

Building Leadership Capacity for Institutional Reform

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*There is something that is
much more scarce,
something rarer than ability.
It is the ability to
recognize ability.*

Around the world scholars and administrators alike speak about a great leadership crisis in higher education.

Blue-ribbon commissions and executive reports call for bolder and better college and university leadership. The search for solutions to the leadership dilemma leads us to thousands of leadership studies, most of which are contradictory and inconclusive. Leaders, the studies say, are born, not made—are made not born; possess distinctive traits—possess no special traits at all; emerge from the ranks of faculty—must be trained and developed; or must use power and influence—must merely manage symbols and the academic culture. In response to these contradictory statements, the Global Consortium of Agricultural Universities (GCAU) sought to explore four questions during this roundtable discussion group session.

1. In an era of institutional change and reform, what are the personal challenges academic leaders face?
2. What attributes should institutional leaders possess to be successful in leading reform?
3. How can institutions of higher education build the capacity for preparing these new leaders?
4. What areas of common interest should Consortium members work together on in the future to address these challenges?

Rarely do we study or even discuss these questions that impede our ability to attract and prepare academic leaders. Institutional searches for academic leaders are failing more often now than in the past; many searches are going into their second, third, or even fourth cycles. When positions go unfilled, bad things happen—institutions suffer from lack of leadership, colleges suffer from lack of representation, faculties suffer from lack of a strong voice of advocacy, states suffer from lack of connection and communication, and the profession suffers from the void that is at best temporarily created (Andersen, 1999).

Historically, academic leaders appear to have undergone a transformation from chief academic officer to chief executive officer with more emphasis placed on extramural funding, personnel decision making, and alumni relations. Increasingly, the vision of an academic leader (e.g., department chair, dean, provost, rector, and president) as a quiet, scholarly leader has been overtaken by this executive image of one who is politically astute and economically savvy. Some view the role of an academic leader as a dove of peace intervening among warring factions that are causing destructive turbulence in the college, a dragon driving away internal or external forces that threaten the college, and a diplomat guiding, inspiring, and encouraging people who live and work in the college (Tucker and Bryan, 1988). No matter what the view, today's leader in the academy resembles an academic species with an imperiled existence, as evidenced by an article in *Fortune* magazine:

Something bad is happening to [deans]. Their terms in office seem to get shorter. No more serene-looking Franklin Delano Deans reigning for decades, but plenty of troubled faces whizzing by, brass nameplates revealing that one lasted three years, another four. (O'Reilly, 1994, p. 64)

What is going on? Some conclude that colleges are almost impossible to manage well and that academics who are trying to run or repair them are getting “burned out and eased out with astonishing speed (O’Reilly, 1994, p. 64).” Edward Lawler, an organizational effectiveness scholar, comments: “Most deans now seem to fail. It is a terribly difficult balancing act.” This report will discuss the challenges, search for balance, leadership attributes, and ways to build leadership capacity in higher education for the future.

The Academic Leadership Challenge

Academic leaders typically come to their positions without leadership training; without prior executive experience; without a clear understanding of the ambiguity and complexity of their roles; without recognition of the metamorphic changes that occur as one transforms from an academic to an academic leader; and without an awareness of the cost to their academic and personal lives. The search for solutions to this leadership void leads us to realize that academic leaders may be the least studied and most misunderstood management position anywhere in the world. The transformation to academic leadership takes time and dedication, and not all faculty make the complete transition to leadership. The first part of this section addresses the question of personal challenges that academic leaders face and how they find balance in order to successfully make the transition to leadership.

The call without leadership training

To become an expert takes time. Studies of experts in the corporate world who attain international levels of performance point to the 10-year rule of preparation (Ericsson et al., 1993). In the American university, seven years represents the threshold for faculty to attain the status of expert in order to achieve tenure and promotion at the associate professor level, and another seven years for full membership in the academy. If it takes seven to fourteen years to achieve expertise in our academic disciplines, why do we assume we can create an academic leader with a weekend seminar? Does the Ph.D. represent a terminal degree, almost like terminal illness?

None of the participants in this conference roundtable (24 participants representing 14 countries) had systematic training for their academic leaders. In addition, of the over 2,000 academic leaders I have surveyed, only 3 percent have leadership development programs in their universities. As we all may now appreciate, we need a radical change in our approach to leadership development in higher education.

The call without administrative experience

The time of amateur administration is over. Department chairs, for example, often see themselves as scholars who, out of a sense of duty, temporarily accept responsibility for administrative tasks so other professors can continue with their teaching and scholarly pursuits. Nearly 80,000 scholars in the United States currently serve as department chairs, and almost one quarter of those will need to be replaced each year. Deans serve, on the average, six years and university presidents, four years. We have already established that opportunities for individual skill development through training are woefully inadequate, but what are we doing to provide leadership experiences to prepare our next generation of academic leaders? Even if we had systematic skill development opportunities available, if you asked managers where they learned their leadership abilities, most would tell you from their job experiences. In fact, a poll of 1,450 managers from 12 corporations cited experience, not the classroom, as the best teacher for leadership (Ready, 1994). One should not draw the conclusion, however, that formal training and education are of limited value because academic leadership training in combination with experience and socialization can heighten a faculty member’s appreciation for leadership and strengthen his or her motivation to develop leadership capabilities.

The call without understanding role conflict and ambiguity

Caught between conflicting interests of faculty and administration, trying to look in two directions, academic leaders often do not know which way to turn. They mediate the concerns of the university mission to faculty and, at the same time, they try to champion the values of their faculty. As a result they find themselves swiveling between their faculty colleagues and the university administration. In essence, they are caught in the

godlike role of “Janus,” a Roman deity with two faces looking in two directions at the same time. Although academic leaders do not have to worry about being deified, they find themselves in a unique position—a leadership role that has no parallel in business or industry (Gmelch and Miskin, 1993; 1995). To balance their roles they must learn to swivel without appearing dizzy, schizophrenic, or “two-faced.” They must employ a facilitative leadership style while working with faculty in the academic core and a more traditional line—authoritative style with the administrative core.

The call without recognition of metamorphic changes

Faculty spend, on the average, 16 years in their discipline before venturing into academic leadership (Carroll, 1991). After all these years of socialization, how do faculty make a successful transition into academic leadership? A national study of beginning academic leaders (department chairs and college deans) in the United States identified salient patterns that characterize the “metamorphosis” of faculty into administration. The change involves the following shifts:

Solitary to Social—faculty typically work alone on research, preparing for teaching and other projects, whereas leaders must learn to work with others;

Focused to Fragmented—faculty have long, uninterrupted periods for scholarly pursuits, whereas the leader’s position is characterized by brevity, variety, and fragmentation;

Autonomy to Accountability—faculty enjoy autonomy, whereas leaders become accountable to faculty in the department and to central administration;

Manuscripts to Memoranda—faculty carefully critique and review their manuscripts, whereas leaders must learn the art of writing succinct, clear memos in a short amount of time;

Private to Public—faculty may block out long periods of time for scholarly work, whereas leaders have an obligation to be accessible throughout the day to the many constituencies they serve;

Professing to Persuading—acting in the role of expert, faculty disseminate information, whereas leaders profess less and build consensus more;

Stability to Mobility—faculty inquire and grow professionally within the stability of their discipline and circle of professional acquaintances, whereas leaders must be more mobile, visible, and political;

Client to Custodian—faculty act as clients, requesting and expecting university resources, whereas the leader is a custodian and dispenser of resources; and

Austerity to Prosperity—although the difference in salary between faculty and administrator may be insignificant, the new experience of having control over resources may lead the academic leader to develop an illusion of considerable “prosperity.” (Gmelch and Seedorf, 1989; Gmelch & Parkay, 1999)

The metamorphosis from professor to academic leader takes time and dedication. Not all make the complete transition and, in fact, few department chairs become fully socialized into leadership.

The call without an awareness of the cost to scholarship

Academic leaders try to retain their identity as scholars while serving in administration. Not surprisingly, with 16 years of socialization in their discipline before entering administration, most academic leaders feel most comfortable and competent in their scholar role. In fact, 65 percent of department chairs return to faculty status after serving in their administrative capacity and therefore are wise to protect their scholarly interests. They express frustration at their inability to spend much time pursuing academic agendas. “Having insufficient time to remain current in my discipline” causes the greatest stress for department chairs and ranks third as a stressor for deans (Gmelch and Burns, 1994). Most deans and department chairs would spend more time on their own academic endeavors if they could, but find it virtually impossible because of the demands of leadership duties. If we are to build a sustained leadership capacity within our universities, we must address the issue of balance in the academic leader’s life.

The Academic Leader's

Search for Balance

What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter... a soothing, calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair which provides relaxation from...fatigue.

- Henri Matisse

In today's world many of us dream of balance and serenity, if not in our profession, at least in our personal life. Academic leaders are no exception. For many, work becomes their entire life. One price they pay when they accept a leadership position is an incredible time commitment—and the pressure to find balance in their lives. Their role brings with it an identity and self-concept that often dictates with whom they socialize, where they live, how long they retain their position, and what lifestyle they lead. Obviously being in a leadership capacity is an important part of their lives and provides them with pleasures as well as pressures.

But over the past two decades, pressures have begun to transform the once unquestioning academic administrator into an individual struggling to find a balance between total academic immersion and a fulfilled private life. Psychologists suggest that one cannot be unhealthy or ineffective in private life and still be an effective professional. As Robert Louis Stevenson once remarked, "Perpetual devotion to what a [person] calls his [her] business is only to be sustained by perpetual neglect of many other things."

Academic leaders' ability to develop a balanced lifestyle depends on how well they can make trade-offs between leadership and personal interests. Do they believe their private life is in balance with their professional life? Eighty percent testified that the lack of balance caused them moderate to severe stress. What price do department chairs, deans, and presidents pay for their venture into college leadership? Where will it lead? What are the benefits? What are the costs? What changes have occurred in their personal lives and are they satisfied with these changes? Can they find balance? Is there life after leadership?

Trade-offs: The leader's balancing act

What does research show us about academic leaders' ability to balance their lives effectively and what price they pay for their venture into leadership? The price depends on their ability to manage trade-offs between professional and personal pressures. A trade-off is defined as an exchange of one interest for another; especially, a giving up of something desirable (Greiff and Munter, 1980). What does research tell us about the ability to manage trade-offs effectively? This section combines the results of three research studies of 1,700 deans and 2,000 department chairs in America and Australia (Gmelch et al., 1996; Gmelch and Miskin, 1995; Gmelch and Sarros, 1996). The following are properties of trade-offs:

1. **Trade-offs from both professorial and private interests vie for the same resource—time.** Time pressures dominate leadership: meetings, heavy workload, deadlines, after work activities, excessive demands, and insufficient academic time head the list of top stresses. Although many complain that faculty are incessantly seeking financial resources, the real limited resource for leaders appears to be time. This problem exists because time is a resource in limited supply; time is inelastic and irreplaceable; everything requires time; every leader has the same amount of time; everyone wants part of their time; and most leaders are ill-equipped to manage time effectively.
2. **Trade-offs act much like a ledger; you cannot debit one side without crediting the other.** The relationship between professorial and personal time resembles a "zero-sum" game—all deans and department chairs have 24 hours in a day. Forty-four percent of the deans experience excessive stress from trying to balance their personal and professional lives.

3. **Too many trade-offs in one direction creates excessive time pressures and leads to stress.** What percentage of the stress in a dean's life results from the deanship? This question was asked of 1,700 deans across America and Australia. The result—60 percent of the stress in their lives came from their jobs. When asked about the nature of their stress, deans identified “imposing excessively high self-expectations” as the most significant time trap. This item proved to be the most predictive indicator of excessive stress for deans as well as department chairs.

4. **Trade-offs often change with the roles professors assume in the academy.** Most deans perceive themselves to be both faculty and administrators (62 percent); however, a sizable portion (33 percent) view themselves solely as administrators and only 6 percent perceive themselves as primarily faculty. This is in sharp contrast to recent studies of department chairs who primarily see themselves as faculty (44 percent) or as both faculty and administrator (52 percent). Only 4 percent of the chairs perceived themselves as primarily administrators (Gmelch and Burns, 1994). Therefore, as deans move from department to college administration, they drastically shift their self-identity to being primarily an administrator (4 to 33 percent). It appears that the more forcefully deans row toward the shores of administration, the more distant they become to their initial identity as a faculty member. Chairs, on the other hand, tend to retain their academic identity. In fact, most chairs (65 percent) return to faculty status after serving as department chair (Carroll, 1991). In this study only 17 percent of the deans plan to return to faculty status. The pattern for presidents and rectors is described by Moore et al., (1983).

5. **Deans find they have to trade their scholarship for duties in leadership.** Although deans characterized scholarship as a low payoff activity, many deans maintain their scholarship while serving as deans (Imig, 1998). The results of our study indicate that 60 percent of the deans rate their scholarly activity as lower than prior to becoming dean. Eighty-eight percent of the department chairs had less time for their scholarly activities, and the same proportion were dissatisfied with their reduction in scholarly productivity.

The Life Span of an Academic Leader

Given the trade-offs, stresses, and levels of satisfaction with leadership, have faculty become less interested in academic leadership? Are deans, in fact, serving shorter terms? In 1979, Abramson and Moss found that 63 percent of the nation's law school deans served five years or less, with an average tenure of three and one half years—a sharp decline from an average tenure of six years in 1970. A dozen years later Bowker (1982), found that deans served an average of just under six years and just a decade ago Andersen and King (1987) reported that exactly half of the education deans had been in office for five or fewer years with almost 20 percent in their initial year as dean. Our study of Australian deans also concluded that 20 percent were serving their first year as dean and 75 percent of deans had served for five or fewer years (Sarros, et al., 1998). In the United States we found the average length of service as dean was 6.6 years and 16 percent of deans were in their first year of service (Gmelch et al., 1996).

Given the diverse methodologies and multiple disciplines used by these studies, the evidence is not conclusive as to whether deans are serving fewer years or not. All indications are, however, that about one in five deans leave their position each year and they are serving slightly longer than a typical five-year term. *Fortune* magazine's assertion of the revolving deanship may not be too far from the truth. How, then, can we build the capacity for leadership development in higher education?

Dialogue on leadership characteristics and capacity

The 24 participants attending the Building Leadership Capacity roundtable session engaged in an extensive two-hour discussion regarding (1) the attributes and roles academic leaders should possess to be successful and (2) how participants and institutions can build the capacity for leadership in the future. Discussion highlights and related literature references are presented in this section.

Academic leader characteristics and roles

Before identifying any specific suggestions generated during the roundtable discussion, the group realized that the answer to the leadership attributes question depended to some extent upon institutional and cultural influences. Two examples of institutional influences on leadership were the method of appointment (appointed by administration, elected by faculty, or a combination of both) and whether the individual was hired from inside or outside the institution. With 14 countries represented at the session and 36 nations attending the Global Consortium, many different cultural perspectives on leadership needed to be considered. A question for further exploration would be whether we could identify leadership characteristics or attributes that are “context free.”

What do people look for and admire in their leaders? The answer, according to Kouses and Posner (1993), is credibility. The results of their surveys of thousands of managers over the last decade are strikingly consistent. In addition, our research of academic leaders in Australia and American produced the same results. We admire credible leaders—those who are honest (truthful, trustworthy, and ethical), forward-looking (decisive and provide direction), inspiring (dynamic, uplifting, enthusiastic, positive, and optimistic), and competent (capable, productive, and efficient) (Gmelch and Sarros, 1996). Participants in the session also identified similar attributes: stress resistant, flexible, skillful communicator (ability to listen), easy to work with, team player, visionary, academic competence, moral character, respected, and persistence to achieve.

But what do academic leaders do? Virtually every managerial book written lists and exalts the tasks, duties, roles, and responsibilities of administrators. Lists that are specific to department chair duties, for example, range from the exhaustive enumeration of 97 activities revealed by a University of Nebraska research team (Creswell et al., 1990), to the 54 varieties of tasks and duties detailed in Allan Tucker’s classic book *Chairing the Academic Department* (1992), to the 40 functions cited in a study of Australian department chairs (Moses and Roe, 1990). In our research, chairs identified four key roles—faculty developer, manager, leader, and scholar—and deans added two others—boundary spanner and program developer (Gmelch and Miskin, 1995; Wolverton et al., 1999).

In addition, several speakers at this conference implicitly made reference to roles academic leaders played in their individual cases: strategist with vision and task (Jischke); integrator of science and practice (Melnichuk); bus driver with a purposeful direction (Magrath’s reference to Israel’s Prime Minister); dream maker (de la Peña); policy maker (Kabat); coalition builder (Kasomekera); risk taker (Shousha, Johnson, and Anderson); change agent (Foster, Magrath, and Csaki); image creator; learner (McIntosh); and engaged leader (Jischke and Magrath).

Building the leadership capacity: An agenda for action

The session concluded with the realization that leadership talent on the global scene is scarce and the need for effective leadership in this time of reform has never been greater. As a result, the participants turned their attention to ways we can develop an agenda to build leadership capacity within institutions of higher education. Several action plans emerged.

1. Develop a web site to engage in continuing dialogue on issues of leadership development.
2. Create case studies on institutional successes and failures, on institutions that transformed themselves, and on ones that missed opportunities (see Keller, 1983).
3. Develop an international clearinghouse of programs on every continent engaged in developing leaders in higher education (see Green and McDade, 1994).

4. Develop leadership education materials for administrators, faculty, and students.
5. Study leadership skills, attributes, and roles critical for effective reform.
6. Publish materials generated from the above actions.
7. Conduct another session on leadership capacity at the next Consortium meeting.

From the corporate sector we realize that there are three principal approaches to leadership education: individual skill development, socialization of leaders' values and visions, and strategic interventions that promote collective vision (Conger and Benjamin, 1999). In higher education, leadership development is at a critical juncture. While the corporate world complains that they have simply progressed from the Bronze Age of leadership to the Iron Age, we fear that in higher education we may still be in the Dark Ages. We hope this Consortium will help shed some light that will lead us into the Building Age of our leadership capacity.

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