

Practices Used by Effective Department Chairs To Enhance Growth and Development of Faculty

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify behaviors used by academic department chairpersons to assist faculty professionally. Descriptive research design was employed in this study with major emphasis on the interview method of data collection and subsequent descriptive analysis. The survey population was 30 academic department chairpersons representing ten of the twelve North Central Region Land-Grant Colleges of Agriculture.

Department heads identified numerous behaviors to support the "movers", reduce the number and magnitude of faculty problems, and foster early detection of those that did occur. This paper focuses on six areas of behaviors used by effective chairs to enhance faculty performance: recruitment, communication, goals identification, support, evaluation and intervention, and recognition. Most administrative behaviors were learned "on the job" and from other department heads.

The implications of the study relate primarily to training and support of academic department chairpersons with emphasis on institutional policy and practice.

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Faculty development programs present institutions of higher education with opportunities to keep faculty current and to build excellence from within. One promising and economical approach to faculty development builds on the current institutional structure by working through first-line managers in higher education, the academic department chairperson. Because most faculty find that their immediate concerns and involvement in the institution are through their departments (Dressel, 1981), department heads are in a particularly pivotal position to encourage, support, and recognize growth and development activities of their faculty. Whereas department heads acknowledge their responsibility for the enhancement of faculty growth and development, they are sometimes poorly prepared to assume this role (Boice, 1985). Most department chairs are promoted to these positions through the academic ranks with little or no leadership training and without a clear understanding of the skills of managing and facilitating the growth of faculty and staff. Knight and Holen contend that this inexperience "...intensifies the need for information concerning the behavior characteristics of department chairpersons who are perceived to be effective" (1985, p. 685).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify specific behaviors and practices used by effective academic department chairpersons to enhance the professional growth and development of faculty in their teaching, research, and service roles. Sources of information which helped chairpersons arrive at these behaviors, satisfactions and dissatisfactions of chairs with their role, and advice chairpersons would give to new chairs were identified.

Procedure

Thirty male academic department chairpersons from ten North Central Region Land-Grant Colleges of Agriculture participated in this study. College of Agriculture deans and chairpersons from each of the 10 institutions identified three chairs who had excelled at assisting faculty professionally. Chairpersons whose names appeared most often on the lists were selected for telephone interviewing. Deans and chairs at the ten participating colleges identified sixty-one chairpersons. The number identified at each college ranged from four to ten. Of the thirty chairpersons selected for interviewing, twenty-three were identified by both deans and chairpersons. The remaining seven were identified only by chairs.

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A nonscheduled structured interview schedule was developed for this study. The interview schedule consisted of 20 questions in 6 sections. Questions in the first section asked for background information. The second section sought behaviors used by the chairs to assist faculty professionally. Other sections of the instrument consisted of questions about methods used to develop administrative skills, information sources, satisfactions and dissatisfactions with their role as chairpersons, advice they would give new department heads about assisting faculty professionally.

Results

Preliminary Information about Chairpersons

Chairpersons selected for interviewing headed departments ranging in size from 11 to 69 members with a mean of 30 members. The chairs had served from two to 26 years. Forty-three percent reported prior administrative experience, most commonly serving as department head, program head, or research project director. Thirty percent of the department heads had gained administrative experience in a field other than education.

Job Satisfaction

In spite of various frustrations associated with the role of academic department head, e.g., ambiguity of the position, inability to motivate faculty, proliferation of paperwork, and fear of becoming professionally obsolete, chairs were generally satisfied in their role as first-line administrators. Over 75 percent of the department heads cited "accomplishments of faculty" as a major source of satisfaction. "Hiring outstanding faculty," "building a department of national reputation," and "the turnaround of troubled faculty" were also viewed as a primary source of satisfaction, providing most chairs sufficient motivation to continue in their role.

Reported Preparation for Chair Role

Besides observing and interacting with department heads, chairpersons reported using various sources of training and development for their role in assisting the growth and development of faculty: (1) journals, books, and newsletters; (2) workshops, courses, and conferences; (3) on the job training; and (4) trial and error. All chairpersons recognized the need for training. Several, however, complained of too little time for formal development activities.

Behaviors and Practices Used for Faculty Development

Six areas of behaviors were identified by study participants to manage and enhance faculty performance: recruitment, communication, goals identification, support, evaluation/intervention, and recognition. Attention to these administrative domains helped chairs support the active faculty, reduced the number and size of faculty problems, and promoted early discovery of problems that occur.

① **Recruitment.** Recruitment was viewed by chairpersons as an opportunity to establish new directions in the department, and a chance to bolster faculty morale. One department head commented:

The first thing is, of course, hiring the right people. To me that's a high priority of the job. Because people make the department and if you don't hire the best people you're not going to have the best department.

Eighty-six percent of the respondents indicated that they had hired faculty during their administrative tenure and emphasized the importance of recruiting "top personnel."

② **Communication.** In addition to "hiring the best," "getting to know your faculty" was cited by the thirty department heads in this study as fundamental in assisting the growth and development of faculty. Chairs are proactive in this two-way communication process. Several specific behaviors were identified as being particularly important when communicating with faculty. A thorough orientation process for new faculty can set the stage for further communication between faculty and chairs. While formal communication methods such as faculty meetings, newsletters, memos, and retreats are useful ways to regularly communicate with faculty, an open door policy which permits informal but frequent interaction is also very useful. Many times an incipient crisis can be stopped before it can cause a major problem by the use of any or all of the above behaviors. Of equal importance is the annual evaluation at the end of each year. This evaluation can be particularly meaningful if there is input by both the chairperson doing the evaluating and the staff person being evaluated.

Frequent communication between department head and faculty was viewed as critical to the growth and development of faculty and was facilitated by the chairpersons.

③ **Identification of Goals.** Department heads considered goal identification as another important development tool. Helping faculty identify goals, assess opportunities, and set departmental direction was cited by respondents as a major responsibility of department heads and critical to the professional development of faculty. The job description was viewed as integral in this goal identification process. One department head commented:

The best thing you can do for anybody in any job is to define the job description completely--the duties, the expectations, and the methods that you're going to use to evaluate that person's performance. If you don't do that I think anything else that you do is pretty much cosmetic.

Eighty-four percent of the chairs indicated that they give new faculty more individual attention due, in part, to the rigorous promotion and tenure evaluation. Department heads met with new faculty as often as needed to assist in goal assessment prior to the promotion and tenure decision. For established faculty, goal assessment generally occurred during the annual evaluation.

To help faculty determine job directions, chairs first identified their own expectations and those of the institution. Chairs then encouraged faculty to define their areas of expertise, to indicate how they felt they could best contribute to the department, and to specify how they wanted to make their mark.

Chairpersons helped faculty identify their strengths and weaknesses and worked with them to promote the strengths and eliminate the weaknesses. By identifying the specific forms of development (e.g., toastmasters, campus instructional improvement opportunities, departmental mentoring), chairpersons provided faculty the opportunity for professional growth.

④ **Support.** Chairs viewed providing frequent encouragement and support as essential to keeping faculty vital and

productive members of the department. Numerous approaches were cited by the chairpersons interviewed as effective means of enhancing faculty morale and performance. Foremost among these were providing adequate facilities, equipment, technicians, and graduate students. Demonstrating confidence in faculty and encouraging participation both within the department and at the college and university level were considered important for growth of both faculty and the department. Although participation in various departmental, college, and university activities was encouraged, chairpersons interviewed felt all faculty should be cautioned against over commitment to committee work. They also felt that committee assignments for new faculty should be limited.

Additional forms of assistance for new faculty included providing released time, encouraging and assisting participation in professional societies, assisting in grant writing and editing, and helping new faculty define research directions. Most department heads felt that assisting new faculty was extremely important, as evidenced by the following comment:

In my view, they are the future of the department, and I feel that I can have a greater impact by putting the emphasis on the young people that are going to be the future. If a choice has to be made, I bank on new faculty.

A few of the participants in the study counseled "stuck" faculty out of the academic environment. One department head commented:

There comes a time when some faculty clearly know that their career is not going well. They know they're frustrated with research, and their teaching is not that good. I have actually worked with two of our faculty very recently to get them jobs outside the university. I usually try to work hard to get people out of the system as well as to improve them.

Additionally, the department chairs studied supported all faculty by removing obstacles and shouldering added responsibilities. One department head commented:

I've assembled one of the best groups of faculty in the country...They can more productively spend their time doing science, and I can more productively spend my time helping them do it...That means keeping a lot of paper work off their desks.

Some department heads in the study indicated they support faculty by serving as mentors to their assistant professors or by appointing a senior faculty member to serve as a role model. Others encourage interactions with senior faculty on an informal basis.

Generally speaking, these department heads supported sabbaticals and research and development leaves for their faculty, particularly for their mid-career and senior faculty. In addition, the chairpersons cited altering faculty appointments and helping the mid-career or senior faculty member, whose productivity has declined, focus on a new interest.

Several department heads indicated they promote change, whenever feasible, to encourage faculty vitality and productivity. The chairs in the study often support faculty by anticipating potential problems and initiating change.

For the more vital and productive faculty member, "getting out of the way" was voiced by several department chairs as the best assistance. One department head commented:

My basic philosophy...is to get out of the way and let them develop. Oftentimes that's more helpful than becoming actively involved.

All chairs viewed themselves as strong advocates of their faculty and of their department. Several department heads stated that they supported faculty by communicating frequently with the appropriate dean concerning their departmental and individual accomplishments and, simultaneously, determined the "mood" of the administration in matters relating to the department. One department head illustrated the importance of communicating department accomplishments to higher administration when he observed that "an informed dean is a supportive dean."

⑤ **Evaluation.** While chairs advocate frequent or continuous feedback to assist faculty professionally, a rigorous and comprehensive annual evaluation process was considered essential for the growth and development of faculty. Many department heads required their faculty to complete an evaluation form stating their activities for the year. They were also asked to list specific goals for the coming year for which they would then be held accountable.

Whitman and Weiss suggest that "...if there exists one conventional wisdom in the field of faculty evaluation it is that using multiple data sources is desirable" (1982, p.2). Several chairs "distributed the burden of faculty evaluation" through the use of student evaluation for classroom instructors, peer evaluation or review, self evaluation, and exit interviews with graduating seniors.

Department heads identify and address problems throughout the year but often use the formal evaluation process to tackle major issues relating to faculty productivity. Most chairpersons in this study indicated that they schedule a formal meeting with each faculty member to discuss goals and accomplishments, strengths and weaknesses, specific problems and suggested remediation. Thus, the annual conference was often the springboard for initiating significant changes in faculty activity.

Merit salary decisions were closely tied to the evaluation process by department chairs. Most agreed that withholding salary increases for faculty who don't achieve rarely of itself promotes productivity. Several, however, use this practice. One department head suggested that "...it may not be effective, but it frees up additional funds for productive faculty."

⑥ **Recognition.** Finally, recognizing and rewarding faculty was viewed as reinforcement for faculty productivity. Although strongly tied to the annual evaluation process, department heads reinforce faculty productivity throughout the year. One department head commented:

If I have a faculty member who is extremely productive...I don't ignore the fact that they are doing a superior job except once a year. Pat them on the back. Publicly praise them. I think we have to encourage even those who are doing very, very well to continue to do so.

Forms of recognition used by the chairs were early promotion, salary increases, additional funding, appointment to "select" committees, and nomination for awards.

Summary

Department heads feel they can most effectively assist faculty within a pattern of behavior beginning with the

Teaching At Higher Levels Of Cognition

Susie Whittington and L. H. Newcomb

Introduction

Students in colleges of agriculture are often shortchanged by their professors. In fact, the situation could be severe enough in some cases for the students to win malpractice suits using "failure to encourage thinking" as their claim. This is a serious allegation, but professors of agriculture often fall short of encouraging students to think beyond rote memorization of facts.

More Than Rote Memorization

The allegation that professors fail to move students beyond rote memorization of facts would not be so severe if rote memorization was enough to prepare students for everyday living, but it is not. Certainly it is agreed that students need to be taught facts on which they can build a knowledge base for future thinking; however, professors often stop after delivering the facts and assessing whether students have memorized.

Professors who care about their teaching and who care about equipping students for everyday living will want to teach more than rote memorization of facts. Professors need to encourage students to translate information into their own words, make estimations of predictions based on understand-

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establishment of the appropriate departmental climate--supportive open environment--marked by honesty and openness. When heads use the behavioral framework associated with recruitment, communication, goal identification, support, evaluation/intervention, and recognition, faculty members inevitably have higher morale, are more productive and tend not only to enhance the performance of the chairperson, but to achieve the goals of the department. At the same time, the techniques associated with faculty management help the chairperson guide the department in exciting and future directions by also enhancing growth and development of all faculty members.

The results of this study suggest that chairpersons' effectiveness as faculty developers could be enhanced by stronger institutional support. In this regard, deans and other administrators in Colleges of Agriculture can assist chairpersons in their efforts to enhance the professional development of faculty. This assistance can be accomplished in several ways. First, institutions should select academic department heads based as much on their management qualifications as on their reputations as scholars. To help determine the prospective department head's management orientation, search committees should develop a series of questions to be used in the interview process to determine the candidate's approach to human resource management. In addition, the job announcement should reflect the value placed upon human

ing of trends and conditions, brainstorm, formulate and express answers, lead discussions, and evaluate products and processes.

Moving From Memorizing To Evaluating

For students to develop the ability to evaluate products and processes, they must start with simple thinking ability--memorization of facts. Some authors refer to this level of thinking as "remembering" (Newcomb and Trefz, 1987). Most college students are already very proficient at this level of thinking.

From the remembering level students move in a hierarchical fashion to the "processing" level. Processing involves using known facts in meaningful ways, applying classroom information to a real-life setting, or analyzing a situation.

Once students have mastered remembering and processing, they can move to the "creating" level. At the creating level, students combine pieces of previously taught material and earlier experiences to form something new to the student. Finally, with practice at each of the preceding levels, the complex thinking ability--evaluation of products and processes is possible.

Going Beyond Remembering

Instructors can use a number of teaching techniques to move students through the hierarchy from remembering to evaluating. One or more of the following suggestions may help:

resource management skills by the institution.

Next, the development of pre-service and in-service training directed toward faculty development and other issues confronting academic department chairs is warranted. New chairperson orientation focusing on human resource management and involving deans, vice chancellors, experienced department heads, and administrative staff development experts is also suggested. Deans would be advised to cover university and college policies and procedures as part of this orientation process.

Finally, chairpersons should be evaluated for their efforts to successfully foster the professional development of faculty. Recognition of these efforts would demonstrate to both faculty and chairpersons the value that the institution places on faculty members and on their professional growth and development.

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