

Managing the Chair's Paradoxical Role

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Tomorrow's Professor Msg #910 Managing the Chair's Paradoxical Role

Folks:

The posting below looks at conflicting leadership roles that department chairs must balance. It is by Frank Fletcher and Charles Roberts. The article appeared in *The Department Chair: A Resource for Academic Administrators*, Spring 2008, Vol. 19, No. 2. For further information on how to subscribe, as well as pricing and discount information, please contact, Sandy Quade, Account Manager, John Wiley & Sons, Phone: (203) 643-8066 (203) 643-8066 (squadepe@wiley.com). Or see: <http://www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-DCH.html> Reprinted with permission.

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Tomorrow's Academia

----- 1,172 words -----

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Research supports that the academic chair's position is multifaceted and often includes the roles of academic leader, administrator, scholar, faculty developer, and, in some instances, mediator. Two obvious chair roles that most will agree on are serving as department leaders and as effective liaisons between their departments and their institution's administration. Despite these pressing responsibilities, academic chairs are, paradoxically, rarely given a clear line of authority. They also have to work through the other paradox of simultaneously being a member of the faculty and being viewed as a member of the administration.

To effectively discern their role, academic chairs should look outside their institutions to organizations that successfully manage knowledge workers. The term knowledge worker was coined by Peter Drucker almost 50 years ago to describe anyone who works for a living at the tasks of developing or using knowledge. The work of a faculty member is most definitely the work of a knowledge worker.

Organizations designed to accommodate and maximize the performance of the knowledge worker effectively integrate the best elements of self-organization and networking with different styles of communication and leadership. They address the knowledge worker's desire for challenging assignments, effective leadership, and ample feedback. Key attributes of these kinds of organizations center on leadership, relationship building, creating an environment for clever people to thrive, authenticity, integrative thinking, and effective change management.

Leadership

According to Hill (2007), the process of becoming a leader is arduous and by anyone's definition is a "stretch

assignment."Often many new chairs believe that power is based on authority and quickly find that when they give direct reports an assignment it doesn't necessarily happen. They learn that most faculty usually cannot tolerate direct orders.

Previously, as a faculty member or a professional working outside the academy, the chair's success was based mostly on his or her personal knowledge and experience. Today, chairs often find themselves "responsible for setting and implementing an agenda for a whole group, something for which often their careers as individual performers have not prepared them" (Hill, 2007, p. 50). Leaders, according to Hill, must demonstrate the following qualities:

- * Character: the intention to do the right thing
- * Competence: knowing how to do the right thing
- * Influence: the ability to deliver and execute the right thing
- * Relationship building: on a one- to-one basis

Relationship Building

Good relationships between the chair and the faculty are an essential element to the success of the department. The academic chair has to inspire and support the unit's collective responsibility to create a better future. Hamm (2006) explains that effective leaders understand their role in doing so and of bringing out the solution in others, not falling into the trap that they are the person with all the answers. Successful leaders, according to Hamm, actively seek out contributions, challenges, and collaborations from their colleagues.

Chairs need to be able to listen, collaborate, delegate, and develop new leaders as they develop in their own leadership role. From their faculty, chairs should expect that they stay current in their field, drive their own growth, and be team players through the department's highs and lows. In exchange chairs should provide faculty with clarity, realistic goals, and feedback that is specific, timely, and immediate.

Clever People

Chairs must also create an environment for their faculty to survive as "clever people."Clever people, according to Goffee and Jones (2007), "have one defining characteristic; it is that they do not want to be led"(p. 74). They also seek a high degree of organizational protection, recognition that their ideas are important, the freedom to explore and fail, and they "expect their leaders to be intellectually on their plane-but they do not want a leader's talent and skill to outshine their own"(p.74).

Authenticity

Authenticity is largely defined by what other people see in the leader, and, as such, can be controlled by the leader. Establishing your authenticity as a leader is a two-part challenge. First, you have to ensure that your words are consistent with your deeds. Second, you need to find common ground with the people who you seek to recruit as followers.

Integrative Thinking

Leaders also need to develop the capacity for integrative thinking. As opposed to conventional thinking, which accepts the world as it is, integrative thinking welcomes the challenge of shaping a better future. According to Martin (2007), integrative thinkers have the capacity to hold opposing ideas in their head without settling for one. They resolve the tension of this situation by formulating a solution that is superior to one that contains either or both. Martin explains that an integrative thinker goes through four related but distinct stages when looking for a solution to a problem. First, they must discover which factors must be taken into account. They especially need to seek out less obvious but potentially relevant factors. Next, they need to understand the

cause(s) and examine these links, especially from a multidirectional and even a nonlinear perspective.

Change Management

Change management is the ultimate test of leadership as fundamental change is most resisted by the people most affected by it. To bring about change, educational leaders need to create a sense of urgency and assemble the players who can get it done. They must have a vision of how the change will happen and why it is good for the organization and the people involved. Most of all they must communicate it and make sure people understand it.

Accomplishing change requires that leaders empower others to act on the vision and support them by helping them to overcome obstacles. Educational leaders must also spotlight initial victories in the process and help those involved appreciate the milestone. Consolidating the change helps to produce more change, and finally the change is institutionalized.

Before starting the change process chairs need to understand precisely what type of change their department is capable or incapable of (Christensen & Overdorf, 2000). To understand the department's inclination to change, educational leaders must assess three factors: resources, processes, and values. Inventorying and understanding their tangible and intangible resources is a vital first step. Processes--"patterns of interaction, coordination, communication, and decision making processes" (Christensen & Overdorf, p. 68)--must also be understood. Finally the leader must examine the organization's values, "standards by which employees set priorities" (p.69).

Conclusion

Knowledge workers are the primary force that determines the success of an organization. As noted earlier knowledge workers, like faculty members, don't like to be told what to do. They also enjoy more autonomy than other workers, and much of their work is invisible and hard to measure because it goes on inside their heads. The similarity between the profile of knowledge workers and faculty is striking.

Managing human intellect is as vital to the success of any academic unit or institution as it is to an organization that employs knowledge workers. Organizations designed to maximize the performance of the knowledge worker integrate the best elements of self-organization and net- working and are effective in leading, relationship building, allowing clever people to thrive, authenticity, using integrative thinking, and, most of all, managing constant change effectively. They offer an organizational frame for academic leaders to consider and model.

This article is based on a presentation at the 25th annual Academic Chairpersons Conference, February 6-8, Florida.

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