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Meeting Today's Governance Challenges: A Synthesis of the Literature and Examination of a Future Agenda for Scholarship

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Meeting Today's Governance Challenges

A Synthesis of the Literature and Examination of a Future Agenda for Scholarship

Over the past four decades higher education institutions have faced increasing complexity related to governance (Berdahl, 1991; Birnbaum, 1988; Kezar, 2000; Leslie & Fretwell, 1996). In particular, institutions now face even greater competing priorities and demands to engage the community, business, and industry; to solve social problems and improve the schools; to generate cutting edge research and innovations to fuel the economy; to develop a more just and equal society by preparing a diverse student body, while having fewer funds, more demands from students, and an increasingly complex legal environment (Eckel, Hill, & Green, 1998; Kezar, 2000). Three significant changes in the environment within the last decade make governance even more problematic and will be described in greater detail in this article: (1) the need to respond to diverse environmental issues, such as accountability and competition; (2) weak mechanisms for faculty participation, major faculty retirement with close to half of the faculty retiring in the next ten years and a more diverse faculty entering the professoriate; and (3) the need to respond more efficiently based on shorter decision time frames (Kezar, 2000).

The intense environmental demands on higher education place great responsibility and strain on institutional leaders to make wise decisions in a timely manner. Dill and Helm (1988) argue that "the substance of academic governance has changed" (p. 323). They note that traditional "maintenance" decisions, which include items such as the allocation of

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incremental budgets, modifications to the curriculum, and issues of faculty life are being replaced with “strategic policy-making” decisions. These new decisions are high stakes challenges that include the changing nature of scholarship, competing with new for-profit providers, prioritizing programs, choosing among new opportunities, and reallocating either shrinking or static budgets. Current decision-making systems (e.g., academic senates) were not created to cope with these types of decisions and demands (Schuster, Smith, Corak, & Yamada, 1994). These traditional academic governance structures face a cascade of criticism that they are slow and ineffective. Campus senates and other joint administrative-faculty committees need to design processes to resolve unprecedented problems that call for responsive solutions.

At the same time, governance is becoming less participatory, as few individuals care about or are involved in campus academic governance (Williams, Gore, Broches, & Lostski, 1987). At times when better, more thoughtful institutional decision making is needed, participation has diminished. Current trends work against widespread academic participation (fewer full-time faculty are employed, participation is not rewarded, other demands take precedence, and faculty allegiances to disciplines rather than to institutions (Carlisle & Miller, 1998; Fairweather, 1996; Finkelstein, Seal, & Schuster, 1999; Kezar, 2000; Schuster & Miller, 1989). An increasing proportion of the faculty are either part-time or have limited contractual affiliations with their institutions.

Some trustees, legislatures, and higher education associations say that shared governance limits an institution’s agility and flexibility, creating obstructions and sluggishness and fostering a predisposition toward the status quo (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1996; Schuster et al., 1994). To respond more quickly and to compensate for shrinking participation, some institutions have adopted increasingly bureaucratic systems (Rhoades, 1995). This administrative prerogative is characterized by more centralized, hierarchical administrative oversight, where quality is measured by the speed of decision making, not by the results (Hardy, 1990). Some leaders believe corporate approaches will improve institutional decision making and response time. However, studies of “corporate-like” approaches have documented disadvantages including lowered morale, interpersonal and organizational conflict, and loss of institutional values and integrity (Sporn, 1999). Although major changes in the environment are afoot, little scholarship has been conducted in the last decade to guide decision-makers.

There was a similar period of rapid change in the 1960s and early

1970s, with some of the same conditions. For example, a whole new cadre of faculty entered the professoriate and had little experience with governance. New participatory governance structures, such as academic councils, were proposed and faculty senates and student governments expanded. Although faculty and students had been part of campus governance for many years, their influence and power increased and was formalized in this time period. In the 1960s higher education researchers aimed to find strategies for successfully establishing these new structures and training new faculty.

In times of rapid change and expansion such as in the 1960s and today, research is particularly important. In the past three decades, there has been minimal scholarship on governance, notable exceptions include studies by Schuster et al. and Birnbaum in the late 1980s and Gumpert's work in the 1990s. Thus, colleges and universities have little scholarship to draw on in this critical transition era. In addition to the fact that few new studies have emerged, there is no summary of the extant scholarship on governance in order to inform either a research agenda or institutional change processes.

The aim of this article is to synthesize existing scholarship on governance in order to provide some guidance for current decision-makers as well as to highlight gaps in understanding to develop an agenda for future scholarship. The main thesis of this article is that previous scholarship focused almost exclusively on structural theories and to a lesser extent on political theories and provided limited explanation of, or few ideas for, improving governance. First, human dynamics have remained under investigated. Human relations, cultural, and social cognition theories remain underutilized theoretical frameworks in the study of governance, especially for exploring human conditions that affect governance. Second, few studies address the entire governance process; most scholarship focuses on subunits of analysis, such as student government, governing boards, or faculty senates. There is also virtually no scholarship on how these groups interact, for example, faculty senates and joint fiduciary committees. This gap in the literature suggests that an open-systems approach to the study of governance is needed. There is some promising scholarship currently being conducted by Burton Clark and Patricia Gumpert, which takes an open-systems approach that will be reviewed in this article.

In sum, the purpose of this article is to review theoretical perspectives that have been applied to the study of governance to identify conceptual gaps, to synthesize what we know about governance from existing scholarship to understand new directions, and to identify and suggest new questions for study, based on the gap analysis, encouraging a broad-based

agenda for scholarship on governance. To make a contribution to the higher education community, it is important to frame governance scholarship in more meaningful ways. Current work needs to be informed by past scholarship that has illustrated theoretical shortcomings.

Approaches to the Study of Governance

In this section, we review the major approaches to scholarship on governance. We will present major studies in chronological order to illustrate the progression of this line of inquiry over time. Structural approaches to the study of governance and the various models that have emerged such as professionalized bureaucracy or matrix organizations will be presented first. Open systems approaches to governance are also reviewed; the reader will note that early scholarship in this area focused mainly on structural elements of the environment. The second half of this section reviews studies that focused more on the human dynamic of governance, such as political and cultural theories. Governance scholarship has focused almost exclusively on structural theories, and to a more limited extent, political theories. Human relations, cultural, and social cognition theories remain underutilized theoretical frameworks in the study of governance. Human relations theories emphasize how people within organizations affect organizational processes and includes concepts such as motivation, training, and rewards (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Morgan, 1986). Cultural theories examine how symbolism, values, and beliefs affect institutional operations and focus on institutional climate and culture (Morgan, 1986). Social cognition theories explore how learning occurs within organizations or how people make sense of their environments (Argyis, 1994). Each of these three theories focuses the human dynamics of organizations whether it is thought, beliefs, or motivation. Cultural and social cognition theories were not prominent within the social sciences until the 1980s, but even scholarship conducted after that period has not tapped into these theories to better understand and improve campus governance.

A comprehensive search was conducted of all governance literature to examine the overall body of work. Studies were chosen for inclusion and more extensive review in the article based on two primary criteria: (1) inclusion in key books or higher education references such as the ASHE Reader Series; or (2) study has been widely cited. We also note that methodology is not a major focus in the article because it appears not to be limiting our understanding. Case studies, ethnographies, and surveys have all been used to understand issues of governance. It is not the methodology that appears to have limited researchers' views, but the

theoretical orientation brought to the study. Also, it should be noted that some scholarship on governance is “theorizing” rather than empirically based.¹ Both types of studies are described, but some authors have noted a paucity of empirical research, especially in-depth case studies (Birnbaum, 1991). The lack of empirical evidence to support explanations, descriptions, and theories of governance might also represent a weakness in its interpretive ability. However, the authors support the value of multiple types of scholarship (not just empirically driven); thus, all scholarship on governance is reviewed in the following section.

Before beginning the discussion of theories or scholarship on governance, it is important to define the term governance. Yet, this is a troubling task since each theory about governance is embedded with a different definition; almost every book and article avoids any clear or precise definition. At the broadest level, most theories assume that governance refers to the process of policy making and macro-level decision making within higher education. Governance has typically included scholarship on state boards, board of trustees, faculty senates, and student government. It is a multi-level phenomenon including various bodies and processes with different decision-making functions. Certain entities tend to have authority over specific kinds of decisions, such as faculty senates for curriculum or boards of trustees for budgetary issues.

Structural Studies of Governance

It is important to clarify some definitions related to structural theory as some argue that structuralism is a meta-theory that encompasses many individual theories such as professional bureaucracy or matrix organization (Bolman & Deal, 1991). Others suggest that structure is merely a concept that is part of other theories (Morgan, 1986). Still others use the term “bureaucracy” to refer to structural theory since structure is the key component to this model. Yet, not all structures need be hierarchical and well defined, thus we adopt the broader term “structuralism” over the narrow term bureaucracy. Regardless of the definition, structure has been the major emphasis within studies of governance the last forty years. One or two models presented in this section are not “purely” structural models, but structure is the predominant emphasis in all the models reviewed.

Scholars utilizing structural theories suggest that the most important aspect in understanding governance is to examine organizational structures such as lines of authority, roles, procedures, and bodies responsible for decision making. The major themes examined include centralization versus decentralization, authority, hierarchy, bureaucracy, size, efficiency, and rewards. The major assumption is that for any governance

process, a structural form can be designed and implemented to improve effectiveness and achieve ideal functioning. Scholars also study structure because they believe that it can be “managed” or altered more directly and because it influences social interaction, which can be more difficult to shape directly.

One of the first individuals to examine governance from a structural perspective was Clark Kerr. The notion of Kerr (1963) that the Multiversity was a structural description of the many changes that had occurred as a result of the increased federal and state support for higher education, trends toward massification, and the increasing number of constituents who had a stake in college and university operations. Kerr noted that “Flexner thought of a university as an ‘organism.’ In an organism, the parts and the whole are extricably bound together. Not so the multiversity—many parts can be added and subtracted with little effect on the whole or even little notice taken if any blood spilled. It is more a mechanism—a series of processes producing a series of results—a mechanism held together by administrative rules and powered by money” (p. 20). Kerr’s mechanistic octopus that can lose limbs at will provides one of the first structural images of governance that began to characterize scholarship for decades.

In addition to providing structural images of governance, Kerr and other scholars in the 1960s sought to understand how institutions could organize decision making on increasingly large campuses and determine whose voices should have authority in an environment where more people were demanding control (Dahl, 1962). Many studies of the 1960s and early 1970s attempted to delineate what bodies were making decisions—such as boards, presidents, departments, colleges, programs (and how much authority each entity possessed (Duryea, 1991; Gross & Grambasch, 1974). These studies identified the bureaucratic qualities of institutions and their salient features including chain of command, role differentiation, increasing number of policies, and systematizing of processes that were resulting from increased size and complexity (Mintzberg, 1979; Stroup, 1966). Additional scholars described the legal environment of governance, such as charters from states to institutions; federal, state, and local legislation that shapes academic governance; contractual arrangements and the like (Birnbaum, 1988; McGee, 1971). The emerging bureaucratic model contrasts with the collegial governance structures that some scholars suggested characterized many campuses prior to the growth and increasing complexity since World War II. Collegial governance models were characterized by informal decision making, consensus building, community of peers, and a high degree of personal interaction (Berdahl, 1991; Goodman, 1962; Millett, 1962).

Campus decision making moved from being predominantly centralized to increasing decentralization and diffuse authority structures, although for the most part authority has been divided between the trustees, administration, and faculty (Clark, 1963). Researchers demonstrated the usefulness of subunits (and bureaucratization) such as faculty senates, student governments, or campus councils as ways to distribute decision making effectively in complex organizations (Baldrige, 1971; Clark, 1963; Mintzberg, 1979). One major outcome of these early debates and scholarship was the 1966 statement on government of colleges and universities formed jointly by the American Association of University Professors, the American Council on Education, and the Association of Governing Boards for Universities and Colleges. The intent of the statement was to clarify roles in campus governance among the Board, president, faculty, and students and illustrate mutual interdependence.

In the 1970s, governance studies explored the impact of increasingly larger campuses, decentralization, and diffuse authority on campus decision making. For example, Weick developed the concept of coupled dependency that showed decentralized decision-making structures as slower, less efficient processes, yet loosely interconnected allowing for innovation and flexibility (Weick, 1979). He used higher education as an example of organizations that had achieved a workable balance between decentralized and centralized authority and decision-making structures. These characteristics gave colleges and universities an advantage over tightly coupled institutions in their ability to respond to changes because the organization as a whole does not have to respond to the environment, instead individual units could react. Furthermore, these individual units were able to sense more detailed and nuanced changes in the environment than the institution as a whole.

The organizational scholarship of Mintzberg (1979) in the late 1970s confirmed Weick's findings; he argued that the changes in the 1960s created a newly coined structure, the professionalized bureaucracy, in which democratic involvement disseminated power directly to professionals and created needed autonomy. Professional bureaucracies are able to organize large scale organizations, but to decentralize decisions to a large degree, as Mintzberg notes: "A single integrated pattern of decisions common to the entire organization loses a good deal of meaning within this structure" (p. 55). Although Mintzberg did not study only higher education institutions, his work was quickly utilized by higher education scholars since the organizational environments he studied, such as law and medicine, were closely aligned to higher education. Mortimer and McConnell (1979) also studied the distribution of authority (or delegated authority) across institutional decision-making structures, but they

were concerned that not enough mechanisms existed to ensure accountability. They wondered whether professionalism (championed by Weick and Mintzberg) would facilitate appropriate decision making (yet they offered no empirical support for this contention).

Around this time Cohen and March (1986) produced another major study of presidential leadership and governance, arguing that the large size and complexity of campuses, diffusion of authority, and decentralization of governance made presidential leadership less influential than commonly thought. Within certain universities authority was so diffuse that it lessened the leader's ability to influence decision making and later, implementation. Their study also identified a new organizational model—organized anarchy—and description of campus decision making—garbage can (March and Simon, 1994; March, 1981). The garbage can model applied to organizations with problematic goals, unclear technologies, and fluid participation—the organized anarchy of Cohen and March (1986).

The shared governance model has many of these characteristics. First, the goals are problematic, as institutions operate with a multitude of unclear, competing, and inconsistent goals, which can be accommodated in the shared governance arena. For example, faculty from different departments want different outcomes based on goals tied to their units and have different expectations of what shared governance can deliver. Second, the organization accomplishes its tasks through unclear technologies. Institutions do not clearly understand the processes that govern their activities and produce their outputs. Finally, participation is fluid: actors flow in and out of decision-making opportunities as they have a limited attention span and can only attend to a narrow number of tasks at any point in time. For example, large numbers of faculty may show up for one senate meeting, and the following week too few attend to constitute a quorum. The study of Cohen and March was much broader than merely structure; in fact, they were among the first scholars to focus on communication, information channels, leadership, and other aspects of governance that had been ignored (and their work will be described later in this article). But structure was a major aspect of their study, one that other scholars who read their work focused on most visibly.

Some interpreted the study of Cohen and March as critiquing governance structures or suggesting they were not as effective as they should be (Kerr & Gade, 1986). Keller (1983) felt that studies in the 1970s signaled that higher education governance had lost its ability to be efficient, responsive, and effective as it grew increasingly complex over the 1950s through the 1970s. Several commentators noted that higher education was being scrutinized by legislators and the public who demanded

greater standardization and centralization in addition to a more managerial approach (Fisher, 1984; Kerr & Gade, 1986; Mortimer & McConnell, 1979). New governance structures were needed to organize the increased number of individuals included in governance and the diffusion of authority. After studying existing structures, Keller (1983) recommended a more efficient approach, which he labeled Joint Big Decision Committees (JBDC). These new committees borrowed from a host of traditions: collegial structures that were representative across campus, a bureaucratic model that maintained highly structured roles and definitions of responsibilities, and a business model focusing on strategy, planning, and priority setting. The intent of the committee was to recentralize decision making and authority, in the hope that it would be more efficient, but maintain cross-campus input (Keller, 1983). Later studies of these committees found that many disbanded, others never got off the ground, and most did not work as hoped; the structures were not more efficient, and campus members had less ownership of decisions (Yamada, 1991).

Another major study undertaken by Schuster et al. (1994) examined strategic governance or strategic planning councils (innovative structures like the JBDC). The study examined joint planning and governance structures that were purported to enhance institutional decisions and policy by being more responsive to the environment, could be created more quickly, and were effective in including strategic priorities. However, similar to Yamada's study of JBDC, strategic planning councils were not successful (Schuster et al., 1994). In fact, the findings illustrated that structure usually does not guarantee that the process will work (Schuster et al., 1994). Structural alterations allowed campuses to tinker with decision-making processes but did not address major challenges, such as developing expertise needed to address complex decisions, weighing the viability of policy, or examining how efficiency and effectiveness would be affected by implementation. As more campuses began to experiment with ways to reconfigure governance processes in the 1980s, a series of studies related to participation levels (still focused on ways structures facilitated involvement) in governance were conducted, since there was concern that new approaches threatened shared governance (Williams, et al., 1987).

The 1980s brought new theories to the study of governance—in particular, open systems theory. Attention remained on governance structures, however. Mortimer and McConnell identified the growth of external forces on internal campus governance, noting that “faculties are beginning to realize that senates are no help when the enemy is the legislature or the governor. Senates themselves probably cannot invent

lobbying mechanisms to counteract these external forces" (1991, p. 165). They critiqued the AAUP/ACE/AGB joint statement on college and university governance for excluding important external groups that had a major effect on operations. In 1986 Alpert reinforced the findings of Mortimer and McConnell that models of governance had ignored the impact of external players such as accreditors, disciplinary societies, and state legislators. A better structural model for representing governance, he argued, was a matrix model (a concept from open systems theory) that included both internal and external forces related to governance. Although his model remains mostly untested, it is assumed that this approach would enhance responsiveness to the external environment, long a criticism of governance. A small body of research has looked at the relationship between collective bargaining units and faculty senates (Kermerer & Baldrige, 1981). This is one of the only early studies to examine layers of governance empirically.

Birnbaum's five-year inquiry (1985–1989) into college and university organization is the most extensive study of governance in the last thirty years. He too identified an open systems model as important for understanding governance. His work was the first to demonstrate the importance of cybernetics, a concept that emphasizes the need to recognize the linkages between various governance subunits, and that highlights the important role systems play in institutional choices (1988, 1989). Regardless of institutional size, Birnbaum argued, campus governance had layers/subsystems and was highly complex. A major assertion in his work is that campus governance systems are not efficient but highly effective, suggesting that efficiency and effectiveness may be antithetical when applied to campus governance. The overlap of authority and roles, for example, although redundant, allowed for better decisions to emerge. Dual systems of authority that accommodate the differing perspectives of faculty and administrators are the key to effective governance in that they retain both educational values (faculty) and responsiveness (administrators) (Berdahl, 1991; Birnbaum, 1991). Increasing efficiency may jeopardize effectiveness. His work reinforces that of Weick and Mintzberg. Structural clarification as suggested by researchers such as Keller (1983), Schuster and Miller (1989), Schuster et al. (1994), or even Alpert (1986) are not helpful for effectiveness and, in fact, are potentially dangerous.

A new set of studies conducted in the middle to late 1990s again focused on governance structures. The impetus for these studies came from public and political criticism that campuses were not responding quickly enough to external changes. Activist trustees assumed greater decision-making authority, becoming involved in areas that had previ-

ously been the domain of faculty and administrators. One well-publicized study by Benjamin and Carroll of the RAND Corporation suggested that campus governance was wholly ineffective and inefficient because of its structure (1998). Recommendations for restructuring campus governance included clarifying priorities and developing university-wide evaluation criteria for decision making. Yet, the authors conceded that only the constituents themselves could develop an appropriate structure, so they left the actual system modification to campuses.

In addition, AGB issued a new statement related to campus governance that focused on the need to temper shared governance and to pay more attention to external influences on the governance structure/process. Other critics cited earlier findings that few campuses actually practice shared governance (Baldrige, 1982; Mortimer & McConnell, 1979). The Mortimer and McConnell (1979) study showed that shared governance was not common at community colleges and comprehensive institutions but existed at only a small number of research universities and liberal arts colleges. They noted that the move to centralized authority and tempering of autonomy happened long ago. In addition, Mortimer and McConnell noted that structures needed to respect the size and culture of the particular campuses and that shared governance might not be appropriate in all environments. Even the most recent publications, such as Baldwin's and Leslie's article (2001) in *Peer Review*, entitled "Rethinking the structure of shared governance," illustrates that researchers continue to believe in the power of structure for improving governance.

The major focus of the literature—structures—has limited analytic capacity for understanding how governance functions or in addressing challenges facing campuses. Structure is important for establishing lines of communication, designating authority, and facilitating access, for example; but it has perhaps received too much attention in comparison to other important frameworks (more evidence for this assertion is provided in the next section). A study of senates from the 1970s summed up what many studies found: the structure was as good as the people on them each year (Riley & Baldrige, 1977). Ironically, studies examining structure find that people, interpersonal dynamics, and culture affect governance processes most and can be related to efficiency, responsiveness, and participation—the very three issues that many campuses currently struggle with (for example, Cohen & March, 1986; Lee, 1991; Schuster et al., 1994). Thirty years of scholarship demonstrate that structural variables/conditions explain few outcomes including effectiveness, implementation of policy, commonality of purpose, and the like.

From Structure to People

Earlier studies of structure illustrated the importance of people to the process, yet the conceptual emphasis on structure limited the depth, accuracy, and the use of the above findings. In other words, since the scope of most studies was not to study people, it was not a major focus of the results or discussion. The first major study to focus on the human side of governance was *Power and Conflict in the University* (1971) by Baldrige. In a political model, people throughout the organization are central to the process, since influence and informal processes are seen as critical to the formation of policy (Riley & Baldrige, 1977). Policy emerges from interest groups, conflict, and values; they are embedded in people, not structures. The major concepts underpinning political theory include interest groups, conflict, values, power and influence, negotiation, and bargaining. Baldrige's ethnography of New York University found that a political model helped to explain how decisions were made, but it also noted that bureaucratic and collegial models, were relevant to understanding how governance operated. The key contribution of his study was that it debunked the myth that colleges and universities are primarily rational decision-making bodies and that a formal process or structure determines how decisions are made. In fact, informal deal making was so prevalent in his case study that it would be hard to know when formal processes were responsible for a decision within governance. In his analysis Baldrige noted that his study failed to consider the way institutional structure may channel political efforts; yet, in the final analysis, interpersonal relations rather than structure shape the process.

Some might argue that although bureaucratic and rational models do not explain campus governance, they can be used to improve it. Keller (1983) and Schuster et al. (1994) made these arguments. The problem is that bureaucratic and rational models tend to exclude an examination of the role people play. Political models are not necessarily the most appropriate to guide campus governance; they are important because they help understand what conditions or factors affect governance.

Since the early 1970s, some studies have examined how political processes operate. For example, Kissler explored how the power of faculty versus administration varied during difficult financial times (1997). A study by Cohen and March (1974) was another major work to examine the human dynamics of governance. Garbage can decision making focuses on structural aspects of the environment, such as goals and technology, *as well as* human conditions, such as participation, motivation, leadership, communication, and information channels, which operate to problematize an idealized rational governance process, pointing to its am-

biguousness and challenges. The important contribution of Cohen and March of combining structural and human dynamics of governance was not followed up for almost a decade. Perhaps the negative connotations of the garbage can model made others apprehensive of pursuing this direction.

Birnbaum's major study (1985–1989) focused on the political aspects of governance. He found that certain campuses and subunits are particularly political and that this was related to effectiveness within certain settings, but that generalizations about the effectiveness of political processes were meaningless (1991). In other words, a successful political process on one campus may fail on another. In addition, he emphasized the importance of the collegium, which had been mostly invisible in the late 1960s through the 1980s. Certain campus processes are effective if they develop informal, consensus-based governance approaches. Lastly, Birnbaum (1988, 1991) focused attention on the way symbolism operates within governance. For example, he noted that faculty senates are important not because of their ability to make decisions (or as structures to channel authority) or even as a forum for competing interests to be argued (political model), but because they serve three symbolic purposes that are critical glue to campus organization and operations. Senates reinforce (1) institutional membership in the higher education system; (2) collective and individual faculty commitment to professional values; and (3) joint faculty/administration acceptance of the existing authority relationships (1991). Birnbaum's focus on the necessity of political, collegial, and symbolic processes underscores the importance of the human factors to the way governance operates.

Furthermore, the underlying assumption of his book, *How Colleges Work* (1991), is that good governance varies by institution and campus context. On a small campus, a collegium might be the best way to reach decisions effectively, whereas on a larger campus a more political approach might be more effective. His book aims to describe, rather than prescribe, a model(s) of governance, but its core arguments suggest that no single model or structure will be helpful for understanding and improving governance. Instead, what works will vary from campus to campus. This conclusion reinforces cultural theories in which the local context, history, and values override generalized strategies for improving governance, and they stand in contrast to structural theory, emphasized in the previous thirty years, that aim to develop ideal types.

Birnbaum's research opened up several promising new lines of inquiry, and his work acknowledged the deeply human dimension of governance by focusing on politics and symbolism. However, few people followed his work, and studies of structure continued to be predominant. A few exceptions exist, such as studies by Williams et al. (1987), Drummond and

Reitsch (1995), or Peterson and White (1992) on faculty and administrator attitudes and values and its affect on governance. Also, Barbara Lee (1989) conducted a case study analysis from a cultural perspective examining how the history of governance, faculty attitudes toward the senate, quality of faculty choosing to participate, and leadership continuity affect governance processes. Although the authors found a close relationship between human dimensions and successful campus governance, few researchers have followed up with more studies examining the way that human dynamics can affect governance. One recent exception is the research by Gumport (2002) that examined cultural and political conflicts in governance and suggests moving from individual interests in campus decision-making to an exploration of group and system interests.

An open systems approach is also receiving some attention in recent years, and the emphasis has expanded beyond structure. Clark (1998), Eckel (2003), Gumport and Pusser, 1999 and Leslie and Fretwell (1996) examined governance from an open systems perspective, focusing on how broader economic, political, and cultural forces affect campus decision making. They showed how shrinking public funding causes institutions to grapple with harder decisions that need to be made rapidly, the need to accommodate more students with less money, and the rise of accountability related to decision making. This research examines the interplay between the various layers of governance and external pressures, a critique within earlier governance studies.

However, the interaction of external governance systems with internal governance systems continues to receive minimal attention (Riley & Baldrige, 1977; Gumport, 2000), for example, governing boards and academic senates. Additionally, most subunit studies of governance focus on governing boards or student government, there is virtually no scholarship on academic councils, campus committees, faculty subcommittees, presidential cabinets, dean's councils and the like (Chait, Holland, & Taylor, 1996). Therefore, we know very little about certain aspects of formal and informal internal governance processes.

What Do We Know about Governance?

Although knowledge about governance has been stunted by an overemphasis on structuralism, there are some key findings that are important to summarize in order to develop a future agenda for scholarship. The findings are organized around major topics in the field and the key challenges facing governance including efficiency, effectiveness, participation, leadership, and responsiveness to the environment (Schuster et al., 1994). Efficiency is the value "all the more compelling under

conditions of financial constraint, of obtaining greater outputs (results) with fewer inputs (resources) and doing so with dispatch, avoiding the delays and quagmire of endless committees and meetings that are often viewed as the curse of traditional academic governance” (Schuster et al., 1994, p. 195). Effectiveness is the value of achieving a quality decision and is based on competence. It results in good organization (Birnbaum, 1988). Participation is the value of “inclusiveness, reaching out to internal and external stakeholders, and involving them in the processes that yield strategic decisions” (Schuster et al., 1994, p. 195). Leadership is a collective of individuals that influences, shapes, and creates change in a particular direction. Environmental responsiveness refers to the “process of identifying elements in the external environment, and accommodating the elements that have a legitimate role in influencing postsecondary education” (Schuster et. al., 1994, p. 195).

Efficiency

In governance scholarship, efficiency has been a primary focus because management processes are constantly being scrutinized for their speed and organization. Repeatedly, studies find that size of the governance structure/process and complexity impact efficiency of the decision process (Birnbaum, 1988; Cohen & March, 1974; Lee, 1991; Mintzberg, 1979). The larger the size of both the institution and structures involved in the process, for example, a faculty senate with 100 members rather than 30, the more time consuming the process tends to be. Decisions that are complex will usually need greater thought and debate and tend to involve protracted discussion (Dill & Helm, 1988; Schuster et al., 1994). Another major factor impacting efficiency is the composition and role of governance bodies (Dill & Helm, 1988; Lee, 1991). If the composition of the governance body includes key individuals and expertise that are necessary, then the process becomes more efficient (Dill & Helm, 1988). Furthermore, if the governance body has a clear understanding about its role, less time is spent clarifying purpose and moving toward accomplishing the task (Gilmour, 1991; Mortimer & McConnell, 1979). Providing inadequate institutional support (secretarial/administrative and financial) has been related to less efficiency (Gilmour, 1991, Schuster et al., 1994). Basic tasks, such as minutes from meetings, mailings, etc., are hindered if institutional support is missing. Technology has most likely helped to overcome some of these issues, but this remains an area of concern related to efficiency. Scholars have identified key conditions that affect efficiency because structural studies placed a great emphasis on this area. Yet the scholarship suggests that efficiency is not a particularly important principle, since some

level of inefficiency enhances decision-making effectiveness. Efforts to improve efficiency might merely have a negative impact on effectiveness (of decision making), based on the scholarship of Weick (1979) and Birnbaum (1988). The relationship between efficiency and effectiveness needs more study to be sure that valuable learning or institutional knowledge is not lost.

Effectiveness

Several conditions have been identified as critical to effectiveness, including clarification of roles, lateral coordination, redundancy of function, reward structures, consultation and joint formulation, trust and accountability, norms and values, composition of the governance groups, and leadership. Clarifying roles was found to be related to effectiveness, not only efficiency (Berdahl, 1991; Mortimer & McConnell, 1979; Schuster, 1984). Governance processes without a charge, guidelines, focus, or priorities typically failed compared to those with clarity of purpose and role (Mortimer & McConnell, 1979; Schuster et al., 1994). These clear roles need to be buttressed with lateral coordination (meetings and communication that is established within a division and is not part of the chain of command), such as meetings and informal communication that provide opportunities to process information, to distill better ideas, and to disseminate emerging ideas to key constituents (Lee, 1991). Therefore, formal hierarchical processes cannot be depended on alone: informal interaction outside the hierarchy is key. Birnbaum's research suggests that in higher education, effectiveness is related to inefficiency or at least a level of redundancy in function. Learning organization theorists also argue that although organizations appear less efficient, they are actually more efficient because decisions that are made in a decentralized and redundant approach are implemented more quickly and with greater ownership and understanding (Argyris, 1994; Senge, 1990).² Yet, the research of Birnbaum's (1988) also confirmed that clearer structures—committees with clear charges and defined roles—shape effectiveness. Thus, even though some level of inefficiency and redundancy is needed, clarity about structure affects effectiveness. Lack of rewards for participation in governance shapes both effectiveness (not attracting strong people to these roles on campus) and efficiency, in terms of people making governance a low priority (Dill & Helm, 1988; Gilmour, 1991; Mortimer & McConnell, 1979). Able faculty are not attracted to participate in governance because of promotion and tenure standards that de-emphasize service on most campuses (Gilmour, 1991).

Over time, structurally framed studies of effectiveness in governance began to find more deeply human issues emerging as important. For ex-

ample, having appropriate composition was related to efficiency as well as to effectiveness. Having expertise on the issues involved with the governance process improves decisions (Dill & Helm, 1988). Based on these findings, Dill and Helm (1988) argue for competence over interest group representation in governance. A democratic political process (this includes elected officials to Boards) does not ensure, but often detracts from, effectiveness, because individuals either do not have the necessary expertise or they represent specific interests rather than the overall institutional good. The joint framing of issues and agenda between those in positions of authority—Boards and Presidents—and those with delegated authority—faculty and administrators—leads to greater effectiveness (Lee, 1991). In addition to joint framing, a carefully constructed consultation process for involvement of faculty has been tested and established (Dill & Helm, 1988). Consultation increases the institutional knowledge applied to governance and develops ownership that often facilitates implementation (Mortimer & McConnell, 1979). The major components of the consultation process include early input, joint formulation of procedures, adequate time to formulate responses, availability of information, adequate feedback, and communication of decisions (Dill & Helm, 1988). Several studies confirm that carefully mapping the process to ensure consultation, adequate timing, and information are the best way to guarantee an effective process. The importance of developing consultative processes is also confirmed by studies that illustrate that governance processes have been brought to a halt when feedback is not followed or advisory capacity unclear (Lee, 1991; Schuster et al., 1994). Effectiveness is heavily related to trust or a sense of accountability on the part of the board that listens to the council/senate or whatever governance bodies exist on campus (Lee, 1991; Schuster et al., 1994). Eckel's work (2000) on the role of governance in program reduction identified norms and values as key to effectiveness. Agreement on expectations/values and adherence to operating norms within decision making was found as one of the most important conditions to effectiveness, even within difficult decisions, such as closing academic departments.

Studies began to confirm that relationships between and among groups were the major prerequisite for fostering effectiveness. One study noted that the interpersonal dynamics between the president and senate chair were instrumental to success or failure (Lee, 1991). In particular, work by Schuster et al. (1994) confirmed people significantly impact the process: out of the ten institutions studied, leadership or leadership style had the most significant impact on governance effectiveness. This confirmed earlier findings that interpersonal dynamics, group process, group motivation/interest, and committee membership

were among the most significant issues that campus should focus in order to improve governance. Also, their study confirmed the research of Dill and Helm (1988) that the level of knowledge of individuals involved in the process affects outcomes such as effectiveness. Based on these findings, some researchers have begun to emphasize the need for leadership development among senate chairs and other key positions rather than restructuring, the most popular solutions to improve governance the last forty years (Lee, 1991; Schuster et al., 1994). One major source of concern and an area of significant study in the 1970s was collective bargaining and its affect on participation and effectiveness. Collective bargaining and shared governance have been found to coexist, and collective bargaining has minimal negative impact on governance effectiveness (Baldrige, 1982; Gilmour, 1991; Lee, 1991).

Participation

Several studies have examined the relationship between participation and successful governance. Over the years, many restructuring efforts have attempted to increase or limit participation, the latter being related to needs for efficiency. In some studies, however, participation leads to satisfaction among those involved in the process; it is a positive outcome of a successful process (Birnbaum, 1988; Williams et al., 1986). In some studies, greater participation has been found to lead to greater effectiveness (Weick, 1979; Williams et al., 1986). This relates to the issue of a consultative process described in the section on effectiveness. It appears that more inclusive processes with broad participation increase the likelihood of valuable input that can improve a policy or decision. One of the problematic findings is that what participation means is interpreted uniquely by individuals/groups (Birnbaum, 1988; Williams et al., 1987). At one institution participation might mean having representatives with advisory involvement on a campuswide committee, yet on another campus it might mean all faculty having voting privileges. It is hard to generalize about what level of participation will make the process effective, successful, or lead to satisfaction. Also, faculty satisfaction with governance is related to knowing that involvement makes a difference (Dimond, 1991). Thus, participation alone is not adequate. Being able to see that input has altered decisions or been taken into consideration is necessary for involvement to be considered legitimate and leads to greater involvement and long term has been related to greater effectiveness and efficiency (Lee, 1991; Dimond, 1991).

Leadership

There has been conflicting evidence around the importance of leadership for effectiveness and efficiency within the governance process.

Cohen and March (1986) and Birnbaum (1988) suggest that senior leadership plays a lesser role than commonly believed but can be influential in certain circumstances. In particular at the higher levels, among presidents, leadership is diffused by other conditions and factors. However, neither of these studies examined middle-level leadership among chairs, deans, and faculty. In contrast, Schuster et al. (1994) confirmed empirically what many people had suspected for years: leadership or leadership style significantly shapes governance in terms of both effectiveness and efficiency, as well as many other outcomes, such as implementability and ownership. Schuster et al.'s study did examine leadership more collectively across the institution both formal and informal, rather than examining only positional leaders. Gumport and Dauberman (1999) identified that presidents and other campus leaders interviewed felt agency for attempting to reshape governance processes and were beginning to play a larger role in this endeavor than in the past. At present, there have been few studies on the effect of leadership, and the evidence is mixed.

Responsiveness to the Environment

The evidence suggests that higher education is responsive to its environment, but that the time it takes to respond may be longer than some groups or individuals find acceptable. Studies from an open systems approach were most likely to explore responsiveness to the environment. The work by Weick (1979) and Birnbaum (1988) on loose coupling is instrumental in understanding responsiveness. Loose coupling allows for adaptation by individual units rather than the whole institution; the response can be more nuanced to changes in the environment that subunits identify, and changes can happen without creating disequilibrium for the whole institution. Every unit within an institution need not focus on the same elements in the external environment. Thus, a College of Education can adapt to a new teacher certification examination without causing the physics department to overhaul its undergraduate curriculum. If the adaptation undertaken in one part of the loosely coupled organization is unsuccessful, the weak linkages among units seal off the dysfunction so it does not infiltrate other areas of the organization. This early scholarship on responsiveness is consistent with later research in the 1990s on learning organizations that illustrates that redundancy and loose coupling allows for greater organizational learning, flexibility, and ability to respond to external conditions, leading to improved decision making (Senge, 1990).

More recent work by Gumport and Pusser (1999) has discovered that state systems and institutions have responded to external concerns in

recent years with restructuring efforts such as adopting year-round calendars, distance learning initiatives, and new forms of assessment. Slaughter and Rhodes (1997) found that institutions have revised curricula to meet market demands and altered faculty work life in order to address concerns for accountability. Large-scale shifts within institutions can be attributed to governance and have been identified when examining the system and/or specific institutions. Yet, these studies do not explain how a campus might be more responsive to the environment or what campus governance mechanisms were responsible for effective response to the environment, with the exception of the loose coupling of Weick (1979) and Birnbaum (1991). The RAND Corporation (1998) studied how long organizations took to respond to external changes and concluded that response time was too slow. Yet, their assumptions about the timing of decisions are neither well explained nor adequately supported.

Most scholarship has focused on how higher education responds to the external environment, yet a few studies have focused on ways institutions might shape external influences. Mortimer and McConnell (1979) and Alpert (1986) examined the ability of faculty senates and other internal bodies to influence external factors and found they had minimal ability (as currently configured and conceptualized) to impact legislators and other external forces that affect campus decision making. This is another gap in our understanding that needs more scholarship, since these studies are from the 1970s and early 1980s.

In summary, scholarship has illustrated factors that are related to efficiency and effectiveness. In particular, campus efforts to increase efficiency can be greatly enhanced by using the principles outlined in earlier studies about clarifying roles or moderating size of governance structures. Effectiveness can also be enhanced by attention to a variety of structural and human factors, such as expertise of individuals appointed and developing a clear consultation process. Restructuring has a minimal affect on improvement or effectiveness, but leadership development has strong potential. Change agents should utilize this knowledge in refashioning approaches to campus governance. For example, since we know that role definition and clear charges are important to governance processes, then campus procedures around the development of committees should institutionalize this process. Knowledge about collective and informal leadership, participation, group dynamics and other human characteristics is more limited, but available data about the importance of the relationship between the senate chair and president, for example, should be used to improve campus processes. The gaps in our understanding provide a clear agenda for future scholarship.

What We Need to Know about Governance: A Future Agenda for Scholarship

The many failed efforts at restructuring governance, coupled with scholarship that suggests structure has a marginal affect on effectiveness (and minimally shapes efficiency, responsiveness to the environment, and participation) should lead us to question reliance on a particular framework and to move in new directions.³ Several key areas of inquiry remain unexplored, namely, human relations, social cognition, and culture. Open systems theory has received some attention but is also under-represented. Although we feel that applying more theoretical perspectives is an important conceptual task in order to understand governance better, we also believe that this process will assist in providing information related to meeting the governance challenges posed at the beginning of the article. The challenges of participation will, most likely, be more thoroughly understood through human relations and cultural studies. Responsiveness to the environment, such as discussions related to market forces, can be understood better with attention to open systems theory. In this section, we highlight some questions that might be posed within these four theoretical perspectives which can help shed light on both perennial questions of efficiency, effectiveness, and leadership as well as address challenges of the new governance environment.

Human Relations Theory

The most obvious line of scholarship is to continue to understand the human dynamics of governance through *human relations theory*. A majority of studies of human dynamics in governance have focused on documenting demographics or characteristics of individuals involved (Gilmour, 1991; Pope & Miller, 1999; Reyes & Smith, 1987). These studies do little to help address effectiveness or responsiveness to the environment. Human relations theories focus on leadership development, training, personality, motivation, and relationships. New scholarship should further explore findings that relationships, knowledge base, and leadership development are related to effectiveness and efficiency. The following questions would begin to increase our understanding of leadership development, knowledge of people in the governance process, motivation, relationships/interaction, and current challenges related to the shift in the faculty to part-time and contract faculty.

- Do particular efforts at leadership development and training enhance governance? If so, which ones and why?

- Because the composition of committees and expertise of individuals involved in governance has a significant impact on success, campuses need to know what strategies for choosing and developing committees or governance groups work best.
- Since composition is shaped by motivation and willingness to serve, perhaps one of the most important questions is: what type of institutional culture can be developed to encourage involvement in governance?
- Another core concept is relationships among groups on campus. Literature in organizational theory suggests that the ways in which campuses facilitate and improve relationships among groups, such as faculty and administrators, boards and presidents, or academic and student affairs staff, can have positive effects (Peterson & White, 1991). But questions still remain such as: What are the best ways to develop trust and a sense of accountability in the governance process? Are relationships among diverse faculty and staff (different race, gender, social class) related to campus decision making?
- Given the current shift to part-time and contract faculty, many human relations issues are likely to emerge since there are few full-time faculty with the time and commitment to participate in governance. What training and rewards are most successful to encourage part-time and contract faculty to become involved in governance, for example?

A major focus of study should be placed on how governance can be improved through the human dynamic. Human relations theories might be critical in addressing the concerns about participation in governance—a concern of campus leaders in the new governance environment.

Social Cognition Theory

Because governance is essentially a process for capitalizing on the intelligence of the organization, it seems critical that theories about social cognition and learning organizations be brought to this area of study. *Social cognition theories* focus on how individuals and organizations learn and examine knowledge structures, paradigms, schema, cybernetics, sensemaking, cognitive dissonance, causal maps, and interpretation (Argyris, 1994; Morgan, 1986). There are a plethora of important unanswered questions:

- What level of redundancy within the decision-making process is needed to create learning?

- Do optimal strategies exist to capitalize on learning? How does size of the governance process and participation affect learning?
- What process and expertise are more effective for addressing complex decisions noted by Dill and Helm (1988) in the new governance environment? How does trust or availability of information relate to learning?
- How do group dynamics facilitate or hinder learning about governance?
- How can we capitalize on the knowledge of part-time and contract faculty, especially since their work conditions are quickly becoming the norm?

Social Cognition theories may be able to address some of the concerns with the new governance environment related to strategic decisions and complex policy development with multiple stakeholder input and conflicting data.

Cultural Theory

Birnbaum (1988), Lee (1991), Eckel (2003), and Schuster et al. (1994) suggest that culture shapes the governance process in profound ways and that *cultural theory* is important to understand governance. Birnbaum's work on governance found that efficiency and effectiveness cannot be defined universally. What is good governance varies by institutional culture. He asserts that to develop a rubric of strategies for creating effectiveness across a host of institutions will fail, since global strategies are not likely to work. Although this finding could be contested, it influences the direction governance scholarship might take in the future. Repeated attempts over the last 40 years to develop a formula for efficiency and effectiveness should be questioned. Lee's case study of three campuses found that institutional culture shapes the governance process and provides an important direction for future scholarship. Her findings explore how institutional culture can thwart or facilitate governance processes. For example, a history of mistrust between faculty and administrators had an impact on the success of governance at institutions. Schuster et al. (1994) confirmed the earlier studies of both Birnbaum and Lee. The ten institutions in that study were hindered or empowered by their institutional cultures, and governance took a unique shape because of institutional culture. This is a significant area in need of scholarship that also focuses on the human dimension of governance. Are there a core set of cultural issues that shape governance? How can campuses examine their institutional culture related to governance? Are

there values central to a successful process? Are there ways to eliminate cultural obstacles? Within the new governance environment, faculty and administration is increasingly diverse. Cultural theories might help understand the challenge presented by more diverse values systems being brought to the governance process.

Open Systems Theory

Scholarship on responsiveness to the environment or the interplay of various levels of governance is underrepresented and can be illuminated by the application of *open systems theory*. Few studies focus on overall governance, most study subunits such as student government or governing boards. There is also virtually no scholarship on the interaction of various subunits such as faculty senates with governing boards. This oversight has severely limited our understanding of the overall process. Reyes and Smith (1987) proposed four conceptually distinctive layers of governance: system governance, institutional governance, college governance, and departmental governance. Researchers using an open systems approach to the study of governance would greatly improve our understanding of how various levels affect each other. Market forces have always affected decision making and policy in higher education, yet few researchers have examined this relationship—an example of one of the many conditions that campuses need to be more attentive to within the new governance environment. Scholars will help campus leaders by providing more attention to these aspects of responsiveness that are part of the changing governance process. Many additional research questions need to be answered:

- How do system, institutional, college, and departmental governance overlap and affect each other? How can these various layers interact to increase effectiveness and efficiency?
- What level of participation is important among these various levels?
- How does the market affect decision making and policy on campus? What influence do students as consumers have?
- How and why are some pressures for change more easily responded to by some levels of governance than others? What factors account for responsiveness to the environment?
- In what ways will globalization in the higher education area impact governance and institutional responsiveness?
- How is authority interconnected within these various levels of governance? What is the appropriate level of responsiveness to the environment for a higher education “institution?”
- More studies are needed that define what is the acceptable amount of time it takes an “institution” to respond to societal pressures.

Higher education is distinctive from other organizations in that it is an “institution” in the sociological use of the term. Some of the defining characteristics of institutions are that they: (1) serve long-standing missions; (2) are tied closely to ongoing societal needs; (3) have set norms and socialization processes based on the mission and needs of society; and, (4) have norms that are tied closely to individuals’ identities (Czarniawska & Sevon, 1996). Because these organizations have long-standing missions, they perhaps should not respond quickly to societal shifts and perhaps should engage in extensive debate among stakeholders, because these organizations serve so many enduring societal needs.

Although it would be tempting to prioritize these various gaps in our understanding, it is impossible to know before some initial studies have been conducted which areas will provide the most fruitful scholarship. The intent of this article is to illustrate the need to examine some new directions and to encourage researchers to follow them, but not to be prescriptive.

In sum, this article is not meant to suggest that structure is not important to governance, but that there has been an overemphasis on this theoretical approach and that other questions need to be pursued. Researchers need to expand the theoretical perspectives used, in addition to using several approaches simultaneously. Structure will overlap and inform many of the proposed areas of scholarship, for example, looking at reward structures when examining motivation to participate in governance through the human relations theories. Bill Tierney explains why many researchers have focused on structure when studying organizations: “Too often in hard times we look for academic heroes who might lift us up out of the morass or seek villains we think are responsible for the mess. Leadership becomes the battle cry of trustees. Thus, I focus on systems and structures rather than on people and personalities” (1998, p. 4). We are not arguing that change agents forget this important role of systems and structures. Rather, we argue that human, social cognition, and cultural theories should be used in combination with systems and structures to create a richer understanding of governance.

Although this critique has focused on theoretical approaches as one of the main vehicles for understanding governance, there may be other issues that affect our knowledge base. For example, as noted earlier, there is a paucity of inductive studies that might develop new theoretical perspectives not currently used to understand governance. There have been few large-scale, in-depth case studies (mostly due to the cost of such an undertaking). Also, there may be an underemphasis of empirical studies about governance; the scholarship has at times been anecdotal or

deductive theorizing. The critique offered in this article should be coupled with these other potential problems within the scholarship on governance.

Conclusion

Campuses across the country are being asked to respond to a host of challenges: technology, diverse and changing populations, competition, financial stress, and globalization to name a few. Yet, campus decision-making mechanisms, in most instances, may not be prepared to handle these increasingly complex issues. Many campus leaders have begun the work of rethinking their approach to governance, but limited scholarship exists to guide their efforts. It is imperative that scholarship become available in the near future to assist campuses with both ideas for improvement and explanation of the benefits of the current system. The scholarship conducted in the 1960s and 1970s was instrumental in helping to develop campus senates, to invent models for diffusing authority, and to provide mechanisms for more decentralized and participatory systems.

We hope that the current dilemmas related to limited participation, perceived inefficiency, and lack of responsiveness to the environment can be better understood through scholarship that taps novel theoretical perspectives and that draws attention to the human dynamics and complex web of governance systems.

Notes

¹The broad term *scholarship* refers to all work, whether empirically based or not. In this article scholarship is used to refer to the broad body of literature, theorizing for non-empirical, and research is used for empirically oriented projects to differentiate these two concepts and so they are not conflated.

²Learning organizations will be defined and described in greater detail in the last section of the article.

³The focus of this article is on theoretical approaches brought to the study of governance; however, another critique that could be offered is that there have not been enough inductive studies for developing theory or insights from grounded theory. This certainly should be coupled with the theoretical concerns we are providing within this article. Scholars might also learn about ways to be responsive or more participatory through inductive case studies.

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