Chapter 6

The Political Institution: Competing for Power and Resources

Over the past seventy-five years, Regional State University (RSU) has been transformed successively from a state normal school to a state teachers' college, to a state college, and finally in 1972 (when it had enrolled 3,000 students), into one of five comprehensive public universities controlled by a statewide board of regents. The university includes five colleges—arts and sciences, education, business, health sciences, and technology—and an evening division. Its mission statement is over a page in length and includes extended references to teaching, research, and service and to almost every campus program.

The present enrollment of about 13,500 students represents a decline of about 10 percent in the past five years. Almost all of the undergraduates come from the northwest portion of the state; half commute, a quarter live in residence hall apartments, and the rest rent dilapidated houses in the community. About 1,550 part-time commuting graduate students are in master's degree programs, in education, in computer technology, and in an M.B.A. program that is now seeking professional accreditation.

Most faculty who were at RSU before 1972 received their

doctorates (often in education) from in-state institutions; they have strong commitments to RSU and deep roots in the small city in which it is located. More recently hired faculty tend to have doctorates from national universities and to focus more attention on their discipline or profession than on the institution. Many came to RSU after unsuccessfully seeking appointment at a research university. The elected senate, now dominated by disaffected associate professors who are unlikely to be promoted, spends most of its time opposing actions by the administration—actions often taken without formal consultation with faculty representatives.

President Rita Robinson came to RSU from a career as a campus dean and a state coordinating board officer. Knowledgeable, innovative, and impatient, she is strongly supported by the regents and some segments of the faculty. Her relationships with the senate, as well as with some deans and chairs, are often contentious.

Most students come from the top two-fifths of their high school class, and while a good number are interested in academic matters, most are pursuing vocational interests or are giving primary attention to the active social scene. Fewer than half stay to graduate. Faculty work hard at teaching but tend to focus attention on the more able students. Pressures for publication have increased, and achieving tenure is now more difficult.

Current issues on campus include a request to the regents for authorization to award the doctorate, complaints about faculty work load and lack of faculty research support, debates on salary levels for scarce faculty in some fields, effects on faculty reappointments of midyear state budget rescissions, and a National Collegiate Athletics Association investigation into the recruitment of athletes.

Regional State University as a Political System

People familiar with colleges and universities have often observed that they have many political characteristics. As far back as the turn of the century, an Oxford don turned his wicked wit to writing a set of instructions for aspiring academic politi-

cians. His comments remind us that now, as then, there are ways to get things done in academic institutions even in the absence of collegial agreement or bureaucratic directives.

> This most important branch of political activity is, of course, closely connected with *Jobs*. . . . When you and I have, each of us, a Job on hand, we shall proceed to go on the Square. . . . The proper course to pursue is to walk, between 2 and 4 p.m., up and down the King's Parade. . . . When we have succeeded in meeting accidently, it is etiquette to talk about indifferent matters for ten minutes and then part. After walking five paces in the opposite direction you should call me back, and begin with the words "Oh, by the way, if you should happen. . . ." The nature of your Job must then be vaguely indicated. . . . Then we shall part as before, and I shall call you back and introduce the subject of My Job, in the same formula. By observing this procedure we shall emphasize the fact that there is *no connection whatever* between my supporting your Job and your supporting mine [Cornford, (1908) 1964, p. 30].

At RSU, as at Oxford long ago, individuals or groups with different interests can go "on the Square" and interact by forming coalitions, bargaining, compromising, and reaching agreements that they believe to be to their advantage. These processes of interaction, in which the power to get one's way comes neither from norms nor from rules but is negotiated, identify Regional State University as a political system.

We have already seen how social processes lead the faculty and administration of Heritage College to like each other, interact with each other, engage in common activities, and in doing so share and sustain important values. This is possible because the relatively small size of Heritage and its coherent program permit and encourage frequent face-to-face communication between its members. As a consequence, Heritage possesses

a sense of community in which those inside the college's boundaries are thought of as "us," and those outside are considered "they." "We" become more and more alike, and increasingly different from "them."

In a more complex institution, member groups tend to be more specialized and heterogeneous, with divergent interests and preferences. Subgroups may have their own perceptions of community, but the institution as a whole seldom does. Sometimes these subgroups are work groups, such as academic departments or administrative offices, and sometimes they are based on social factors such as sex, age, ethnicity, or ideology. Those who identify strongly with any of these groups think of each other as "we," and "they" can come to refer not just to groups outside the institution but to other groups *inside* as well.

That is what has happened at Regional State University. The institution grew, became more diverse, added new missions, increasingly received resources from external agencies, and appointed new staff with values different from those of older staff. For example, it has one group of administrators who were hired when RSU was still a state college emphasizing teacher education and who remain interested in developing closer ties with school systems in the region, and another group of "fast-track" younger administrators pushing for a state-of-the-art program in robotics. Older faculty have formed an alliance to challenge retirement policies that are being advocated by younger faculty concerned with the possibility of layoffs, and a group of scientists connected to an "old boys' network" has coalesced to defend recruiting practices that are being questioned by the Women's Caucus. The interests of different groups are reflected even in the seating patterns in the faculty dining room, where members of a small but close-knit set of European émigrés in the social sciences are likely to be found at one table, while issues of campus racism are being debated at another.

Resources at RSU are no longer under the sole control of a small group of administrators, decision making has become diffused and decentralized, and the organization is too complex to control activities through bureaucratic systems such as those at People's Community College. As centralized authority has

weakened, consensus for preferred goals has diminished. RSU has become fragmented into special interest groups, each competing for influence and resources. The influence of any group is limited by the interests and activities of other groups; in order to obtain desired outcomes, groups have to join with other groups, to compromise their positions, and to bargain.

To consider a college as a political system is to consider it as a supercoalition of subcoalitions with diverse interests, preferences, and goals (Cyert and March, 1963). Each of the subcoalitions is composed of interest groups that see at least some commonality in their goals and work together to attempt to achieve them (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980). If the collegium can be metaphorically described as a family, and the bureaucracy as a machine, then the political college or university can be seen as a shifting kaleidoscope of interest groups and coalitions. The patterns in the kaleidoscope are not static, and group membership, participation, and interests constantly change with emerging issues.

Characteristics of Political Systems

Organizational politics involves acquiring, developing, and using power to obtain preferred outcomes in situations in which groups disagree (Pfeffer, 1981b). To consider RSU as a political system is to focus attention on uncertainty, dissension, and conflict. RSU is composed of a large number of individuals and groups that in some ways operate autonomously but in other ways remain interdependent. Without interdependence, there can be no politics, and no power; it is only when individuals must rely on others for some of their necessary resources that they become concerned about or interested in the activities or behaviors of others. Political systems depend on social exchange and, therefore, on mutual dependence. The power of any party depends to some extent on the value of that party's contribution to the political community and the extent to which such a contribution is available from other sources (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980). For example, academic departments at RSU that bring in highly valued external resources such as research grants,

or that have high prestige and increasing graduate enrollments, have more power and influence over the allocation of internal budgets than do other departments (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1974; Hills and Mahoney, 1978).

Power at RSU is diffused rather than concentrated, and many individuals and groups have power of different kinds in different situations. The vice-president for academic affairs is believed to have considerable influence on campus, but the business school at RSU often appears more responsive to its professional accrediting body than to the vice-president; President Robinson has more power than any other individual on campus, but she has been unable to fire a popular but ineffective dean of students; and the Women's Caucus, a group with no official standing whatever, exerts a powerful influence on the actions of the Faculty Personnel Committee. Under most circumstances, neither the accrediting association, the Women's Caucus, President Robinson, nor any single person or group can impose its will unilaterally on the others.

RSU has an organizational culture, as do Heritage College and People's Community College. The culture at Heritage is supported by norms that are pervasive in all parts of the institution; the culture at People's is made coherent through structure and the ethos of rationality. But at RSU, development of a pervasive or coherent culture is inhibited by the various and competing interests of different groups. To be sure, there is widespread public agreement that the teaching, service, and research missions are all important. But agreement in the abstract conceals the fact that people have different ideas about which programs are the *most* important. When resources are plentiful, so that everyone gets what they want, these ambiguities and disagreements cause no problems. But when resources are scarce, their specific allocation becomes vigorously contested, and conflict is inevitable. Last year, for example, various groups had sharply different views on whether a $50,000 budget windfall should be used to begin a freshman honors program, to support released time for faculty research, or to develop a regional natural resources institute to do research and provide consultation to local governments on water quality and environmental safety.

The three programs were all consistent with the institutional mission, but the mission statement provided no guidance for choosing among them.

In this situation, as in many others at RSU, choices have to be made not between good and bad things but rather between competing goods. People in the institution differ about which objective is most important, and even those who agree on the objective often disagree on how it can be achieved. There are no data that can "prove" that supporting freshman honors is "better" than supporting faculty research, and there are no rational calculations, laws, or rules to help decide what to do. In a collegial system such as Heritage, such decisions can be made by consensus, and in a bureaucratic system such as People's by fiat. But these processes are either unavailable or unacceptable in the complex and decentralized social system of RSU. The institution is too large and the interests of various groups are too diverse to achieve consensus, and the socialization and expectations of the various participants make authoritarian decrees unacceptable and therefore unenforceable. If they are to be able to make a decision at all, they must rely on politics.

Subgroups wish to exert influence so that their preferences are reflected in the allocation of institutional resources such as money, prestige, or influence. Since the board of trustees legally *is* the institution, and all legal authority resides in the board, some might say that the preferences of the trustees and the president as their executive officer should always dominate choice processes at a college or university. But at RSU, as at other institutions, legal delegation is not the sole source of authority, and many groups are able to exercise power in different ways. Administrators have power through their access to budget and personnel procedures, to sources of information, and to internal and external legal authority; faculty and other professionals have power related to their specialized expertise, to tradition, and to external guilds (Baldridge, 1971; Clark, 1983). Clerical and blue-collar groups may invoke the power of their unions in order to influence policies. And, as the example of the Women's Caucus demonstrates, it is possible for groups to obtain power through informal contacts and through appeals based on moral or ethical principles, such as equity.

The problems caused by the dualism of controls are manifest at RSU, and there are constant conflicts between administrative and professional authority. Because of this, it is tempting to view RSU as composed of monolithic groups, and to refer to the battles as being between "the administration and others" or "the faculty and others." This view may occasionally be valid, but it is more often misleading. The president and the deans can have conflicting interests, trustees (particularly in public institutions such as RSU) can disagree on many issues, not all students share the same concerns, and faculty in different disciplines and departments are as much divided by their professionalism as united by it (Clark, 1963). Academics are highly ideological, and the ideologies of different academic departments—and therefore the preferences they might have in institutional decision making—are quite disparate (Ladd and Lipset, 1975). RSU "is not one community, but several—the community of the undergraduate and the community of the graduate; the community of the social scientist, and the humanist, the community of the scientist; the communities of the professional schools; the community of all the nonacademic personnel; the community of the administrators" (Kerr, 1963, p. 19). But, of course, the communities are far more complex even than that on a contemporary campus. On any issue, for example, subgroups of faculty transcending department or discipline bring young and old, male and female, minority and white, tenured and nontenured, local and cosmopolitan, into arenas in which their conflicting interests must be addressed. We commonly think of the president as the institutional leader, and it is true that President Robinson plays a part in decision making in many areas of governance. But in each, she is opposed by countervailing forces of different groups (Corson, 1960).

Some groups are stronger than others and have more power, but no group is strong enough to dominate all the others all the time. Those who desire certain outcomes must spend time building positions that are supported by other groups as well. This requires the development of coalitions among various groups, and trade-offs and compromises are often among the costs that must be paid. For example, the faculty senate finally approved President Robinson's proposal for a freshman honors

program after she successfully persuaded the humanities division to also support it. Their support, in turn, required her to agree to have the program reviewed after two years and to express willingness to appoint its director from among the existing faculty.

The idea that political processes in academic institutions are somehow "dirty" reflects the misunderstanding that if people would only act in the best interests of the institution, they would agree on what to do. It assumes that the institution's best interests are either known or knowable, rather than that different people, especially committed to what they believe to be the institution's welfare, can, in good faith, have completely different ideas of what that means and how it should be accomplished. The allocation decision is primarily a political one of who gets what, when, and how, and in a democratic and pluralistic organization, political processes are appropriate means for resolving such political issues.

It might be expected that, because groups contend for power and there are differences in their preferred outcomes, RSU would be typified by constant turmoil and instability. There are several reasons why this is usually not the case. First, organizations tend to develop continuing and quasi-stable dominant coalitions (Thompson, 1967) whose established power serves to inhibit overt conflict. At RSU, the president, senior administrators, and board have for a decade been the dominant coalition; they agree on policies most (but not all) of the time, and general campus recognition of their power inhibits those who would otherwise challenge it.

In addition, individuals belong to more than one group, and they participate in many political processes, each of which involves different people. The existence of a large number of small cross-cutting disagreements provides checks and balances against major disruptions, so that the agitation of political processes can ironically lead to system stability. At RSU, people who engage in total conflict are generally referred to as "crazies." Most people on campuses are not crazies; they participate in conflict segmentally—for example, supporting the administration on one issue and disagreeing with them on another. Even

within the faculty senate itself, which has quasi-stable proadministration and antiadministration voting blocs, the balance of power is held by a third, "unaffiliated" coalition, whose members align themselves with one or another bloc on the basis of specific issues (Bowen, 1987). As a result, deep cleavages dividing major groups at RSU on many issues are unlikely (Coser, 1956). By permitting groups to assess their relative power, and by encouraging the development of associations and coalitions, political conflict may increase the cohesiveness of RSU.

A central characteristic of most political communities is indifference. Most people at RSU are not concerned about most issues most of the time. Even during the last great budget crisis, which had the potential for faculty layoffs, only a small percentage of the faculty actively participated in governance activities, while another small group looked on with interest; the majority were apathetic (Baldridge, 1971). Most of the time, most of what happens at RSU is routine and guided by existing procedures and informal understandings. But at irregular intervals, and for reasons that are not at all clear, a specific issue emerges and becomes contentious on campus. Sometimes the issue is one of great substance, such as whether RSU should offer doctoral programs. And sometimes, as in the case of whether RSU deans should have reserved spaces in the faculty parking lot, it is primarily symbolic. Similar situations have occurred in the past without activating political interest, and President Robinson has found it impossible to accurately predict campus responses to her initiatives. Political processes at RSU may sometimes be initiated by new issues, or sometimes by the loss of an old coalition or consensus.

Finally, disruptive conflict is inhibited because power in higher education tends to be issue specific. Different groups develop spheres of influence around issues of concern to them (Baldridge, Curtis, Ecker, and Riley, 1978). Deans at RSU leave course development to faculty most of the time, faculty leave fund raising to the president most of the time, and President Robinson leaves faculty recruiting to the deans most of the time. As long as these tacit agreements are maintained, contention is unlikely. All parties recognize that intrusion into tacitly

approved spheres of influence is usually costly, and they ordinarily go to unusual lengths to avoid it.

The political processes at RSU have organizational advantages and disadvantages. If there were institutional consensus about preferences and agreement on how to achieve them, political processes would be wasteful and unnecessary. The costs and benefits of any proposed program could be specified, and calculations would give unequivocal direction to the participants. But since at RSU such a consensus does not exist, decisions can be made only through the exercise of power (Pfeffer, 1981b). A major advantage of political systems, therefore, is that they permit decisions to be made even in the absence of clear goals. Political systems also simplify the influence process, since it need not involve the active participation of everyone in the organization but only their representatives (Weick, 1979). They also simplify budgeting processes. If politics is a game in which power is used to influence resource allocation in support of one's preferences, then the budget is the document on which the yearly score at RSU is kept. "Rational" approaches to budgeting would suggest that the funding of all programs be reassessed each year, with the costs and benefits of each compared to each other, and decisions based on the optimization of stated objectives. Political processes in budget formulation, on the other hand, simplify calculations and usually lead to outcomes acceptable to a majority of stakeholders. Among other things, only those issues raised by specific groups need be addressed (most programs approved in the past are continued, so that budgets next year are likely to be similar to budgets this year), only politically feasible alternatives need to be considered (so that time is not wasted on alternatives that could not be supported), and participants need consider only their own preferences without worrying about others (since other groups will have representation somewhere in the process) (Wildavsky, 1974).

Political systems have another great advantage: their inefficiency provides institutional stability. There is a lot of consistency at Heritage College because people tend to think alike; there is consistency at People's Community College as well because people follow the same rules. In both cases, having similar

data and sharing uniformity of opinion or action make it possible for small changes to be amplified as they move through the system. Everyone knows what is going on, an unexpected situation may become volatile, and balance becomes precarious. But at RSU, people have access to different data from different sources on which they place different interpretations. No one knows the totality of what is happening, and their activities often resemble random movements that cancel each other out and provide stability.

There are, of course, disadvantages to political systems as well. Some groups at RSU attempt to control information as a source of power to achieve their own ends, and this may weaken other organizational functions. Competing for resources means that groups have to present the reasons why their claims are stronger than those of other groups. This ensures that the best arguments are given, but at the same time it may lead to advocacy, the hardening of positions, and difficulty in developing reasonable compromises. Since not all programs get reviewed all the time, programs that are no longer effective may be allowed to continue if no one challenges them. The system therefore has little accountability. In addition, coalitions can arise that are not concerned about protecting the weak. Too, political processes may sometimes be used in situations in which more rational approaches are feasible and could be more effective.

While the instrumental activities associated with obtaining benefits at RSU are one side of politics, there is another side as well. Political processes and structures also have important symbolic elements and outcomes (Edelman, 1967). They permit interest groups at RSU to display or confirm their status, provide individuals with rituals and enjoyable pastimes, protect organizations from disruption by deviant members, and confirm important institutional values and myths (Birnbaum, 1987a, 1987b). It is the constant involvement of various constituents in campus political activity that permits both change and stability. The existence of political instruments for change, and the potential of influencing policy, rather than merely getting one's way, permit people at RSU to work together even as they have disparate objectives.

Loops of Interaction in Political Systems

In the previous chapters, we have described how collegial or bureaucratic systems are coordinated through the development of stable vertical or horizontal interactions. Considering RSU as a political system focuses on coordination through conflict. Formal and informal groups change, overlap, are created, and fall apart, as they search for the power to induce outcomes consistent with their preferences. Senior tenured science faculty may comprise a group for the purpose of one policy decision, but it may be fragmented into life science and physical sciences, or gender or age groups, on another issue. There are at least two important processes through which groups are created and develop their positions: one is the formation of coalitions, and the other is the process of negotiations.

Coalitions. If politics is the pursuit and exercise of power to achieve desired objectives, then the purpose of forming coalitions is to join with other individuals or groups in order to achieve a level of power and influence that cannot be achieved by acting alone. Coalitions can involve any number of parties, but the triadic structure is the one about which the most is known. A current conflict at RSU over faculty work load, for example, involves three parties: the dean of the College of Business, who wants to reduce the teaching load of faculty in the M.B.A. program; the faculty senate, which wants to establish precedents for reducing teaching loads in general; and the president, who does not wish to support a policy with such substantial fiscal implications. None of the parties has the power to impose its will if the other two disagree. Normally, President Robinson and the dean are part of the dominant coalition, but in this case the issue is business faculty work load, and the dean disagrees with the president's position.

Coalitions are theoretically possible between any two of the three parties; in Figure 15, I show a coalition between the dean and the senate on this issue. The *actual* coalition that will form in cases such as this will depend on the relative strength of the three parties and whether the relationships between them

Figure 15. Parties to Coalitions in a Triad.
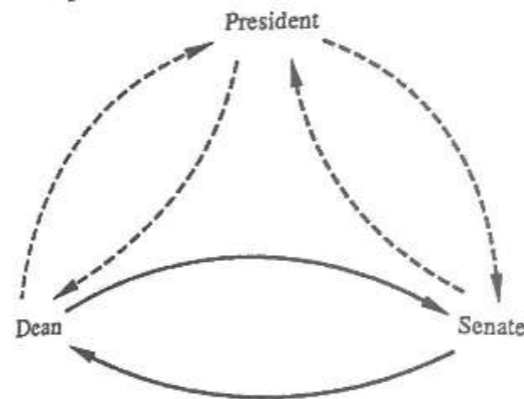
are continuous or episodic (Caplow, 1968). The opportunity to form coalitions serves to balance power in an organization because even relatively weak parties can swing the balance of power and can exact a price for doing so. Particularly in continuous relationships, coalitions tend to be stable over time, but that does not mean that the same coalitions will inevitably form in the same way as issues change. Coalitions can preserve ongoing balances of power (the fact that the president and the dean are both members of the dominant coalition increased the probability that they would support each other on this issue as well), or they can change balances (in this case, the senate and the dean, both weaker members of the triad, formed a coalition that was stronger than the president, who is the most powerful member). Coalitions challenging the formal authority structure are more likely to form in decentralized organizations such as RSU than in others; it seldom happens at People's Community College, where centralized administrative power is considered strong enough to overwhelm any conceivable coalition, or at Heritage College, where power is accessible to all and people believe that their interests will receive due consideration in all decisions.

The formation of coalitions can be extended throughout entire organizations by linking triads together. Although the bureaucratic model suggests that the power of higher-level officers will always prevail over lower-level ones (and therefore that no

coalitions are necessary), a political system makes it possible for lower-level participants to form coalitions that can be stronger than their superiors. At RSU, for example, the dean of the School of Education felt threatened by the possibility that the school's two associate deans were working together to curtail the dean's influence over academic policy. To prevent this, the dean gave special recognition and program support to one of them. The development of this new dean-associate dean coalition effectively ended any possibility that the two subordinates would work collectively to undermine the dean's authority.

Negotiations. Coalitions do not just "happen." Before parties can decide whether to join forces with others, they must try to assess their own power, the power of potential coalition partners, the degree to which the interests of the parties coincide, and the potential costs and benefits of forming alliances. Bargaining processes are often carried on by identifiable people who fill roles spanning the boundaries between institutional subsystems. They interact with each other as representatives of a group rather than as individuals. Negotiators in these boundary-spanning roles must engage in two sequential and continuing processes. In one process, they have to negotiate with representatives of the other group to discover the most advantageous outcomes or compromises that can be achieved. In the other process, they have to negotiate with the members of their own group in order to understand their desires, clarify their willingness to accept potential outcomes, and help them to adjust their aspirations as the political process unfolds. Often, the negotiations with members of one's own group prove to be more difficult than those with representatives of the other side! These interactions are shown in Figure 16, which depicts the interaction of President Robinson and the chairperson of the faculty senate as they negotiate an issue of faculty salaries.

Political processes often involve the interaction of two people who are the representatives of different interests. For example, President Robinson often meets with the chairperson of the faculty senate to bargain over issues of mutual concern, such as the president's proposal (opposed by the senate) to give

Figure 16. Representatives Negotiating in a Political System.
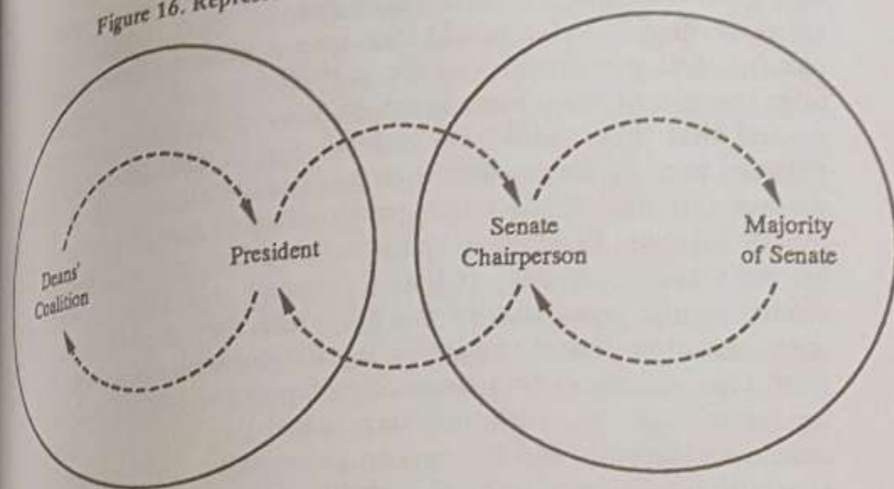
higher salaries to faculty in scarce areas. The president's position was developed in consultation with a coalition that included most of the deans and the faculties of several departments in business and computer science that are unable to successfully recruit; the chairperson's position was endorsed by a majority of the senate, by several humanities departments, and by the Women's Caucus, which wishes to see sex-related salary inequities rectified before paying higher salaries in fields dominated by men. Both sides see their positions as justified and reasonable, and each tends to identify the other's position as self-serving and inconsistent with institutional effectiveness. President Robinson thinks that she can obtain approval from the trustees for her own position even over the objections of others, but she is unwilling to pay the probable cost in terms of campus disruption. The alternative is negotiation.

President Robinson and the senate chairperson meet to argue their cases, and each tries to change the attitudes and behaviors of the other. The processes through which they interact have probably been best described in terms of labor negotiations (Walton and McKersie, 1965), but they are applicable in any social negotiation setting. To some extent, the relationship between

these two people is governed by the same interpersonal processes that govern all interpersonal exchanges. All other things being equal, feelings of liking should increase and values become more consistent as they interact and engage in common activities. If only the two of them were involved, they might find common ground that they could both endorse. But as coalition spokespersons, their ability to alter their positions is constrained; they are not just individuals but representatives of groups with different interests. Yielding to the other could be seen as betrayal by their constituencies, and to the extent that they are persuaded by the arguments of the other side, they must return to their constituents and engage in negotiations with them as well. Both representatives find themselves engaged simultaneously in boundary roles in which they are negotiating with both their own constituencies and the opposing negotiator. They are simultaneously part of two dynamic, nonlinear systems in which every action changes the situation and the state of both systems.

Tight and Loose Coupling in Political Systems

The parties to political processes have different preferences. As they interact through negotiations, compromises, and coalition formation, their original objectives change. Since the groups with which they interact are also modifying their positions, the social environment in which they are functioning changes more quickly than they can respond to it. It is impossible to predict in advance which of many alternative outcomes will in fact take place. The actual outcome is likely to be the resultant by-product of many forces and may be neither intended nor preferred by any of the participants (Steinbruner, 1974).

Not only are the outcomes of political processes often not consistent with the preferences of any of the actors, but because they represent compromises and are embedded in ongoing organizational processes, they are usually not as radical as the rhetoric of debate might suggest. Most change at RSU is incremental rather than comprehensive, and while some of the battles may be revolutionary in intent, the changes they provoke are usually neither radical nor dramatic (Baldridge, 1971). In the

political arena of RSU, loose coupling between what is said and what is done is the rule rather than the exception. Since participants in the process know that the final result is likely to be compromise, they usually ask for much more than they expect to get in order to increase the chances of their getting at least a minimum of what they want.

Political outcomes are difficult to predict also because they may depend greatly on the forums in which they are discussed and the timing with which alternatives are considered. What happens in a particular case at RSU may be related to whether the issue is discussed first in the faculty senate or the administrative council, and the conflict related to where an issue is properly to be discussed may at times be as contentious as the issue itself. In addition, when there are a large number of alternatives, the sequence in which they are considered is critical; depending on these sequences, it is possible for an alternative desired by fewer participants to be selected over one desired by many more (Plott, 1982). President Robinson has become aware of this possibility because of two versions of a bill recently introduced in the state legislature that would permit faculty members to join unions and bargain collectively. One bill calls for two sequential elections. In the first, faculty would vote whether or not to unionize, and if the second vote is needed, they would select their bargaining agent. The other bill calls for one election in which faculty could vote for any contending bargaining representative or for "no agent." There are two contending union groups on campus. If the first bill passes, President Robinson thinks the faculty would reject bargaining. But if the second passes, some faculty opposed to unionization might vote for one union in order to prevent the other, less desirable union from winning, and the campus might unionize even though a majority opposed it.

Leadership in Political Systems

President Robinson acts like a political leader much of the time. She gives high priority to informally learning about the concerns and attitudes of the many institutional constituents

and low priority to data and analytical reports (Dill, 1984). She knows that leadership depends in good measure on presence and timing; influence is exerted by people who are present when compromises are being effected and coalitions are being negotiated. "Being there" is critical, and part of Robinson's influence as a political leader comes from knowing where to be. It has also been said that in politics, "timing is everything." Timing refers to the understanding that a political leader brings to the questions of the positions of other campus groups, the possible linkages between one issue and another, and one's own power at a particular moment. Leaders must decide whether to do something now or to wait.

The heavy reliance of political leaders on intuition, experience, and a sense of the particular situation at hand makes it difficult to generalize about what works in specific circumstances. Practitioners and scholars from the time of Machiavelli have offered their counsel on gaining political advantage. College presidents who see politics merely as the exercise of raw power might wish to heed the advice said to have been offered by a former master at Oxford: Never retract. Never explain. Get the thing done and let them howl! But President Robinson sees the campus as a democratic community whose leaders depend on the consent of the governed (Walker, 1979). She believes that persuasion and diplomacy are her most reliable administrative tools. She sees conflict and disagreement as normal rather than as an indication of organizational pathology, and she recognizes that others may hold different views in good faith. She tries not to attack opposing opinions but to use them creatively. The president believes that there are many ways that objectives (for example, excellence or access) can be achieved, and she tries not to become irrevocably committed to any single proposal or program. She strives for "flexible rigidity"; she is willing to compromise on means but unwilling to compromise on ends. Most of all, she is a realist, and tries to understand the dynamics of the institution not as she would like it to be but as it really is. She appreciates the need to bring a degree of rationality to management processes, but she tries to balance this in her judgment with an understanding of the values of others. In her previous

position, for example, she was surprised by the vehemence with which her attempts to "improve budgeting" through apparently neutral technical reforms provoked criticism and anger. Now she realizes that management systems such as budgeting are not merely technical; in fact, they significantly change the balance of campus power and the processes through which individuals and groups express their preferences.

Political systems have many sources of power. President Robinson is certainly *a* leader, but only the naive on campus think of her as the *only* leader. Many groups attempt to exercise influence, and leadership at RSU of necessity must be referred to in the plural rather than the singular. Representatives of each of the various coalitions and subgroups must all be leaders in the sense of representing or altering the interests of their constituencies, entering into negotiations with other representatives, and seeking outcomes acceptable both to their constituencies and to their coalition partners. Of course, not all groups, and therefore not all representatives, have equal power, and the central power figure is the one who can manage the coalition (Thompson, 1967). At most colleges and universities, as at RSU, that individual is the president.

President Robinson's major leadership role is to help the community manage its own affairs, to assist in the process by which issues are deliberated and judgments reached, and to take the actions necessary to implement decisions (Tucker, 1981). This emphasis on giving direction to a community suggests that President Robinson does not rule—she serves. Since a college or university consists of different groups with legitimate interests, she tries to find solutions to problems in a manner that constituencies find acceptable (Walker, 1979). Probably the most famous statement of this political role of the president was Clark Kerr's characterization of the president as "leader, educator, creator, initiator, wielder of power, pump; he is also officeholder, caretaker, inheritor, consensus-seeker, persuader, bottleneck. But he is mostly a mediator. The first task of the mediator is peace . . . peace within the student body, the faculty, the trustees; and peace between and among them" (Kerr, 1963, p. 36).

The responsibilities of mediation as Kerr defined them

transcend merely the institutional and personal survival that peace might bring—they include institutional progress as well. The political leader, therefore, is a person who practices the art of the possible. President Robinson has learned that she cannot always get everything she wants. But she can usually get something. She has become an expert in analyzing differences in the stated preferences of different campus groups, designing alternatives that find a common ground between them, and persuading the conflicting parties that their own interests are furthered by accepting these compromise alternatives (Lindblom, 1980). She tries to develop positions that can be endorsed by the dominant coalition to minimize disruption and maximize satisfaction, while at the same time moving RSU—even if only in an incremental way—toward her own objectives.

In addition to providing what might be thought of as "mediated progress," President Robinson performs many other important services that are often not given appropriate recognition by the constituent community. Two of these are the design of programs that help clarify group values and the facilitation of constituent involvement in governance by reducing the cost of participation.

Clarifying Group Values. The rational model suggests that leaders should first seek agreement on values, and then design programs consistent with these values. It is easy to agree on many of these values, and at RSU, as at most institutions, consensus could be found that values such as "excellence" and "diversity" are good. But the meanings of these terms, and the relative value that they have in any specific situation, cannot be assessed in the abstract. Values can be clarified only by inventing alternative policies and programs, and then selecting between them (Lindblom, 1959). The relative importance of excellence or diversity in a specific situation at RSU can therefore be determined only by designing policies whose various outcomes differ in terms of these values. It is through the selection process that relevant values are disclosed. President Robinson functions as a political leader by having alternatives designed or designing them personally and by developing systems that de-

liver relevant information concerning them to participants in the political community (Wildavsky, 1979). She minimizes conflict by ensuring that the alternatives she designs are plausible and fall within the constraints of important constituents and by focusing attention during debate on common bonds between participants. She does this so that, while constituencies may struggle to achieve their objectives, at the same time they recognize that they do not wish to destroy the other side or wreck the organization.

Reducing the Cost of Participation. In a political community, mere dissatisfaction with the state of affairs is not enough to activate political interest. Without special incentives (or a degree of coercion), members of a group often will not act to achieve the interests of the group (Olson, 1982). The reason for this is that individual participation is costly (in terms of time and energy, as well as money), and each member will get the benefits of the group activity even without participating. It is particularly difficult to obtain participation when past participation has not been successful. In general, when the chances for success are low and the benefits can be achieved without participating, the rational self-interested person will not participate. Faculty apathy at RSU turns out to be rational!

One of President Robinson's roles as a political leader is to identify the issues that political groups should deal with, to reduce the cost of participation to elicit support, and to provide added incentives or coercion when necessary to induce involvement. This is true not only for President Robinson but for the leaders of other campus groups as well. As an example, one of the contending union organizations at RSU is the Faculty Association of Regional State University (FARSU). Their elected chairperson has developed systems of internal communication and influence within RSU so that faculty members need do nothing more than sign a card and pay a nominal fee to "participate" in the union and through their representatives to influence institutional policy. When faculty are not motivated to join the union by economic incentives, the union may try to provide added incentives by giving only members access to certain bene-

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fits or through coercion by bringing social pressure to bear against "freeloaders."

A consideration of leadership in political systems can conclude in no better fashion than by returning to the sage advice of Cornford, our Oxford don, directed toward persons who, like President Robinson, wish to be influential in academic institutions: "Remember this: *the men who get things done are the men who walk up and down King's Parade, from 2 to 4, every day of their lives.* You can either join them, and become a powerful person; or you can join the great throng of those who spend their time in preventing them from getting things done, and in the larger task of preventing one another from doing anything whatever" (Cornford, [1908] 1964, p. 31).