DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 438 766 HE 032 768

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TITLE	Role Orientation and Communication Behaviors of Faculty Governance Leaders.
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	14p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College Governing Councils; College Planning; Communication Skills; Faculty College Relationship; Faculty Organizations; Faculty Workload; *Governance; Higher Education; *Participative Decision Making; Policy Formation; Verbal Communication; Writing Difficulties
IDENTIFIERS	Faculty Governance; University of Alabama

ABSTRACT

This study, part of the National Data Base on Faculty Involvement in Governance project at the University of Alabama, attempted to profile the role orientations of faculty governance unit leaders, and to determine if those orientations differed under conditions of communication apprehension (how a unit leader interacts with others) or were dependent on the type of institution. Respondents (n=223) were chosen from a random sample of 100 institutions in each of three groups: research universities; teaching-focused institutions, including comprehensive colleges and universities and liberal arts colleges; and community, junior, and technical colleges. Two different communication apprehension instruments were used to determine apprehension levels in oral and written communication. The study found that the majority (65 percent) of faculty governance unit leaders perceived themselves as process-oriented, that is, facilitating the operation of the unit by setting agendas, scheduling meetings, and other activities; thirty-five percent perceived themselves as task-oriented, dealing with specific programs of work or themes. For all three types of institutions, communication apprehension levels were identified in the moderate to normal range, indicating that many governance unit leaders serve out of a sense of responsibility and professional obligation rather than out of a desire to pursue a specific agenda. (Contains 13 references.) (RH)

Role Orientation and Communication Behaviors of Faculty Governance Leaders

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The contemporary faculty governance unit (FGU) relies on a variety of voluntary services by participants to accomplish the work set out before them. Often, the pace and amount of work is determined by the agenda created by the leader of the FGU, most often termed a president, chair, or director. The FGU leader combines introspection of what can realistically be accomplished with the service function of the position, i.e., responsiveness to faculty concerns and the unit culture, to develop a program of work. In some instances, the informality of the unit may even provide an elected leader a rationale for not creating a set of objectives or goals for the term.

Birnbaum (1991), among others (Baldridge, 1982; Floyd, 1985; Gilmour, 1991; Miller, McCormack, Maddox, & Seagren, 1996) has argued that perhaps one of the most influential variables in campus decision-making and behavior is institutional culture. Birnbaum has also argued that no singular classification of institutional typology can be held exactly to any one institution, but variations on internal structuring may lead some institutions to perform differently than others. The extent to which individuals act in these scenarios, however, has not been fully examined.

Faculty members who hold a position of responsibility in the decision-making process are motivated by any number of factors, including availability of time, personal conflicts, classroom teaching assignments, research expectations, and so on. Beyond these factors, however, Kang, Newman, and Miller (1998) suggested that how an individual perceives their appointment may have a great deal to do with how they perform in the position. A parallel argument has been made by Seagren and others (1994) in relation to the department chair position. In both situations, the faculty governance unit leader and the department chair are responsible to groups

of faculty, while simultaneously responsible to senior or central administrators for conveying policy decisions and representing competing views on decision-making. The faculty governance unit leader, then, much like the department chair, is caught in the middle between representing a faculty group's interests tot he administration while representing administrative policy and decision-making to the faculty.

A primary difference between the department chair and the FGU leader is the time of service. Most department chairs serve in the position either on a permanent basis or on a term basis, often lasting from three to five years. Most faculty governance unit leaders, however, serve in the position for only one year (on occasion two), thus compounding the difficulty of creating a work agenda, implementing the agenda, and adequately representing faculty and administrative issues to each other. Additionally, assessing the effectiveness of the work agenda can be problematic.

The current study was designed as part of the larger National Data Base on Faculty Involvement in Governance project at The University of Alabama. Specifically, the study attempted to profile the role orientations of faculty governance unit leaders, and to identify if these orientations differed either based on how a governance unit leader interacts with others (communication apprehension) or based on the type of institution in which the faculty member works.

Who Leads Faculty

Faculty governance unit leadership has traditionally been voluntary, relying on some form of election among peers to select an individual based on the potential for leadership in the position. The reality of the matter also alludes to the idea of the motivation to assume leadership

simply via a willingness to serve (Kang, Newman, & Miller, 1998). Additionally, faculty co-governance leaders have been selected based on their willingness to serve as advocates for the governing body. A popular argument has also held that prominent faculty assume a senate or council presidency in preparation for a future career in administration, although Trow (1990) has countered this argument. Trow strongly advocates that faculty governance leaders tend to reactionary forces to counter administration, and that the position by definition does not produce administrators.

Faculty governance leadership requires a variety of skills for effective leadership, including negotiation, planning, and data analysis skills, and particularly the ability to be patient as colleagues express their views. Although not widely reported, the concept of a first-among-equals as a faculty governance unit leader requires interpretative abilities in understanding the desires of senior administration, and what role the faculty governance unit should or can have in responding to these desires (Miller, McCormack, Maddox, & Seagren, 1996). Birnbaum (1991) similarly noted that faculty senates and councils can have more roles than forcing decisions in a tightly coupled organization, and their placate abilities can be tremendous and powerful.

Faculty governance units tend to be structured around a representative democracy or town-hall format, both of which can be effective based on the institution. Gilmour (1991) noted nearly 90% of all colleges and universities have some form of faculty co-governance body, and Floyd (1985) also argued that these bodies play a variety of roles. In general, they tend to be advocators of particular interests, and often take on watch-dog like mentalities to respond to various concerns, such as salaries or workload disputes (Armstrong, 1999; Nelson & Miller, 1999).

Writing apprehension is another traditional dimension that can impact the performance of a faculty governance unit leader. Written communication has been identified as an important skill for leading a faculty senate or council (Kang, Newman, & Miller, 1998), yet, writing apprehension can be debilitating. Those classified as having a low level of writing apprehension tend to have little or no fear about the writing process or a written product. Moderate apprhensives, however, may experience some discomfort in certain writing situations. For example, writing a personal journal or diary, or personal correspondence, may result in no feelings of discomfort. Writing for publication, however, may be difficult for the writer to cope with, producing levels of anxiety and discomfort. High apprehensives can realize this in an extreme fashion, fearing both the writing process, particularly the 'blank page,' and the idea of someone assessing or evaluating the writer's work. This fear of judgement can also have severe impacts on self-esteem and self-image, thus impacting, among other things, occupational choice (Minot & Gamble, 1991).

Research Procedures

The National Data Base on Faculty Involvement in Governance (NDBFIG) Project was developed in 1994 to collect baseline data on the process, individuals, policy, and methods of faculty co-governance in higher education. Funded through the support of The University of Alabama's College of Education and several research grants from various agencies, the NDBFIG Project team has collected data on the perceptions and activities of nearly 5,000 college faculty. The current study was part of this initiative, specifically addressing the faculty governance unit leader, most frequently identified as a faculty senate or council president, chair, or director.

The survey constructed for the current project contained, in addition to demographic data, an identification of the faculty governance unit leader's perceived role orientation while serving in the position, and the individual's communication apprehension levels, both oral and written. This information was intended to help provide a better understanding of how the faculty governance leader behaves and whether this behavior has anything to do with comfort in communication. An additional dimension to the study was the stratification of respondents based on institutional mission, including colleges and universities from three distinct groups: research, graduate-oriented universities, teaching-focused institutions, including comprehensive colleges and universities and liberal arts colleges, and community, junior, and technical colleges.

Communication levels were identified through the use of Richmond and McCroskey's (1989) Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA). This 24-item instrument allows for the determination of apprehension level in oral communication through the computation of an overall score. With a hypothetical mid-point of 75, high communication apprehension is considered any score one standard deviation above the mid-point (88 or higher), and low communication apprehension is considered any score one standard deviation below the mid-point (62 or lower). Similarly, Daly and Miller's (1975) modified (Richmond & McCroskey, 1989) Writing Apprehension Test (WAT) was used to determine comfort levels in written communication. The WAT has frequently been used in English classes, and consists of 20 statements about writing. Respondents are asked to rate each statement's application to their perceptions about writing. The range for "normal" writing apprehension on the WAT is between 45 and 75, with high levels of apprehension above 75 and low apprehension below 45. Richmond and McCroskey have reported a moderate correlation between the PRCA and the WAT (.30).

A total of 100 institutions were randomly selected in each of the three cells, resulting in a total sample size of 300. Institutions were initially identified, and faculty governance leaders were subsequently identified within the institutions. The survey was mailed to the sample during the fall of 1998.

Findings

A total of 223 usable surveys were returned for inclusion in the data analysis. Although four additional surveys were returned, but were not included in the data analysis for various reasons, including lateness of response, written indication of non-participation (n=2), and no responses marked. This response rate was 74%, and was determined to be adequate for the exploratory nature of the study. Responses included 76 from research universities, 64 from comprehensive colleges and universities and liberal arts colleges, and 83 from community colleges.

As shown in Table 1, the majority of faculty governance unit leaders perceived themselves to be process oriented (n=145; 65%) as compared to task oriented (n=78, 35%). This majority was consistent at research universities (process orientation, n=57, 75%) and in the responses from leaders at comprehensive colleges and universities and liberal arts colleges (n=41, 64%). Community college faculty leaders were also primarily process oriented, although nearly half of the respondents did perceive themselves to be task oriented (n=36, 44%).

As shown in Table 2, faculty governance leaders fell within one standard deviation of the hypothetical mid-points of both the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension and the Writing Apprehension Test, indicating moderate, situational apprehension about oral communication encounters and writing episodes. Faculty governance leaders at research

universities had a mean PRCA score of 66.09 with a range in scores from 43 through 71, and a mean WAT score of 60.40 with a range of 40 to 80. Governance unit leaders in comprehensive universities and liberal arts colleges had mean ratings of 68.64 and 57.53, respectively. Community college faculty governance unit leaders had mean scores of 70.87 and 61.96, also respectively. Thus, the overall mean ratings for the group was a PRCA rating of 68.53 and a WAT rating of 60.14.

Discussion and Implications for Practice

Faculty involvement in college governance has become a critical topic for college management. The activities of faculty members being involved in how an institution operates is an important aspect of college administration, and is reflective of the overall institutional culture of sharing decision making.

Study findings revealed interesting conceptual thinking about how faculty governance leaders perceive their roles. The vast majority of faculty senate presidents and chairs were process-oriented, indicating that they viewed their leadership role as one of facilitating the operation of a faculty co-governance unit. This process might include setting agendas, scheduling meeting rooms, providing minutes of meetings, updating unit web pages, processing paper work related to attendance, and so forth. Almost half as many unit presidents and chairs viewed their role as being task-oriented, that is, dealing with specific program of work items or themes throughout the course of a term. These terms, although common in areas such as political science and public administration, do not accurately convey whether these governance unit leaders viewed their role as instigators of institutional policy reform. Few NDBFIG efforts overall have been able to identify the curious characteristics which set apart active faculty

governance unit leaders, and those who see their term in office as "filling time." Future research must begin to address how these presidents and chairs take on active roles in supporting the faculty position in opposition or support of institutional administration.

In terms of communication preferences, community college faculty governance leaders were identified as having somewhat, although not significantly, higher levels of oral and written communication apprehension. For all three groups of faculty, communication apprehension levels were identified in the moderate to normal range, an indication that many of these leaders may well be serving out of a sense of responsibility and professional obligation rather than out of a desire to pursue a specific agenda.

The immediate applications for these findings are in the transitional efforts of faculty governance units, and how leaders share or transcend the expectations for leadership among and to each other. For faculty co-governance to be effective in the future, leadership must be seen as an opportunity to provide direction and overall enthusiasm for the work of the co-governance unit, and this leadership needs to be nurtured with the immediate president or chair, and transcended to others in preparation for their succession. Leadership needs to be cultivated in an environment where real expectations are placed on senators and representatives so that the entire governance body works collectively to advance a common agenda. As the background literature demonstrates, the process of shared governance is not widely studies, and this alone may be problematic for future leaders. Those in positions of influence within academic affairs must take on a more aggressive leadership style to create an environment where election to the highest position of representation among faculty is heralded and supported.

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Table 1.

Role Orientation by Institution Type

Institution Type	Role Orientation	
	Process	Task
Research	57 (75%)	19 (25%)
Comprehensive/ Liberal Arts	41 (64)	23 (36)
Community College	47 (56)	36 (44)
Total	145 (65%)	78 (35%)

Table 2.

Communication Apprehension Levels of Faculty Governance Leaders by Institution Type

Institution Type	Mean Scores PRCA (range) n=223	WAT (range) n=221
Research	66.09 (43-71)	60.40 (40-80)
Comprehensive/ Liberal Arts	68.64 (50-84)	57.53 (40-78)
Community College	70.87 (60-79)	61.96 (42-79)
Average	68.53	60.14

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