

My Role as a Collaborator in Student Affairs Work

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Collaborative Leadership

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Collaboration in Student Affairs

The job that I will discuss is the current position I hold at Southern New Hampshire University as Director of Student Life/Student Center. In this position I hold multiple leadership roles that allow me to be successful at my job. As noted in Collaborative Program Planning (Donaldson & Kozoll, 1999, p. 40) there are “two elements important to successful collaboration – the critical roles of leadership, and a vision that drives the development of new programs.” As a director it is important that I wear many different hats to lead my department and facilitate critical campus-wide programs. While I consider myself to be a visionary in this position, I recognize that I also play many different roles as a leader in the organization. The roles that I play are that of convener, initiator, alliance builder, champion, strategy maker, and behind the scenes orchestrator. (Donaldson & Kozoll, 1999, pp. 40-49)

As I consider my MBTI, there are four leadership roles that resonate with my personality type. My core type centers on the letters ENFJ. In *Understanding Yourself and Others* (Berens & Nardi, 2004, pp. 44-45) my type is described as one that connects and considers others in a group, foresees implications and transformations, experiences and acts in the immediate context and analyzes, categorizes and evaluates according to principles. An ENFJ will withdraw mentally to visualize the impact of the new information on the people involved. (Berens, 1999, p. 47) ENFJ’s often base decisions on what is most fitting and suitable according to the values of the group. (Berens, 1999, p. 47) This description lends itself to the four roles of a collaborator. These roles are: convener, initiator, alliance builder, and behind the scenes orchestrator. (Donaldson & Kozoll, 1999, pp. 40-42) Reflecting on my responsibilities there are projects and programs in which I use different strengths as a collaborator.

The role of convener is defined as a person who “identifies and brings together a set of stakeholders to address a problematic situation through educational programming.” (Donaldson & Kozoll, 1999, p. 40) In my position I work closely with the student leaders to enact major change activities that involve multiple student stakeholders. For example, when our Student Government Association lost direction as a group I introduced the idea of implementing a new strategic plan for the organization. The organization was in peril with a constitution that was composed of conflicting statements and policies, and no true direction. The organization engaged student leaders in both the SGA and other organizations in the process of renewing the organizational documents. Today the organization has clarity in its mission and vision, and has a constitution that meets the group needs.

As an initiator, “this leadership role is like the entrepreneurial role in business. Initiators do not wait for opportunities to occur but are continually looking for them and exploring how program ideas might become realities.” (Donaldson & Kozoll, 1999, p. 41) An example of a project I initiated at the university is the SNHU One Book concept. This project is modeled after a program at James Madison University that I learned about at a conference. I believed the One Book concept was a way to streamline communication with new students. I consistently look for opportunities and ideas that will benefit and improve our current offerings in student life.

“In an alliance builder role, persons place themselves at the center of activity and orchestrate the building of alliances among groups that do not normally work together. The reputation of alliance builders is enhanced when other stakeholders clearly see alliance builders as persons whose intent is to develop programs that benefit everyone rather than promote their own personal interest or that of their organizations.” (Donaldson & Kozoll, 1999, pp. 41-42) My position requires me to reach across the table and connect people and ideas that normally

wouldn't see the connection. Programs where I have made this impact have been with the coordination of the University Convocation Advisory Board, where as a Student Affairs Administrator I collaborated with faculty colleagues on re-designing this program. Another group that I have worked together with is the Institutional Advancement Division at the institution. Though we support different clientele, my department supports current students and Institutional Advancement supports past students for many decades, we have been able to produce the Alumni and Family Weekend program. This has required identifying commonalities in the programs we present that would attract both current students and their families and alumni.

The last role I have a strong affinity for is that of behind the scenes orchestrator. This is probably the most important I play in my position. The person in this role "remains in the background and works with others to orchestrate the initiation and development of a collaborative effort." (Donaldson & Kozoll, 1999, pp. 42-43) In my job I do this when working with student organizations as an advisor, or when empowering a staff member to take the reigns on a project or program. A clear example is my advising style with the Student Government Association. I provide the Executive Board with ideas and suggestions to accomplish their organizational goals and objectives, but they run with the ideas and make them their own. This has proved to be a successful approach, which allow student leaders to flourish in their positions.

To be successful as a Director of Student Life one must be a collaborative leader. By drawing on my ability to convene others, initiate growth, build alliances and orchestrate behind the scenes I am able to utilize the strengths of my personality type to lead in my position.

References

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