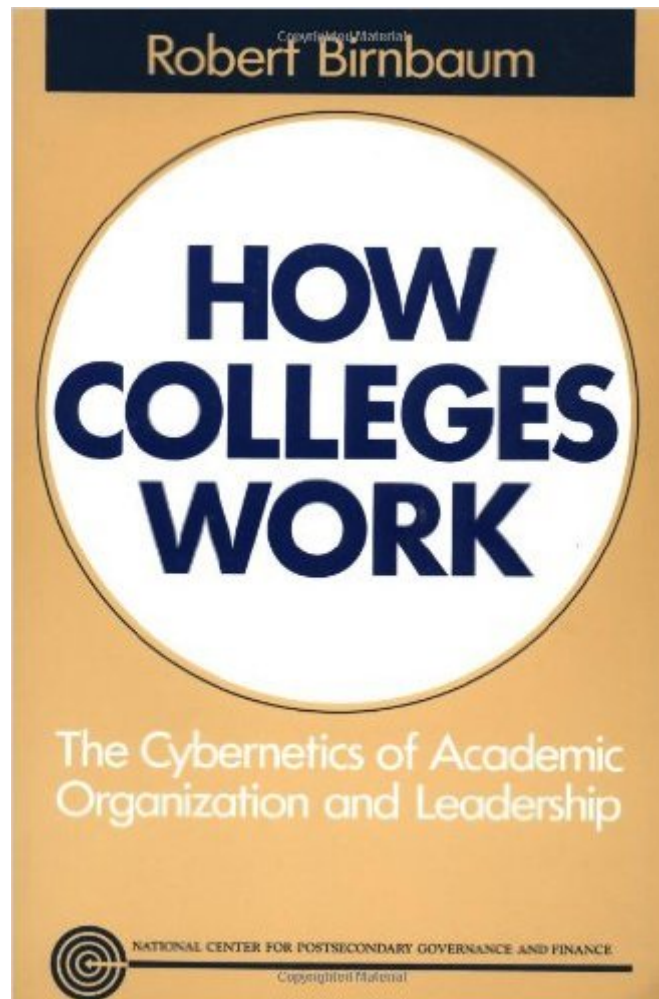


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# How Colleges Work: The Cybernetics Of Academic Organization And Leadership



## Synopsis

"One of the best theoretical and applied analyses of university academic organization and leadership in print. This book is significant because it is not only thoughtfully developed and based on careful reading of the extensive literature on leadership and governance, but it is also deliberately intended to enable the author to bridge the gap between theories of organization, on one hand, and practical application, on the other." — Journal of Higher Education

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A highly theoretical text; Birnbaum takes the reader through a well-planned out dissection of the common systems and "loops of interaction" in a college or university setting. He mainly focuses on the division of power between administrators and faculty, and gives frameworks for how these groups may interact with each other, or within their group. Birnbaum shows the reader 5 fictional samples of institutions of higher education: collegial institutions, bureaucratic institutions, political institutions, and anarchical institutions. In his final section of the text, Birnbaum gives his idea of the ideal institution: the cybernetic institution, which encompasses characteristics of the four other types. I was a little disappointed that Birnbaum did not manage to tie up all the loose ends or to present a solid recommendation about how to create positive change in an institution of higher education. His theories of open and closed systems, dual control, and tight vs. weak coupling, however, are very insightful and well thought-out. A good basic framework.

Although dry in many places, this book provides a nice overview of the administrative styles common on various campuses. It is descriptive rather than prescriptive, but outlines the advantages and disadvantages of each style of governance.

Articulate and concise explanation of academia - much of which remains true despite several decades separating current colleges from the time in which Birnbaum wrote this work. Highly recommended reading for anyone interested in working as an academic administrator!

Excellent overview of the various different college structures. Author worked hard to create analogies for how college systems were linked, but after getting into middle and later chapters the analogies made some sense. A good introduction to, as the title says, how colleges work.

The author provides a thorough discussion of the four basic organizational structures in higher education. What I found most helpful is that he also provides strategies to help academic leaders be efficient and successful in each of the organizational structures described.

This book is one of the most interesting books I have read. It is written persuasively and in a clear language. That it uses hypothetical cases also makes readers clearly see what is happening on the ground practically.

I was assigned this book for a class in organizational theory for higher education. When I first saw the age of the book I was at first skeptical that it might not be applicable to the higher ed environment in 2011. I was wrong! Birnbaum's book was well written and I found that his ideas are just as applicable, and more importantly still useful, today. I highly recommend it as a starting point for understanding "how colleges work."

Great book to understand the basic "layers" that worked at the organizational level of colleges.

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