Rethinking the Culture of Academic Life

Richard F. Bowman, Winona State University

Bowman, Ph.D. is Professor Emeritus of Clinical Practice at Winona State University

Abstract
Culture resides at the synapses where people interact. Organizations do not change unless people change. An academic culture expresses the shared sensibility of one's colleagues and students. The underlying theme of an academic culture is captured in the playfully dismissive expression: "That's the way we do things around here." There are three distinctive models of academic culture: professionalism as a force for cultural renewal, self-governance as a catalyst for cultural transformation, and culture as a self-correcting system of language.

Introduction
The purpose of this paper is to identify the defining characteristics of three distinctive models of cultural renewal in academic settings:
- o   Professionalism as a force for cultural resocialization.
- o   Self-governance as a catalyst for cultural transformation.
- o   Culture as a self-correcting system of language.

Compelling Narratives: Challenge, Struggle, and Resolution
Throughout history, the building blocks of all compelling narratives have remained intact: Challenge, struggle, and resolution. The stories that hold us captive surface an unexpected challenge, narrate the emotional struggle to overcome that challenge, and galvanize the listener's response with an eye-opening resolution that calls one to action (Guber, 2011). Tellingly, a story that fails to deliver a surprise is characteristically stillborn. Neuroscientist Dan Siegel decoded the seminal elements of surprise as "expectation + violation of expectation" (Guber, p. 22). That is, a truly evocative narrative emerges from violations to one's expectations. Authentic stories also employ drama to unmask the hidden truth about a challenge that an individual or organization is facing and, importantly, guide the listener to feel that he or she is uncovering that truth oneself. Finally, at the end of a persuasive story, listeners tend to think: "We never expected that—but somehow it makes perfect sense." Thus, "a great story is never fully predictable through foresight--but it's projectable through hindsight" (Guber, 2007, p. 57).

For thousands of years, tribal cultures such as those in the Upper Wahgi Valley in New Guinea have shared oral narratives to ensure that the vital details of their myths and legends remained intact from one generation to another (Guber, 2011). Through stories repeated across time, tribal cultures have faithfully passed down the essential elements and meaning of the values, beliefs, and structures of governance that have held their tribes together. In tribal initiation rites, tribal elders have modeled we-conscious language to underscore the natural propensity of individuals to cooperate productively in communities of engagement (Mintzberg, 2009). In their ten-year study of more than twenty-four thousand individuals in educational, medical, and business organizations on four continents, Logan, King, and Fischer-Wright's (2008b) research findings point to a ubiquitous phenomenon that is seemingly invisible to many people. That is, tribes remain "the basic building block of any large human effort, including earning a living" (p. 4). In world of soulless PowerPoint slides, birds still flock, fish still school, and colleagues still tribe culturally.

The Culture of Academic Life: The Challenge
Colleagues have a fundamental human need for social and emotional belonging. They have an overarching need for guiding values and a sense of purpose that gives life and work meaning. They have a compelling need for conversation and engagement with others in pursuit of shared beliefs and aspirations. Intuitively, colleagues sense that organizations cannot function optimally without a bedrock level of trust (Bowman, 2002). Contextually, colleagues are immersed in a social architecture which confronts them with four foundational questions: "Who am I? What am I a part of? What connects me to the rest of the world? What relationships matter to me? (Bressler & Grantham, 2000, p. 161) Maslow framed the cultural challenge piercingly: "We do what we are and we are what we do" (Donkin, 2001, p. 232).

A recent Google search of the term academic culture yielded 149,000,000 results. Embedded in those results are the traits of four basic types of organizational culture: Anarchy, blind obedience, informed acquiescence, and values-based self-governance. The four basic types of culture describe "how organizations create the rules, structures, policies, and procedures that shape the way that individuals behave and perform" (Seidman, 2007, p. 241). A school or university, for example, may well have a number of different, related cultures operating simultaneously within it. Each of those organizational cultures manifests itself in every aspect of daily life on campus from the questions asked, initiatives supported, achievements measured and highlighted, lessons learned from mistakes, and priorities set and pursued (Hrabowski, 2013). To understand the dimensions of academic cultures, together with their promise for cultural renewal in academic life, we will consider three distinctive models of group culture: (a) professionalism as a force for cultural resocialization, (b) self-governance as a catalyst for cultural transformation, and (c) culture as a self-correcting system of language.

The Culture of Academic Life: The Struggle
An academic culture expresses the shared sensibility of one's colleagues and students. It reflects the values, principles, habits, mind-sets, history, lore, and legends that influence how individuals behave organizationally. An academic culture is not an irrational set of beliefs but rather "is the embodiment of past beliefs and practices that have become institutionalized as a result of past success" (Shaw & Ronald, 2012, p. 51). The underlying theme of an academic culture is captured exquisitely in the expression: "That's the way we do things around here" (Schwartz, Gaito, & Lennick, 2011, p. 45). An organizational culture resembles an ecosystem, "a highly sophisticated, interdependent cosmos of evolving organisms with a profusion of interrelationships" (Seidman, 2007, p. 218). In his classic study of the dynamics of classroom learning in elementary schools, Jackson (1968) examined how teachers channel the social traffic of the classroom in which there are as many as a thousand teacher-student interactions a day. Two themes emerged from Jackson's observations: Delay and denial. Teachers remain poised to employ the tactics of delay and denial in response to the minute-by-minute requests and demands of their students. Pointedly, "that's the way that we do things around here."

Individuals within an academic culture "share a tacit understanding of the way the world works, their place in it, the informal and formal dimensions of their workplace, and the value of their actions" (Katzenbach & Harshak, 2011, p. 35). A school or academic department's culture circumscribes deeply-embedded beliefs, attitudes, self-reinforcing behaviors, and mind-sets regarding how to relate to one's colleagues and students, coupled with ingrained perceptions regarding the nature of professional success and preferred methods of getting work accomplished. Academic cultures are in a constant state of becoming as colleagues adapt to emergent challenges and opportunities while pursuing stronger interpersonal connections. An academic culture is "powerful because we all take our cues from people around us" (Kleiner, 2011, p. 1).
Cultural transformation in academic settings begins with accepting things "exactly as they are and exactly as they are not" (Logan, King, & Fischer-Wright, 2008b, p. 128). The cultural threads that Logan, King, and Fischer-Wright teased from the tapestry of the academic cultures that they studied revealed a disquieting image of the cultural and social patterns of work in academia: Academic life tends to be perceived as a zone of personal accomplishment, not a zone of collective leadership. The dominant language system in an academic department is encapsulated in "I," "Me," and "My." Faculty members characteristically function in a series of dyadic (two-person) relationships. If graphed, it would resemble a hub with spokes. Colleagues make friends---in dyadic relationships---with those who they believe are at

their level professionally. Finally, colleagues tend to require an adversary---an enemy. These are colleagues who assume a fight on policy issues and practices and tend to create that fight wherever they go. In a word, an academic culture is less about what colleagues espouse philosophically and more about what they do in daily practice.

Relatedly, Pascale, Millemann, and Gioja (1997) foreshadowed the organizational research findings of Logan, King, and Fischer-Wright:

- o Colleagues carve out private patches of turf to exercise responsibility, protect themselves professionally, and keep intruders at a distance.
- o There is a minimal sense of teamwork and alignment within the entire campus as colleagues seek the relative safety of their particular research or teaching assignment.
- o Conflict tends to inspire a series of strategic collisions, staged to create programmatic or administrative stalemate rather than solution. Alternately, colleagues avoid conflict for fear of blame or fear of having others take their disagreement personally.
- o Ideas and proposed innovations get studied to death in hopes of ferreting out every possible weakness before risking commitment to a new program or vision. The precondition for action is certain knowledge.

The most propulsive cultural narratives trigger the conflict between dread and desire. That is, "the more that we desire something, the greater our fear of not achieving it" (Guber, 2011, p. 31). Logan, King, and Fischer-Wright's research (2008b) framed the conflict between dread and desire compellingly: Is it possible that one's colleagues are tethered to a dominant academic culture that is essentially broken? Is it possible that one is a survivor in a system that rewards the wrong behaviors? Is it possible that one is accomplishing the very opposite of what one values professionally? Finally, is it also possible that what one's colleagues truly aspire to is to live out collegially the essence of the African leadership style of ubuntu: "I am because we are"? (Hill, 2008, p. 124)

The Resolution: The Case for Professionalism
In The Power of Professionalism, Wiersma (2011) argues that professionalism is not an end in itself but rather a process for influencing the creation of a vibrant organizational culture. In academic settings, professionalism serves as a catalyst for personal growth and cultural renewal. Being a trusted professional is not merely an intellectual exercise but rather involves a commitment to being something compelling and transformative in the classroom and across campus. In daily practice, professionals are inspired by the ideals and values that they believe in and find rewarding. Professionals think and communicate in the language of those ideals which matter deeply to human beings: Integrity, truth, transparency, fairness, justice, community, humility, and service to others. In daily practice, professionals embrace those ideals and values as the centerpiece of one's academic culture (Bowman, 2013). The most powerful form of human influence is inspiration. Inspired professional behavior is internal, intrinsic, and sustainable. Being viewed as a professional is about who one is as a person. In that sense, developing a culture of professionalism is not a program or a checklist. It is a way of life (Bowman, 2013).

Professionalism in academic settings involves reflecting deeply about what colleagues and students are doing together and how they are in relationship with one another as they coevolve common futures (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998). Professionalism mirrors a journey toward self-governance, with individuals exercising the freedom to contribute one's character and creativity to how one's organization pursues its mission. When students and faculty collaborate to create something larger than themselves, a values-based self-governing culture expands and deepens. In a morally interdependent world, professionals inspire principled performance by enlisting others in common cause.

Professionalism in daily practice is in a constant state of becoming as colleagues adapt to emergent challenges, pursue success, and seek to build stronger connections with those around them in pursuit of significance. In the everydayness of academic life, professionalism provides individuals the freedom to self-govern around shared values and to satisfy the desire to accomplish common goals. Importantly, professionalism places governance within each individual rather than in positional leaders or in rule sets external to individuals. Specifically, professionalism allows colleagues to govern through culture, instead of achieving culture through governance.

Professional behavior in the workplace engenders and deepens trust. Trust functions as a form of social capital which serves to reduce uncertainty, deepen learning, and make it psychologically safe to give and receive assistance within and across hierarchical boundaries (Bowman, 2012). A violation of trust is inseparably linked with unprofessional behavior. To be a trusted professional is to "master life's lessons in personal leadership" (Wiersma, 2011, p. 25). In essence, professionalism is about something holistic and authentic, something that fills the interpersonal synapses between one colleague and another, between one organization and another, and between every organization and its stakeholders (Seidman, 2007).

The Resolution: The Case for Self-Governing Cultures
Blind obedience, informed acquiescence, and values-based self-governance represent the most common types of culture in contemporary workplace settings, including academia. There are essentially only three ways to generate human connection and conduct in organizational settings: "You can coerce, motivate, or inspire" (Seidman, 2007, p. xxv). Cultures grounded in blind obedience tend to be coercive. Cultures built on a foundation of informed acquiescence rely on a system of rewards and punishments, while cultures anchored in values-based self-governance draw upon inspiration together with a connect-and-collaborate- leadership style. Cultures characterized by informed acquiescence and blind obedience place governance outside the individual through sets of rules, including contractual agreements. Values-based self-governance places the structures of governance in the individual's hands. Surprisingly, instead of achieving culture through governance, academic units govern through culture. That is, "rather than governing with a matrix of rules and authorities laid over the organization, governing through culture is about governing from within the corpus," in which individuals act independently and consistently in the academic unit's best interest (Seidman, p. 242).

In the horizontal, hyperconnected world of contemporary academia, a self-governing working environment connects colleagues and academic units by enhancing information flow, increasing interpersonal transparency, and by enfranchising faculty to act autonomously when presented with emergent opportunities to serve one's academic community. Self-governing cultures provide colleagues the inspiration, trust, and opportunity to achieve at their highest level by binding colleagues together around core values and the desire to accomplish common goals. Strikingly, self-governing cultures both inspire alignment and eject elements that don't fit in. Thus, failing to do the right thing in a self-governing, values-based culture no longer betrays just the academy, "it betrays the individual's own values" (Seidman, 2007, p. 253).

Values-based self-governance speaks to one's higher self by confronting colleagues with the question, "How can we create academic units which mirror our deepest values?" In values-based self-governing cultures, colleagues are inspired by common cause and guided by core values in pursuit of shared visions. As a result, each individual is responsible and accountable to one's academic unit for principled performance. Recognizing that "culture is something that you do, not something that does to you" supports colleagues in becoming more self-governing (Seidman, 2007, p. 259).

Self-governance reflects a distinctive leadership orientation: Colleagues seek to consciously connect with those in one's midst, passionately share one's vision with others, and persuasively enlist others in common purpose. In self-governing cultures, strategy, structure, systems, and processes matter, but getting human relationships right matters more. Colleagues begin the journey to self-governance by splicing trust into human relationships, pursuing interpersonal transparency, aligning and acting on core values, and staying true to a values-based mission. In that sense, self-governance is in a constant state of becoming as one seeks to build more vibrant, sustainable connections with colleagues in the workplace.

The Resolution: The Case for Viewing Culture as a Self-Correcting System of Languge
Logan, King, & Fischer-Wright (2008b) argue that a school or academic department has a culture that can be rated on a scale from one to five---dysfunctional to high performing. Specifically, at each cultural stage, an academic unit has a distinctive fingerprint comprised of the language system that colleagues use coupled with colleagues' observable behavior toward others. Surprisingly, the "two almost always correlate perfectly" (Logan et al., 2008a, p. 26). Briefly, faculty members who are collectively committed to

upgrading the culture of an academic unit focus essentially on two things: the words which colleagues use together with how colleagues structure their relationships in the workplace.

Transformational change involves a recognition of which cultural stage a natural workgroup is operating. Within an overarching academic culture, there are characteristically distinct subcultures, each with its own unique language, dispositions, and behaviors. Moreover, Logan, King, and Fischer-Wright (2008b) posit that every workgroup has a dominant culture which can be assessed on a one-to-five scale, with five being the most desirable. Briefly, they argue that the dominant culture in Stage One mirrors a zone of criminal behavior in which individuals act out in despairingly hostile ways, such as was evidenced in recent isolated instances at Columbine, Virginia Tech, and University of Alabama—Huntsville. Logan et al. concluded that Stage One is the dominant culture in only two percent of workplace settings.

A Stage Two academic culture tends to reflect a bottomless well of unmet needs, complaints, disappointments, and repressed anger. Predictably, the mood in a Stage Two culture is captured in a cluster of apathetic victims. At Stage Two, faculty members' workplace speech tends to deflect personal accountability, characteristically placing blame on others. Change initiatives at Stage Two tend to be countered with expressions such as, "Ah, we tried that in 1995. It didn't work then, won't work now." Stage Two is the dominant culture in twenty-five percent of workplace settings.

Logan, King, and Fischer-Wright (2008a; 2008b) observe engagingly that the dominant culture in educational, medical, and legal settings tends to be cultural Stage Three. Technically, like the other four cultural stages, Stage Three is not a permanent state such as "tall" or "short" but rather a description of colleagues' "set of language" and "pattern of behavior" (Logan et al., 2008b, p. 79). The cultural threads which Logan et al. (2008b) teased from the tapestry of the academic cultures that they studied constitute the essence of a Stage Three tribal culture. Specifically, academic life tends to be perceived as a zone of personal accomplishment, not a zone of collective leadership. The dominant language system in an academic department is encapsulated in "I," "Me," and "My." And faculty members characteristically function in a series of dyadic (two-person) relationships. Strikingly, their research findings suggest that Stage Three is the dominant culture in fifty percent of workplace tribes.

In contrast, Stage Four academic cultures exhibit a body of capabilities and practices that not only distinguish it from Stage Three cultures but allow it to function much more productively. Briefly, Stage Four cultures radiate a need to live resonant core values in which one can fully be oneself in community. Moreover, Stage Four is a zone of collective leadership in which colleagues draw upon their shared vision and values in completing their current projects and assignments. In educational settings, Stage Four cultures in academic settings characteristically function both formally and informally as communities of practice. Colleagues' transition to Stage Four characteristically involves a series of epiphanies, each presenting a deeper insight into what was not working in Stage Three, coupled with a shift in one's language and behavior from "I" and dyadic relationships toward "We" and networked systems of people. Stage Four "represents twenty-two percent" of contemporary workplace cultures (Logan, King, & Fischer-Wright, 2008a, p. 27).

Finally, a Stage Five culture reflects a collegial mood of innocent wonderment and limitless potential. This stage is "pure leadership, vision, and inspiration" (Logan, King, & Fischer-Wright, 2008a, p. 27). Stage Five radiates a deep commitment to sustaining human relationships in day-to-day practices and behaviors. Essentially, a Stage Five culture mirrors a journey toward self-governance by reigniting interpersonal trust, pursuing interpersonal transparency, aligning on core values, and staying true to a noble mission. Thus, Stage Five leaders serve as models and symbols of their organization's cultural ideals (Shaw & Ronald, 2012). At Stage Five, an academic unit is seemingly poised to change the world, essentially because colleagues sense deeply that are in competition only with what is possible, not with other academic units. Not surprisingly, Stage Five is the dominant culture in only two percent of workplace settings.

Theory into Practice: Abandoning the Dominant Culture in Academe:
Logan, King, and Fischer-Wright (2008b) argue that Stage Three, the dominant culture in academic settings, cannot be fixed; it can only be abandoned. Moreover, they posit that workgroups such as

academic departments can move only one cultural stage at a time, such as transitioning from Stage Three to Stage Four or Stage Four to Stage Five. Ideally, the shared aspiration of faculty members in an underperforming Stage Three culture is to elevate their department or school's culture to Stage Four by initially focusing on the language system and relationship structures of their Stage Three workgroup. Specifically, faculty members collectively encourage and support their colleagues in substituting "We" language in place of "I," "Me," and "My" and "We're great" in place of "I'm great." Ultimately, the intent is to enhance one's natural workgroup's transition toward a collaborative culture in which "values and vision are the only compass" and "mission is all that matters" (Logan et al., 2008a, p. 27). In concert, colleagues encourage their peers to establish three-person, triadic relationships. In triadic relationships, "the three form a triangle, with each leg of the structure responsible for the quality of the relationship between the other two parts" (Logan et al., 2008a, p. 28). Triadic relationships stabilize natural work groups essentially by creating webs of connection and circles of trust. In contrast, two-person relationships tend to destabilize natural workgroups, with each member of the dyad struggling for control of the relationship. Because colleagues at Stage Three tend not see the effects of their behavior on their workplace culture, Logan et al. dramatically sound a bugle call right in the ear: "Whether to stay with Stage Three or advance to Stage Four is the single most important question" for colleagues and organizations around the world (Logan et al., 2008b, p. 128).

Finally, Logan, King, & Fischer-Wright's (2008b) ten-year research study initially focused on rhetoric. Succinctly, if colleagues change their words and their words relationships to one another, they change their perception of reality. As colleagues change their perception of reality, their behavior changes predictably. What had seemingly gone unrecognized in the professional literature was that "instead of people using their words, they are used by their words" (p. 266). That is, the language that one adopts or employs "either locks you into rigid relationships or frees you to new possibilities of connection" (Seidman, 2007, p. 272). For Logan et al., that realization led to a series of testable hypotheses. The researchers' unit of analysis subsequently shifted from the individual to a social group, which they christened a tribe. A tribal framework emerged from the researchers' data collection that led them to conclude that one could view an organizational culture as a self-correcting system of language. Thus, it is possible to "change not only oneself but the entire tribe's cultural stage" as well (p. 271). From that perspective, transformational leadership emerges from language and culture, which is set and reinforced by one's tribe.

Conclusion
Culture resides at the synapses where people interact. Organizational cultures do not change unless people change. Cultural renewal begins when colleagues confront an enterprise at its roots: "Why does the world need this organization?" "What would be different in the world if this organization did not exist?" "Why do we wish to renew our academic culture?" Collectively, these questions serve to clarify what an organization is capable of in pursuit of a purpose that matters to the world.

The first characteristic that distinguishes the nature of an organizational culture is "how it creates, communicates, and uses information" (Seidman, 2007, p. 230). The nature of the language that a group chooses to communicate information exerts a remarkable and powerful influence on cultural transformation. Resilient organizational cultures are essentially a series of effective conversations. Conversation-based academic cultures are based on connecting and collaborating collegially one conversation, one meeting, and one insight at a time.

Self-governing, high-trust cultures coalesce around mission, vision, common values, and the pursuit of success and significance. In self-governing cultures, "the role of every individual is to lead and be a leader" (Seidman, p. 234). In values-based, self-governing cultures, strategy, structure, systems, and processes matter, but getting trusting human relationships right ultimately matters more. Ultimately, individuals must be trusted to self-govern. Values and principles are the source of inspiration in cultures characterized by professionalism. In the everydayness of academic life, professionalism allows a culture to engage in self-policing, with deviations from shared values creating an unsettling sense of betraying oneself. In the end, culture is the destiny of an academic enterprise and a lasting legacy that remains uniquely one's own.

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