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ABSTRACT

The personnel function of top management is examined by first studying the environment in which top management functions. The basic skills required to perform the function are discussed. Against this background, six elements of personnel management in colleges and universities are considered: goals and objectives, organization for personnel management, major policies, systems and procedures, communication and reporting, and performance measurement. (JMF)

NACUBO Professional File

Personnel Management: Stewardship of Human Resources

by Douglas G. Mac Lean

The chief business officer of a college or university recognizes that his or her role centers on the management and stewardship of the institution's resources. The program committee for the 1976 NACUBO annual meeting has pointed out that "the success and good management of an institution's resources are dependent upon the performance of key individuals who direct important functional areas." Further, administrators would generally agree that half to three-quarters of the operating expenses of any college or university are expenditures for personnel.

In some cases, the personnel function is performed on a part-time basis by the president or by the chief business officer. In other situations, a personnel specialist guides the personnel function on a full-time basis. Full-time attention to personnel management is increasingly the rule and, in the last few years, more institutions have established this role at the vice presidential level. Regardless of the title of the personnel officer, the personnel function is an integral part of top management. Before the performance of the personnel management function can be evaluated some understanding is needed of the arena within which that function is performed and of the function itself.

The Top Management Environment

So-called "top management" is not easily definable. This is largely because the character of top management is shaped and influenced by the values and style of the individual top manager. No two are exactly alike. Successful top managers share six characteristics:

1. Production of a great quantity of work at a fast pace.
2. Fragmented, brief, varied tasks.
3. Consideration of current, specific, ad hoc "now" issues.
4. Many communications contacts.
5. Primarily oral communication.
6. Control of the job, rather than allowing the job to control the manager, despite the heavy demands.

The forces which work on the top manager are both internal and external. Within the manager, especially in quiet moments alone, the individual may feel that he or she must do certain things, accomplish certain objectives, or act in certain ways which will be personally rewarding and fulfilling. These internal forces, which go to the heart of the individual's value system, are not always clear to the top manager, much less to the manager's colleagues. They set up tensions within the individual, and the cool hand is the one who can live successfully in the tensions between what must be done and that which would be personally satisfying.

If that were all the individual had to deal with life would be difficult enough, but bearable. But there are external forces and tensions. These include other top managers, public officials, legislatures, individual legislators, political appointees, constituents, colleagues, employees, donors and potential donors, trustees, budgets, emergencies—and a thousand and one others demanding the manager's attention, time and energy. The manager is constantly torn between being the human being that he or she is and wants to be and the professional top manager that he or she must be. The constant role-squeeze of the top manager may be the most singular and poignant element of the manager's life.

The top manager stands on a moving, sometimes slippery platform. A posture of constant reaction may provide for survival in the short run, but will not serve the manager or the institution very well over a long period of time. This means that the top manager must be aware of the forces at work, must have clear objectives, must constantly reorder priorities, must develop long-range strategies, must frequently change tactics, must recognize that the job cannot be done alone, and must be surrounded with good people who help get the management job accomplished. This, then, is the environment of top management, and it is into this environment that the personnel management function must fit and be made effective.

The Personnel Management Role

What, then, is the personnel function in top management? Managers in business and industry found the answer to this question almost forty years ago with the passage of the Wagner Act. It has taken all of those years for the impact of that legislation to be felt on college and university campuses, but it has arrived, and, although it did not arrive in a single package, it's here. Every top manager discovers that he or she must devote an increasing amount of time, energy, and humanity to effectively managing human resources. This means that every top manager needs certain basic skills; in the case of the top personnel officer of the institution these skills should be available in abundance. The following criteria for use in performance management of the personnel function are the basic skills which must be present in all of those charged with that function. These skills include, but are not limited to:

1. A knowledge of manpower planning and of its economic and individual human impact.

2. An understanding of organization and of organizational development.

3. An understanding of the "whys" of human performance and of underlying reasons for and methods of personnel development and performance evaluation.

4. Knowledge of total compensation, its economic impact, and of how to improve the self-fulfillment of those key people in the organization who really make it tick.

5. Getting and giving accurate information—concerning not only facts, but feelings as well.

6. An awareness of the humanity of the key top managers, and an understanding of the role-squeeze which gets in between the human beings that they are and the professional managers that they are required to be.

7. An understanding of communication which is, after all, concerned with the relationships and transactions between individuals and other individuals and groups and how they perceive one another and interact.

8. The ability to objectively distinguish between people and functions and to operate in the gray area where a person has great impact on the duties to be performed and must not be allowed to become the proverbial square peg in a round hole.

9. An understanding of the economics of human resources management.

10. The potential for "getting it all together." This refers to the changing form and substance of top management and the need to merge institutional goals, objectives, and resources with the "musts" of new legislation and other external influences.

Against this background, six elements of personnel management in colleges and universities should be considered. These are goals and objectives, organization for personnel management, major policies, systems and procedures, communication and reporting, and performance measurement.

Goals and Objectives

For purposes of this paper, a goal is defined as a statement of long-range ultimate aim which may represent a collection of objectives, is not necessarily specific with respect to time, and may or may not be easily reached. In this context, then, the goal of the institution's personnel function is *to insure that personnel plans, policies, and programs provide effective and economical support to the purposes and operations of the institution.*

The individual objectives supporting this goal depend, of course, upon the specific responsibilities assigned at any given time to the personnel function. Any objective statement, however, provides the basis for measuring performance. This means that objectives of the personnel function should be developed or reviewed at least annually. A good objective statement should be consistent with the overall goal; suggest ways to measure and control results; be realistic in terms of time, local conditions, resources, and cost; and, finally, be capable of personal identification on the part of those staff members who must bring it about.

The manager is constantly torn between being the human being that he or she is and wants to be and the professional top manager that he or she must be.

One or two examples of personnel objectives are offered to suggest the type of guidance which is desirable through the development of written objectives and, further, to illustrate the use of objectives in functional performance measurement.

1. In the area of employment: to enhance and project for effective recruitment a favorable institutional image as a good place to work, to develop job profiles for each job to improve the selection process, and to centrally control recruitment advertising and records to insure maximum efficiency and affirmative action/equal opportunity compliance.

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2. In the area of personnel development: to provide skills training and management development programs to improve staff resources and utilization, and to help provide a climate of growth opportunity for all of the interested employees.

Ways to measure whether or not these objectives are being achieved are inherent in the statements themselves. Some results can be counted and measured; others can not. For example, in the case of the employment objective just stated, achievement of results can be measured by examining the time it takes to fill a vacant position and the cost of the recruitment and selection process. Turnover can also be measured and examined as a trend over time. "Soft" measurements can be obtained by securing information on the confidence of the hiring authorities within the institution in the work of the personnel staff, and by seeking out data on the quality of staff obtained through the recruitment and selection process.

The literature on management by objectives in colleges and universities is growing and administrators should examine it for the merits and perils of its application.[1] It can be said that the personnel function should have stated objectives, measurement criteria should be identified and applied, and it is possible to achieve an effective balance between quantitative and nonquantitative measures of performance. More specific indications of quantitative measures are indicated elsewhere in this paper.

Organization of Personnel Management

The organization for personnel management depends, first, on the goals and objectives which are established for the function and on the overall management concept of the institution regarding centralization versus decentralization of functions. Certain other factors must also be considered, and these include:

1. Whether the function is concerned with faculty or staff personnel, or both.
2. Whether the function exists at the system level of a multi-campus institution or on a single campus.
3. What the role is that is perceived for the function in planning and policy formation.
4. Whether the function is seen as a staff "monitoring" responsibility for the conduct of certain personnel functions such as recruiting, employment, or labor relations.
5. Whether the function is seen as providing administrative support for management or as being part of management itself.

In addition to these general considerations, the organizations for personnel administration must take into account the basic principle of internal control. A few institutions, usually to the later dismay of their managers, have combined the personnel and payroll functions. This has the effect of allowing staff of one office to determine who gets hired and to arrange for them to be paid. This can happen when the personnel function is seen as an administrative "paper-shuffling" element. Most institutions are too sophisticated to permit this to happen because their managers recognize the serious abuses which can occur under such an arrangement. However, the internal control principle can be seen as a fundamental rationale for the level of organization at which the head of the personnel function is to be found.

When the institution places strong emphasis on manpower planning, on the integration of personnel management for both faculty and staff, and on the organizational development and economic impact aspects of personnel management, then the personnel function usually is found at a high level of organization. The position of vice president for personnel is a common one in industry because of the factors just cited.

Colleges and universities are understandably slow to adopt industrial practices, but the need for clear identification of the personnel function at a high level of management is increasingly recognized and vice presidents for personnel can be found today in colleges and universities. This means that the chief business officer and other members of the management team must carefully evaluate whether the administrative structure of the institution is serving institutional goals and whether they are willing to give up some of the power of their present positions in order to better achieve those institutional goals.

The organization for personnel management should provide for an integration of all personnel functions, which will include:

1. Personnel policy development.
2. Manpower planning and organization development.
3. The development and maintenance of major personnel systems and procedures.
4. Compensation.
5. Employee relations.
6. Labor relations.
7. Personnel development and training.
8. Recruitment and employment.
9. Benefits.
10. Affirmative action and equal employment opportunity.
11. Personnel research and management reporting.
12. Personnel records.

To this basic function list are sometimes added security, safety, medical services, credit unions, and a miscellany of employee-oriented services and publications.

Particularly with the advent of federal programs, there has been a tendency to respond to new external forces and activities by creating new offices within the institution.

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[1] See G. Morrisey, *Management by Objectives and Results* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1970), and Anthony P. Raia, *Managing by Objectives* (Glenview, Ill.: Scott Foresman, 1974).

This is particularly true in the case of affirmative action and equal employment opportunity where there has been pressure to establish separate offices reporting to the president of the institution; other instances can be found where the institutions have resisted such pressures and have kept this activity function within the organizational framework of the personnel management function. It is, of course, a value judgment as to which works best in a given institution, but it should be recognized that the establishment of a separate office outside the personnel management function has a disintegrating effect which then must be overcome.

This brief treatise of the organization for personnel management deals only with the formal aspects of organization structure and has emphasized the functional form. The significant advantage of the functional form of organization for personnel management is that each individual has the opportunity to become an expert in the field of specialization. For this reason, the functional form of organization structure is that typically found in personnel departments.

This form of organization structure, however, suffers from serious disadvantages. Foremost is the evil of divided lines of authority. For example, when a department head employs a new secretary and makes a bad choice, whose fault is it? Similarly, if the department head makes a good choice, who gets the credit?

Another disadvantage flows from the normal human failing of experts to work together smoothly when all seemingly have "equal" authority. Futile squabbling can result when the personnel specialist concludes that the authority of the personnel function to enforce labor policies is being nullified by the lack of appreciation which other experts sometimes have in regard to the personnel function.

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Finally, the divided lines of authority are conducive to "buck passing." It is very easy to blame the expert when the labor contract goes sour, when the institution loses a personnel case in court, or when a Fair Labor Standards Act violation is discovered. The expert, of course, can hide behind that same expertise and the fact that the function is, after all, a staff and not a line responsibility. These disadvantages are mentioned because awareness of them is critical to the evaluation of the performance of any staff specialty.

There is only space in this presentation to mention the informal aspects of organization structure and the existence of informal executive authority and informal employee authority. The relationship of line and staff executives within an organization also is a large topic which cannot be dealt with in the space allowed. Suffice it to say that these topics cannot be ignored in measuring the performance of the personnel function.

Major Policies

Most institutions have developed and published in one form or another major personnel policies dealing with the day-to-day operating aspects of personnel management. Lists of the appropriate policies to address and examples of the policies themselves are available in the standard literature in the personnel field and, more specifically, through the lending library and publications of the College and University Personnel Association (CUPA).

There are, however, major personnel policies which currently need to be addressed in most institutions. Some of these policies are being adopted on an ad hoc basis to meet emergency situations and, primarily due to time pressures, are not being addressed with systematic research and full institutional debate prior to their adoption and implementation. Such policies are those governing manpower control and personnel development.

The imperatives of financial stringency and of resource reallocation demand a systematic policy address. As anyone who has been through personnel retrenchment will testify, the time to develop the policy and major procedural aspects of personnel retrenchment is before retrenchment becomes necessary. At the heart of the retrenchment thicket, personnel—and personal—issues present the thorniest problems. Institutions of higher education are justly criticized for their inability to face reality until after it has closed off opportunity for initiatives in dealing with fiscal stringency.

The issues which need to be addressed are attitudinal, programmatic, procedural, and budgetary. It takes time to develop concrete policy expressions of legitimate concerns for people directly affected by retrenchment, and these concerns need to be explicit in the policy and procedures for relocation, retraining, and reassignment of dislocated personnel. The budgetary aspects of personnel policies and procedures governing retrenchment should not be accepted as the sole criteria for policy formulation; both quantitative and qualitative criteria must be employed in a balance appropriate to the individual circumstances of the institution. The time to develop and refine such policies is when the campus environment is low in anxiety and conflict. For some, it is already too late.[2]

[2] For a more complete treatment of these issues, see the recent publication of the Center for Research and Development of Higher Education, University of California, Berkeley, *The Response of Public Higher Education to Fiscal Stringency.* Another excellent treatment may be found in the *Educational Record,* Summer 1974 —"Retrenchment, Layoff and Termination," by W. T. Furniss.

Another manpower control policy also requiring address concerns those actions which precede and help to create the retrenchment problems. Referred to here are the institutional policies and practices surrounding decisions to add new positions or to retain positions once established. In most institutions, these decisions are made under a formula which is in part quantitative and in part political. Manpower planning is, in effect, having the right numbers and the right kinds of people at the right places at the right time, doing things which result in both the organization and the individual receiving maximum long-range benefit. The big multiplier in payroll cost is not salary levels, it is numbers of people. How do you know the position is really needed? Is there another, less costly way to handle the work? Who decides when a new position may be created?

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The literature of industrial engineering is filled with the methodology of work measurement and can be useful to institutional administrators. However, there simply are not standards for all the kinds of things done in colleges and universities. Partly as a consequence, those operations which can be quantitatively measured, are; and those which cannot tend to mushroom. It is possible to evaluate clerical needs, most positions in the area of physical plant, and many others. The first step is deciding to do so and establishing a process for a thorough review. This in itself will eliminate frivolous requests and, in the final analysis, will eliminate the necessity of cutting the fat out of the budget since it wasn't put there in the first place.[3]

Very few institutions have established policies and programs for staff training and development. It is almost as if they didn't believe in education! While some of the professional associations, notably NACUBO, the American Council on Education, and CUPA, have mounted workshops and seminars, individual institutions have done very little for themselves. What is the cost of having work performed by somebody who doesn't know what he or she is doing? What is the cost of turnover brought about by the resignation of employees who are bored or underemployed? What are we doing to insure that we have promotable backup people in key areas of operation?

Training costs money, but failure to develop people may cost even more. It always is risky to single out anyone for a good job, but attention should be called to the personnel development programs of the University of Missouri—programs which everyone could well emulate to the benefit of his or her own institution. Programs of this kind do not happen without the support and participation of top management.

Systems and Procedures

Beginning in 1969, CUPA began publishing *Guidelines to Better College and University Personnel Administration*, a series of "how to" articles on dozens of personnel systems and procedures. These articles cover everything from "How to Conduct a Telephone, Pre-employment, Reference Check," "How to Determine Hours Worked Under the Fair Labor Standards Act," "How to Write a Classified Advertisement," "How to Handle a Grievance for a Nonunion Employee," to "How to Prepare for Collective Bargaining." Without going into detail about individual systems and procedures, it may be useful to make a few, more general suggestions.

1. It is possible to set and forget an automatic washing machine. This is not true of personnel systems and procedures which should be reviewed at least annually for their efficiency and effectiveness. With the possible exception of the procedures for student registration, it is probable that personnel systems and procedures tend to become more unnecessarily bureaucratic than any others in the institution.

2. At a time when institutions need all the friends they can find, they cannot afford to alienate the faculty and staff with the garbage that tends to creep into personnel forms, rules, regulations and processes. Far better that management remove the garbage than to bring in a team of consultants who specialize in such waste disposal.

3. Centrally established personnel systems and procedures ripple through the entire organization creating pressures for additional staff to maintain them. Look through the other end of the telescope. Start your review in the departments and see from their vantage point what they have to put up with.

4. Do not confuse efficiency with control. Complex procedures do not necessarily improve control any more than simple procedures cause control to be lost.

Communication and Reporting

How does a chief business officer know what is going on in the personnel function, whether objectives are being achieved, whether activities are being performed efficiently, whether the ox is about to go into the ditch and whether any assistance is needed? Part of the answers to these questions is a matter of organizational and individual style. Some people operate best with formal, written reports with stated deadlines and, in some organizations, such reporting may indeed be a requirement imposed by some "higher authority." Others find that face-to-face communication is more efficient or effective.

[3] See *The Journal of the College and University Personnel Association:* Ray T. Fortunato, "Personnel Dollar Savings—The Problem of the '70's," Vol. 23, No. 4, August 1972; and Douglas G. Mac Lean and Hugh P. Avery, "Your Opinion—163 Ways to Save Money, Reduce Costs, or Avoid Problems in Personnel Administration," Vol. 24, No. 2, March 1975.

It is a temptation to discourse on barriers to communication, communication channels and their selection, credibility in communication, openness of the communication process, control models, and dysfunctional consequences of control. It is worth noting that chief business officers need to guard against their own understandably high control needs lest they become dysfunctional.

Manpower planning is, in effect, having the right numbers and the right kinds of people at the right places at the right time, doing things which result in both the organization and the individual receiving maximum long-range benefit.

The development of a written statement of objectives for each of the several functions, if done carefully, provides a solid basis for communication and reporting within the personnel function and between that function and other offices. This does not preclude special or one-time reports on given subjects, but it does provide a results-oriented framework for communication about performance. My own preference is to strike a balance between face-to-face and written communication. There is merit, however, in encouraging an individual at least annually to formally document what has been accomplished and what yet needs to be done. Another form of reporting is performance measurement within the several subareas of the personnel function.

Performance Measurement

The subject of performance measurement is either interesting or terrifying depending upon whether one is doing the measuring or being measured. Whatever approach is used in function performance measurement, the key to effective appraisal of the personnel program is in the establishment of appropriate goals and objectives, the development of a written record, effective communication about results and the ultimate prevention of the ineffective utilization of limited human resources.

With the wide variety of institutions and the range of personnel activities available, a totally objective appraisal of the personnel function against a standardized scale is not possible. Differences in enrollment, philosophy, financial support, the type of organization, objectives, and procedures are just some of the considerations which cause the diversity in practice. Administrative appraisals, whether of program or of individual performance, because of the human involvement, are mixtures of subjectivity and objectivity, with subjectivity carrying by far the major weight. In the final analysis, performance appraisal of an administrative functional area involves three questions:

1. What did you expect?
2. Were the expected accomplishments obtained?
3. If not, why not?

While emphasis has been laid on the role of subjective evaluation against pre-established goals and objectives, it is possible to develop a large body of quantitative data. In the appendix to this paper there appears a partial listing of items which can be counted and measured.

There are also a few "rules of thumb" in the personnel business. For example, a job analyst should be able to complete four job descriptions a day including questionnaire review, interview, and writing the job description. For another, an employment interviewer should be able to complete four screen interviews each hour. Also in employment, three referrals for each person hired are considered normative. It also should be possible to complete a minimum of four desk audits a day for Fair Labor Standards Act purposes. Management consultants generally figure that they can review an entire personnel office for a campus and write the report in three to five days. That is not much on which to hang one's hat, so it is necessary to develop individual quantitative measures and to compare the operation with itself over time by trending these data at periodic time intervals.

There are dozens of actions which can be counted and measured in the personnel function depending only on the scope of the operation and the degree of its complexity. It may even be true that the more things that can be counted and measured, the more likely it is that the operation has become too complex. Some examples from the employment function illustrate the quantitative approach to performance measurement of the personnel function (others may be found in the appendix):

1. It is possible to determine the number of applicants processed, the number of referrals made, the number of tests administered, the costs of advertising, the number of interviews conducted (by type of interview), the number of new employees, the number of reference letters sent and received, and so on.

2. From these numbers it is possible to develop ratios (on a monthly, quarterly, or annual basis) of the number of applicants per referral, the number of referrals per person hired, the number of tests per person hired, the number of interviews per applicant, the number of reference contacts per applicant or per person hired, and so on.

Complex procedures do not necessarily improve control any more than simple procedures cause control to be lost.

The quantitative approach aids in knowing what is being done and is useful in decisions about staffing, manpower, planning, and budgeting. Obviously it will not disclose much about how well things are being done, but it can point to areas where more searching communications may be desirable.

Conclusion

Many books have been written on administrative performance management and institutions of higher education treat the subject in various ways in the curriculum. The basic model is that for all of management: (1) Decide what you want to do and the results that you expect; (2) organize, staff, and provide resources to do what you want to do; (3) operate; and (4) evaluate based on your expectations. The personnel specialist knows that every other manager considers himself or herself an expert in the personnel function. Each administrator has job-related frustrations, and this may be the principal frustration for the personnel specialist.

The chief business officer cannot avoid responsibility for the stewardship and utilization of all institutional resources. The chief business officer and the personnel specialist serve the institution best by working together as professionals and by insuring that each of them knows and operates on the principle that performance management begins at home.

Appendix:

Quantitative Measures of Performance of the Personnel Function (Illustrated)

Employment

1. Measures

Number of: applicants, referrals, persons hired, tests administered, interviews, resumes received, reference contacts, rejections; advertising cost; cost of forms, tests, and other printed materials.

2. Analysis

Ratios: applicants/referral; referrals/person hired; tests/applicant; interviews/person hired; reference contacts/person hired; advertising cost/referral or person hired.

Manpower Planning

1. Measures

Number of: positions by classification (title); employees (by classification, age, salary level, length of service, etc.); personnel costs by type (salaries, wages, overtime, etc.); hours worked; full-time equivalent staff; personnel actions by type (employment, separation, promotion, etc.); projected data on numbers of positions and employees by categories.

2. Analysis

Ratios: FTE staff per department or function; hours worked/department or function; overtime cost per time period per function; projected personnel cost per department per year.

Personnel Development and Training

1. Measures

Number of: programs completed; number of employees completing programs; elapsed hours of training time; program cost.

2. Analysis

Ratios: cost per person hour of training and development; training and development cost per full-time eligible employee; cost per person-hour of employee training and development; cost per training session (by type of program).

Benefits

1. Measures

Number of: employees enrolled in each benefit program; leave accrued and taken; time off with pay by type of absence (jury duty, military leave, sick pay, etc.); tax-sheltered annuities; number of benefits applications processed, insurance claims, unemployment compensation claims, and retirement applications.

2. Analysis

Ratios: cost per employee by type of benefit; claims per employee by type of benefit; benefit cost per payroll dollar.

Compensation

1. Measures

Number of: job descriptions written; job questionnaire evaluations; desk audits; requests for compensation activity (reclassifications, new positions, replacements, budget verifications).

2. Analysis

Ratios: number of actions (by type) per department or budgetary unit; number of actions per employee working in compensation section per time period.

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