

Graduate Student Research Day 2011

Florida Atlantic University

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

The Adaptability of Academic Advising Teams in Higher Education

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Academic advising teams interact directly with students, parents, faculty, the registrar, and admissions; yet, they are rarely consulted about changes to policy and procedures in the university. Being in this position, advising teams tend to be the most knowledgeable about what the consequences will be to the students and the university systems. Often, communication does not happen and advisors are left uninformed. The purpose of this single site case study is to identify how four advising teams in a medium-sized public university adapt to the changes presented to them and what role leadership and culture play in that adaptation. This is accomplished through analysis of advisor and administrative interviews, office and meeting observations, and reviews of documents relating to advising. Changes are defined as changes in academic policies and procedures, specifically, curriculum changes and the addition of forms and systems. Culture is defined as the shared norms and beliefs among a group, in this case the academic advising team. The key themes emerging from this dissertation are the dynamic among the group, the positive and negative influences of external people or units, and the role of leadership in and outside of the group. Preliminary findings show that self perceptions, external perceptions, and group and organizational culture have an influence on how advising teams adapt to changes.

ADAPTABILITY OF ACADEMIC ADVISING TEAMS

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Abstract

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Research Questions

The primary research question for this study is: How do higher education academic advising teams adapt to changes in the institution?

The sub questions that will be investigated are:

What is the culture(s) of the academic advising teams being studied?

What are the strategies used by the academic advising teams to adapt to institutional changes regarding the curriculum and the introduction of new systems?

What are the perceptions of the academic advising teams of their ability to adapt to institutional changes?

What role does leadership play in the academic advising teams' ability to adapt to institutional changes?

Methodology

Research Design

- Qualitative Study
 - Single Site
 - Multiple Case Study
 - Cross Case Analysis
- Interviews
- Observations
- Document Analysis

Sample Profile

- Medium-sized university
- Four Colleges/Cases
- 49 Interview Participants
 - 40 Supervisors and Academic Advisors
 - 4 Faculty Advisors
- 15 University Administrators
- 21 Observations Completed
- 29 Documents Analyzed

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study was directed by the research questions and the conceptual framework. Data analysis commenced with data collection by keeping an analytic journal, reading the transcribed interviews, and reviewing observation field notes and document summaries. The researcher used ATLAS.ti to manage the data and identify key words and phrases that emerged from the interviews, observations, and document reviews based on the research questions and conceptual framework. Through identifying these key words and phrases, a second set of codes became apparent to the researcher as seen in table 1. Themes then came forward and connections were made creating the basis of the findings.

Primary Code	Secondary Code	Definition
Group Culture	Artifacts	These can be tangible and intangible objects; this includes mission and vision as well as the physical surroundings.
	Values	This refers to how the group defines itself and their beliefs.
	Trust	Trust in the immediate administrations and in the administration of the entire university.
Adaptation Strategies	Senior Administrative Support	This represents the resources and encouragement provided by the upper level administration, specifically those above the immediate advising supervisor.
	Collaborative Leadership	When positional and non-positional members of the organization collaborate on change initiatives.
	Flexible Vision	Allowing for vision to grow and change.
	Staff Development	Opportunities for professional development.
Group/Self Perceptions	Visible Actions	Showing accomplishments during the change process.
	External Influences	How the group is affected by decisions made from those outside the group.
	Significance of Occupation	How the group is perceived by those outside the group.
Leadership	Support Given	Encouragement provided by the immediate supervisor for the advising team.
	Communication	How communication is disseminated to the group.

Preliminary Findings

Four overall findings are presented. The first finding is an analysis of the five **adaptation strategies** recommended by Eckel and Kezar (2003) for use in change: *senior administrative support, collaborative leadership, flexible vision, staff development, and visible actions*. The second finding discusses the **external influences** on the advising teams which refers to how policy and system changes are disseminated to the group and how the group is affected by decisions made from those outside the group. The third finding is **group dynamics** and values. This finding explores the culture of the teams including their level of trust for the college and university administration as well as how they are perceived by those outside the group. The fourth finding is **leadership** which explores how the immediate supervisors support and encourage the team.

Participant Quotes

"The people who really know, think it is very important and there is a very positive perception... Outside of those I think they see advisors as high school guidance counselors. They think they are just people who tell students what classes to take. Which is, as we know about 15 percent of an advisor's tasks."

"I'm not sure it is necessary to consult advisors on curricular issues, we are not faculty... We have run into issues regarding the implementation of the change. Someone should probably have consulted us about how to go about doing that because they tried to implement that after we already began advising students for the upcoming fall semester."

Preliminary Conclusions

- Forced adaptation
- Serious lack of communication
- Leadership plays a key role in team adaptation

Dissertation Chair and Committee
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