of participants displayed mixed attitudes about a decision-making process in which input from non-academic units helped determine decisions based, in part, on profit generation. One informant summarized the beliefs of others. He asserted:

There are many different people looking at [the curriculum], and in the end, it’s truly a business decision. What is the likelihood of this program or degree will be profitable? That’s what it comes down to. How much are we ready to invest to get to the point of profit building?

To be clear, I maintain there are inherent problems associated with non-academics having decision-making authority over academic issues. However, I leave that discussion for another time. Instead, my intent is to demonstrate how NCU utilizes a model that, for better or worse, fosters communication between organizational units (e.g., faculty, external advisory boards, and research and marketing departments). Moreover, networked communication and unit collaboration were most effective when members of the institution share similar beliefs about the aims of postsecondary education.

### **Ideological Consensus**

NCU developed an educational paradigm with clearly defined goals and objectives aimed at providing students with practical knowledge and applicable skills, supplying the market with well-trained employees, and generating returns for shareholders. NCU’s mission statement clearly articulated its ideological perspective about the function and purpose of

postsecondary education. To paraphrase, NCU's mission focuses on the development of knowledge and skills that enable students to remain relevant in a fluctuating job market. Moreover, the institution's two main purposes are: 1) to structure as a proprietary organization to facilitate innovation and 2) to generate profits to help support the institution's mission. Faculty were not only cognizant of their organization's mission and educational goals, but in many instances revealed similar ideological sentiments about the purpose of a postsecondary education. This collective ideological perspective about the purpose of a NCU served as a foundation for networked communication and unit collaboration. For instance, since one purpose of an NCU education is to provide practical knowledge there was a general consensus that faculty members should be employed full-time in the areas in which they teach. "In order to become a faculty member here you have to be full time employed in the area in which you teach...we want practitioner faculty that bring to the classroom real world experience. We look for people that do it for a living not the unemployed trying to make their rent." A full-time business faculty participant provided an example, "Pick a discipline. If you're a finance person and you work in the finance industry...You might be a business analyst or you might be a CFO...I can pretty much expect that you're worthy for an interview." When asked whether faculty were required to have teaching experience prior to being hired, an informant explained, "It's not as important. It's great, but sometimes it's not....We can teach them how to teach."

Faculty generally agreed with the notion that a major objective of higher education is to provide students with skills to realize their career objectives. "One of the most fun things is working on the curriculum [team] because to me it's a real challenge to get a curriculum that really meets the students' needs." Faculty participants as a whole, including those who had retired from teaching posts at TCUs, viewed NCU's educational philosophy of focusing on market demands as both practical and intelligent. "I think the whole question of how market research fits into the programs you are going to add is big, and clearly, probably no institution should start a program today without some idea [of what] that demand is for." Another faculty member in education expressed a similar sentiment by simply stating, "Somehow, you have to be in touch with the education world." Being responsive to student and market



needs and ensuring that curricula are relevant allows the institution to remain profitable and high performing.

Data from participants also illustrated collective support for the unbundling of faculty work. Part-time faculty were contracted by semester or course session and receive little to no benefits—a cost saving mechanism that has become standard practice at many TCUs. Not surprisingly, part-time faculty responsibilities were unbundled and lay in discrete domains that include classroom instruction, course development, or new faculty training, among others.

Participants expressed satisfaction with regard to the notion of unbundled faculty responsibilities stating that such an approach was beneficial because it provided job security to faculty who were unable to teach for an extended time-period. “We’re paid by assignment, and at any time we could refuse any assignment for a while, but we’d still belong [to] the faculty.” Another described the unbundling of faculty work as an innovative way to approach instructional responsibilities:

... [faculty] take their [work] load depending on their own time and energy. Faculty members at NCU get paid by the number of students they have. They get paid every quarter for advising students. They get paid for every committee assignment they accept. They get paid to be a member of a dissertation committee. They get paid in piecemeal. It is exactly piecemeal, which is a rather entrepreneurial way to approach all of this.

NCU’s approach to organizing responsibilities by discrete assignments provided faculty members with a clear sense of where one activity ends and another begins and served as a mechanism to maintain organizational efficiencies.

To be clear, my intention was not to portray participants as a monolithic group of faculty with similar values. Indeed, prior findings (Lechuga 2006, 2008) illustrate the varying degrees of concern about the potential for ethical dilemmas related to the co-mingling of education and profit. NCU participants expressed mixed sentiments about particular detrimental effects related to linking revenue generation with postsecondary education. A participant asserted that corporate executives ultimately decide whether or not to invest in academic

programs by asking “How much are we willing to invest to get to the point of profit building?” Tensions between academic and corporate divisions did exist. However, my point here is to illustrate that a shared ideological perspective about the purpose of an NCU education partially served as a basis for efficient institutional performance.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

NCU’s educational priorities focused on providing students with the requisite skills that meet employers’ needs. Market research allowed for efficient use of financial resources pertaining to program development and retrenchment and the needs of businesses and employers. Consequently, institutional goals and marketplace needs were inextricably linked and reflected how instructional roles were structured and organized. Faculty work was the result of the three interconnected strategies that work together to meet *institutional goals and priorities*, creating the conditions for high performance. I argued that unit collaboration, networked communication, and ideological consensus were important elements that contributed to the ways in which NCU *developed and executed* its organizational activities to provide *market-based teaching and learning* opportunities to its students in an efficient and productive manner.

Findings illustrated that NCU’s communication strategy provided the institution with numerous data points before making a final decision pertaining to the development [or discontinuation] of courses and programs. NCU draws transparent lines of authority; however, participants’ remarks illustrated two important aspects of organizational functioning. First, unlike traditional hierarchical organizations, communication at NCU was multi-directional. Directives, such as new ideas for courses, could flow upward from faculty to senior level administrators or downward from central administration to curriculum development teams and finally to instructors. Second, distribution of information between different organizational teams fostered effective communication lines between various internal and external units of the organization. Furthermore, a collective understanding of how the organization functions fostered a clearer understanding of institutional mission and goals.

Scholars have argued that organizations will not perform effectively when they do not foster group interaction or promote a shared vision across organizational units. For example, Meyer (2007) asserted that the use of teams fosters high levels of performance by focusing team efforts on creating synergy between organizational units. Moreover, the most successful cases suggested that a shared vision across teams provided the basis for creating organizational synergy. Mohrman, Cohen, and Mohrman (1995) contended that in order for team-based organizations to function productively, “information regarding the bigger picture—information regarding how the various parts [of the organization] fit together—must be widely held throughout the organization” (p. 182, brackets added). Similarly, Senge (1990) argued that organizational teams built around a shared vision are able “to create the results its members truly desire” (p. 218).

Tierney (2008) posited that traditional colleges and universities were ideological entities where members engage their values, beliefs, and expectations in their work. Yet, the purpose of a postsecondary education often is debated within the context of traditional colleges and universities. Faculty at TCUs cannot be expected to hold similar values and beliefs, especially with regard to the role of higher education in society. With regard to ideological consensus at NCU, faculty members interviewed for this study placed a high value on the needs of the market and did not view this focus as potentially detrimental to students and the public good. Participants generally regarded higher education as an individual benefit. As the most visible unit of the organization, NCU faculty, along with their work responsibilities, personified the institution’s ideological and paradigmatic perspectives.

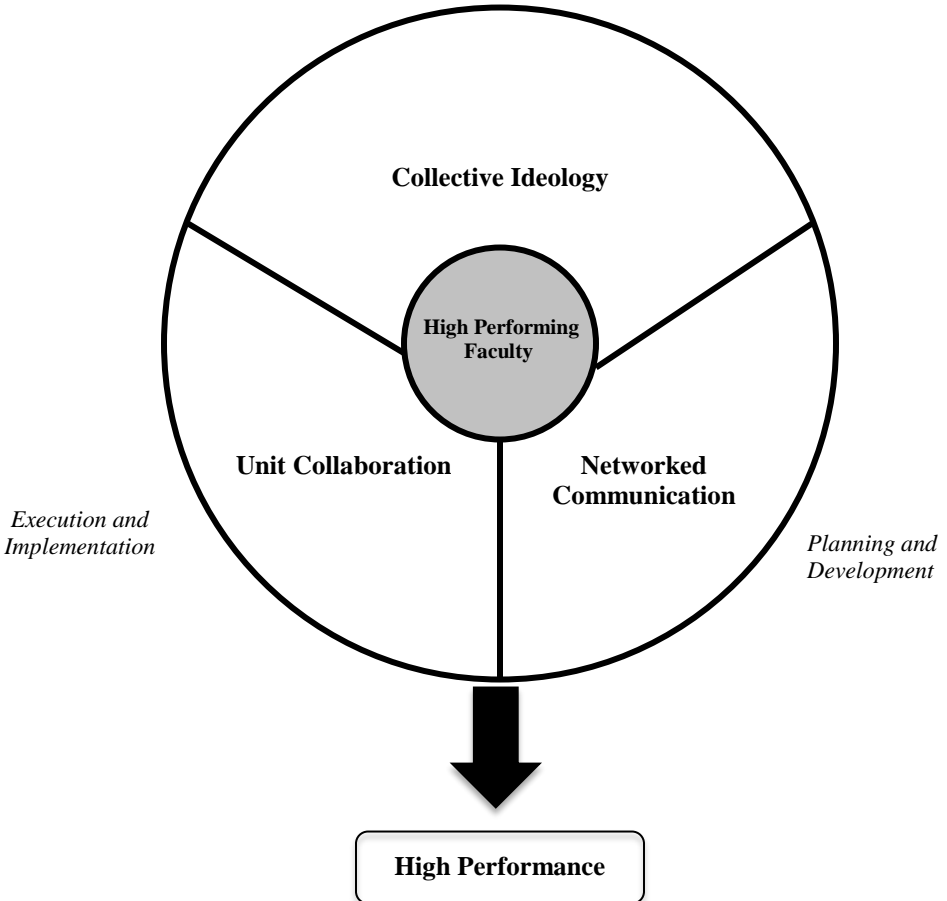
For-profit institutions function in a market-based arena, which serve as the basis for their ideological perspectives on the roles and responsibilities of their faculty. For instance, NCU did not offer tenure and was neither research-oriented nor, from an ideological perspective, concerned with fostering democratic principles for informed citizenship. Similarly, the unbundling of work responsibilities was a cost-saving mechanism that enabled, rather than hindered, group collaboration and provided faculty with role clarity. The nature of faculty roles as delimited and bounded gave rise to collaborative efforts between and amongst faculty and other units throughout the organization, such as the sharing of course notes and other materials, and the development of

curricula. Critics of FPCUs contended that the unbundling of faculty work leads to greater administrative authority by reducing the number of tenured/tenure-track positions while creating a second-class and marginalized group of faculty members (Rhoades, 1998; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). Such criticisms, however, are based on ‘traditional’ notions of faculty work at TCUs not FPCUs.

Findings also illustrated that NCU’s communication strategy provided the institution with numerous data points before making a final decision pertaining to the development [or discontinuation] of courses and programs. NCU drew transparent lines of authority; however, participants’ remarks illustrated two important aspects of organizational functioning. First, unlike traditional hierarchical organizations, communication at NCU was multi-directional. Directives, such as new ideas for courses, could flow upward from faculty to senior level administrators or downward from central administration to curriculum development teams and finally to instructors. Second, distribution of information between different organizational teams fostered effective communication lines between various internal and external units of the organization. Furthermore, a collective understanding of how the organization functions fostered a clearer understanding of institutional mission and goals. I offer a model (See Figure 1) that broadly illustrates the manner in which faculty work is structured and organized for high performance at NCU.

Organizing for performance requires colleges and universities to reconsider how fundamental activities are structured and organized. As Tierney (1998) asserted, “[colleges and universities] need to rethink, and of consequence, restructure what we do. Change ought not come from around the edges, but rather go to some of our core activities” (p. 3). In addition, he challenged academe to “think of different ways to think about academic rewards and activities” (p. 3). Faculty work at NCU was a function of organizational strategies meant to maximize organizational efficiency and increase performance within the context of the proprietary higher education sector. In accordance with Rummler and Brache’s (1990) assertion, for example, NCU can be viewed as high performing, in part, because it provided a clear understanding about the ways faculty interact with other units (i.e., administrators and external program boards) to accomplish institutional goals. As a result, NCU utilized and deployed faculty members in a unique manner given that their

Figure 1. A Strategic Approach to Organizing for High Performance

*Educational Goals and Priorities*

institutional goals are linked to profit generation, e.g., efficiency, productivity, and high performance. Thus, supporting Townsend and Rosser's (2007) findings that faculty productivity may be best defined in accordance with institution type – in this case FPCUs. Accordingly, faculty work is responsive only if it meets the needs of its constituents, regardless of institutional type. A shortcoming is that NCU faculty

relinquished autonomy in exchange for collaborative operational strategies (course consistency, uniform learning objectives, etc.) established to generate a profit.

## **Implications and Conclusion**

To be sure, I do not intend to suggest that the core values of the professoriate—tenure, academic freedom, and the unfettered pursuit of knowledge—be altered at TCUs to foster high performance. Instead, I offer a perspective of high performance based upon a case study of one for-profit institution—a model from which traditional colleges and universities can draw upon to consider ways in which faculty work can be organized to best serve the needs of their specific constituents within the context of traditional public and non-profit higher education. The creation and dissemination of knowledge must remain a fundamental principle of the academy. Yet, scholars argue that “new ways of reintegrating that which we have known in the past as faculty work will need to be developed” (Rice, 2006, p. 12). Moreover, “getting faculty to change the way they think about their work—moving from an individualistic approach (“my work”) to a more collaborative approach (“our work”)—is a critical transition that challenges deeply rooted professional assumptions” (Rice, 2006, p. 12).

This reflection echoes Fairweather’s (2002) suggestion to view productivity as best accomplished by faculty members working in units rather than as isolated individuals who are trying to be productive in all areas. The notion of the “complete scholar” (Rice, 1991) as one who is a skilled researcher, an outstanding instructor, and an individual who contributes greatly to the overall welfare of their university and scholarly community is a misnomer (Fairweather, 2002). Although there are exceptions, the ability for faculty to perform high in all three areas is arduous at best and impossible at worst. In its current form, faculty work at traditional private non-profit and public institutions compels faculty to focus their efforts on that which is rewarded most. As the literature suggests, faculty members are overworked because of their vigorous efforts to fulfill their teaching, research, and service responsibilities (Rice, Sorcinelli, & Austin, 2000).

I base the notion of high performance on the idea that increasing organizational efficiencies within the context of either for-profit or

traditional higher education arenas fosters greater productivity. Yet, how one defines “efficient” is dependent on institutional context. Structuring faculty work to be responsive to the needs of both internal and external constituencies at an FPCU is, in part, what differentiates them from TCUs. A fundamental component that contributes to NCU’s ability to be high performing is their focus on being responsive to marketplace needs. NCU and FPCUs in general, have redefined what it means to be a higher education institution. Scholars continue to debate the extent to which for-profit institutions serve the public good (Pusser, 2006; Tierney, 2010). Nevertheless, FPCUs such as NCU play a role in providing a well-trained workforce that serves the needs of an ever-changing job market. Ewell (1999) maintains that recognizing the changing nature of the public’s educational demands is critical for achieving high performing colleges and universities. Not unlike many community college programs, NCU focuses on workforce education and the development of human capital to serve societal needs. Its operational modes redefine the conventional notion of faculty work as teaching, research, and service, into one in which instructional functions dominate, work responsibilities are chosen not predetermined, and research responsibilities are nil.

Some similarities may exist with regard to the mission and goals of traditional institutions and those of NCU. The major difference between the two institutional types lies in the manner in which faculty members are deployed and utilized. TCUs structure faculty work as an individual endeavor—tenure is awarded based on an evaluation of an individual’s accomplishments—whereas faculty members at NCU function as one of a number of collaborative units. Despite their profit-seeking motives, FPCUs have the potential to produce an educated citizenry that is able to contribute economically to the public good (Pusser, 2006; Ruch, 2001; Tierney & Hentschke, 2008).

Scholars argue that restructuring the core activities of higher education institutions, including faculty work, may better serve the needs of students and the public (Chaffee, 1998; Fairweather, 2002; Rice, 2006). Many offer suggestions on how to utilize scarce financial resources more efficiently and productively (Fairweather, 2002; Johnstone, 2005; Tierney, 1998). Johnstone (2005) asserts that an important “issue within the financing of higher education [relates to] the efficiencies in which resources are employed in the higher education enterprise, and their

productivity” (p. 375). Faculty instruction is the single largest institutional expenditure; these costs will continue to rise as the college-going population increases. NCU along with numerous for-profit colleges and universities draws upon an education paradigm that focuses on ways to structure organizational activities in a manner that increases instructional efficiencies while effectively serving the needs of the market and maintains their commitment to skills-based and market-driven learning and instruction.

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