

8. ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP IN THE PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most misunderstood management positions in the contemporary community is the academic leader. Leadership in education generally receives less attention in our community than it should and in some cases it is not strongly valued in the reward system. Nonetheless, the faculties have a great responsibility for quality education and in fact education can be scholarly work. Education field is a broad arena where many opportunities exist for innovation. High tech classrooms, distance learning, computer simulations and course-ware are the latest but non-traditional approaches of learning that are currently being explored. Educational symposiums and workshops organized by professional societies like ISTE provide excellent venues for disseminating innovations in learning. On the other side academic leaders face additional challenges in monitoring and assessing the performance, which are discussed in the present paper.

Administrative leadership includes a variety of positions in general and specific positions as far as academic arena are concerned. Academic leadership involves groups of various compositions and sizes and the positions range from department chairs to deans of various academic activities; from director of research centre to chancellor of university. Academic leadership is critically important because of the impact it has on academic program, faculty, supporting staff and the student community. In

most of the institutions and universities these roles are, infact, fulltime administrative positions. Earlier, it was thought that it could be difficult to return to research career or teaching career if one became inactive in one's initial field for five or more years. However, present day academicians are more fancy of leadership at the expense of teaching and research.

CHOOSING LEADERSHIP

Obviously, leadership is not for everyone. Also most of the faculties have a foot backward being familiar with the shortcomings of assuming leadership roles. They consider the possible negative impact on their long term career by getting bogged down in administration. The possible reasons to refuse leadership positions include,

- a. Leadership may take away from their research and education interests.
- b. It is difficult to get back into research and education later on.
- c. Leadership involves and requires politics.
- d. Sometimes it requires fund raising skills.
- e. It may cause unnecessary, unhealthy relations with colleagues.

However, present day academicians are mostly politically motivated that they concentrate on retaining the leadership by some means, in the private sector as well as public sector.

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Academic values are now at a great discount. Department chairs and deans often give up most classroom teaching and even research sometimes. Moving away from teaching and research is a genuine drawback as far as quality education and research are concerned. In fact it is not absolutely difficult to return to teaching after a break provided the reality is recognized. And it is also true that politics arise where there are people whether the number is large or small. Whether it is industry or academia one must deal effectively with people to get effective results. The stakes in academia are not small, instead if one believes that one should not be an academician.

EXISTING SITUATION

In private institutions mostly the policies are business motivated and profit centred. Most of the managements concentrate on cost-cutting mechanisms at the expense of quality. Hardly, there will be powers given to the department chairs and deans except leave-sanctioning authority. They will be vested with more and more responsibilities but provided with no powers and freedom. All powers and guidelines are usually loomed and tyler-made by the management and the related administrators. Given essential academic freedom the department chairs and deans may perform effectively and can turn up more fruitful results constructively. In practice, many academic leaders try to spend most of their time to safeguard their positions and they don't mind even suppressing the equally qualified colleagues. This only creates unhealthy relations among the colleagues and insecurity among the highly qualified faculty. In many cases the head of the institution maintains a group of faculty of his / her own interest and executes powers according to the inputs given by that group. Obviously, every department chair tries to become a member of that group or tries to be friendly with that group. However, certain individuals avoid to face that group, and in many cases they are targeted, a truly bad situation to be rooted out.

In the government sector the academic leadership at the department level is rotated for two or three years period among equally qualified faculty whereas in private institutions one person is chosen by the management and that person will continue lifelong, whether good or not. This situation develops differences among the equally qualified and very often it looks awkward. More often the department chair tries to earth such faculty with a feeling of insecurity. The higher authorities also don't listen to the suppressed faculty as they consider it as a part of their game. One may put a question why they don't quit the institution? But that will not solve the problem. There are some faculty who attach themselves to the institution and don't like to move away, the tendency which makes the chairs to target them. It is the management to nurture the institution in a great interest and see that the highly qualified and experienced faculty to chair the departments or other academic leadership positions, or initiate a mechanism of leadership rotation. In the mechanism of rotation if one found inefficient let that person to continue as a teacher only.

Academic leader can improve the educational and research infrastructure and thereby improve the products of these efforts. One can foster the development of faculty, staff and students to improve the quality of work as well as morale. Improving the quality of education and student mentoring can result in higher student admissions and more successful graduates, which is a key factor in how academic leaders are judged. Also, the success of their students is a reward in itself for many educators. Being a leader in education there are rewards associated with pioneering a new dimension in education and observing the trend elsewhere. It is expected that an academic leader can be a catalyst for organizational change. If a leader has something special to his / her unit including improving diversity, increasing focus on teaching and learning, introducing interdisciplinary courses, leadership provides a right opportunity and resources for effecting such changes. Through leadership the person grows professionally, gets

new experiences and new contacts.

Academic administrators often have multifaceted roles as leaders in education as well as managers of complex organizations. Leadership is, so, not for the fainthearted. It needs great energy and intimate passion. The leader is to be a self starter and a good juggler for in a leadership role the colleagues will be seen in a different light and the leader has to adjust the priorities depending on the situation. In any leadership role, one needs to maintain the respect of colleagues both above and below. In academia, one needs to have a strong track record in teaching and research. It is frequently the fact that the best leaders were also excellent teachers.

Faculties are often not appreciated publicly for the work they have completed, and administrators often forget about faculty accomplishments because their work is behind the scenes. Encouragement will motivate faculty to strive for excellence regarding their workload expectations. Faculty need to see the chair as their advocate to foster professional development. The chairs need to create such atmosphere in the department and see that the faculty trusts the chair. When faculty perceives the chair as some one they can trust, it can enhance the relationship between faculty and department chair leading to a better academic department. The Academic chair person's Handbook suggests five strategies that the chairs can implement to improve faculty's teaching performance. The are

- i. Gathering background information.
- ii. Clarifying the problem
- iii. Observing performance himself / herself
- iv. Facilitating improvement and practice
- v. Monitoring progress and advocate. The department chairs are expected to discharge their August duties in a pleasant manner.

According to Kezar, the faculty often struggle as they need to work collaboratively with faculty and administration, but are locked into institutional structures and cultures that reinforce individualistic work. Also, private institutions tend to be more concerned about their rankings such that essential decisions are based on this criterion. As institutions rely on rankings that assist them in recruiting faculty and retaining students, this has become a key component in decision making. When the institution has a culture that promotes relationships and all – inclusive decisions, staff and faculty feel valued.

Several faculties in higher education are promoted based on their other capabilities and not on their managerial abilities, which in turn may not make them good operational managers. Naturally in such cases priority will be given to self guarding from other equally qualified and highly qualified faculty. Then politics enters educational institutions which divide faculty into groups that ultimately ruins the academic atmosphere. In the private institutions the department chairs and deans are permanently given those positions, which may develop a kind of supremacy and may ill-treat the colleagues of same qualifications. This may develop unrest among the faculty and the cordiality slowly goes off, which is rather a set back on the institution. The feeling of qualified and experienced faculty that they never become the department chair or dean in the present institution motivates them to move to other institutes. People may think that these faculties don't have the sense of belongingness towards the present institution. Instead, if the management rotates the department headship among senior, and qualified faculty, the dreams and desires of the faculty will be fulfilled and also they feel attachment to the college.

It is management's duty to see which is the best for the institution. There should be no selfishness as far as academic quality is concerned; as such academic unrest should not prevail among the faculty in the institution. There may be several challenges for thinking every

difficulty can be turned in to opportunity. With proper time management, conflict resolution strategies, supportive to subordinates and accessible to all nature and ordinary leader can become excellent leader.

Yet, as somebody said academic leadership is a split personality.

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