Leadership for Program Prioritization Exercise

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Northern Illinois University (NIU) began its program prioritization process in the Fall of 2015 and reallocated resources based on the prioritization process in the Fall of 2017 (Northern Illinois University, 2015). First, NIU developed an eleven-member coordinating team and sent them to a training conference hosted by an external organization. The team members were chosen based on their varying specialties and organized into the following four subunits: institutional research (IR) and data analytics, program design and implementation, marketing and communication, and expert advisors from executive leadership (Northern Illinois University, 2015). All subunits have three members except for the expert advisors from executive leadership which is composed of only two members.

Of this team, I would most like to be a member of the IR and data analytics subgroup. I strongly support the scientific method and data-driven decision making and enjoy identifying, collecting, analyzing, and presenting relevant data. This data is vital to establish a comprehensive narrative reflecting both the organizational context as a whole and individual programs to be evaluated (Dodd, 2004). This data-derived narrative must be concise, accurate, and easy to understand to inform the coordination team's actions (Northern Illinois University, 2015).

Currently, I teach about 750 high school students either chemistry, biology, or physics once each week. Collecting assessments, analyzing resulting data, and collaborating with the students' other teachers regarding their performance requires organization and interdepartmental communication. This communication is fostered by consistency and provides opportunities for collaboration. These transferrable skills will likely be useful in addressing potential "cross-organizational silos" in a higher education institution (Penn State World Campus, n.d., p. 4). Decreasing departmental silos will allow for a more accurate narrative of an organization's environment, relationships, and challenges.

Higher education institutions routinely conduct self-assessment and peer review for improvement and accountability through maintaining accreditation by a regional agency (Dodd, 2004).

This process "yields rich data for institutional improvement" that is surely useful in the program prioritization process by determining the effectiveness of a program (Dodd, 2004, p. 14). In fact, "resource allocation and plans for improvement and program renewal" is an output of the accreditation process (Dodd, 2004, p. 17). Therefore, NIU could adopt an outcome-focused accreditation framework, which is likely familiar to faculty and staff, to guide their program prioritization process (Northern Illinois University, 2015).

Fortunately, NIU's coordination team is perfectly positioned to adapt the accreditation framework, "The Baldridge Criteria for Performance Excellence in Educational Organizations" to prioritize and assess institutional programs (Dodd, 2014, p. 22). This outcome-focused framework is composed of seven interconnected criteria with "an emphasis on improvement trends, benchmarking, stakeholders, and learning outcomes" (Dodd, 2014, p. 22). As a member of the IR and data analytics subunit, I would be a member of the "results triad" and be able to identify and analyze data for the other coordination team subunits who are members of the "leadership triad" to make data-driven, output focused program prioritization decisions (Dodd, 2014, p. 22).

Finally, I prefer to be involved in behind-the-scenes, supportive roles rather than assuming roles responsible for direct communication with faculty and staff or making the final decision to keep or eliminate a program (Dickenson, 2010). Currently, I lack experience within a higher education institution, so I hope to use transferrable research skills I am comfortable with to support more experienced teammates on projects such as program prioritization while I gain hands-on experience that will prepare me to lead a similar initiative in the future.

References

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