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ABSTRACT

        This paper discusses development of the department chair,
focusing on the need to build leadership capacity in colleges and
universities. It suggests that it takes many years to become an expert,
noting that one of the most glaring shortcomings in the leadership area is
the scarcity of sound research on leadership training and development.
Obstacles to leadership development include such facts as: the institutional
system tends to snuff out the spark of enthusiasm for leadership before the
flame is ignited; the prestige of specific professional disciplines drains
off potential leaders into profitable non-leadership roles; many academics
are unwilling to give up their professional and personal lives for ones
consumed by leadership responsibilities; and the state of selection at the
top levels of the organization is precarious. The development of leadership
ability is a long, complex process. Three spheres of influence are needed to
create the conditions essential to developing academic leaders: conceptual
understanding of the unique roles and responsibilities encompassed in
academic leadership; the skills necessary to achieve the results through
working with faculty, staff students, and other administrators; and the
practice of reflection to learn from past experiences and perfect the art of
leadership. (Contains 28 references.) (SM)

The Call for Department Leaders

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Where have all the leaders gone? In higher education, the development of academic leaders is at a critical juncture. While the corporate world complains that they have simply progressed from the Bronze Age of leadership development to the Iron Age (Conger & Benjamin, 1999), we fear that in higher education we may still be in the Dark Ages (Gmelch, 2000c). It is my hope that inquiry into department chair development may shed some light to help illuminate the way to the Building Age of our leadership capacity in colleges and universities.

Scholars and administrators alike speak about a great leadership crisis in higher education. Blue ribbon commissions and executive reports from the American Council on Education (Eckel,1998), Kellogg Commission (1999), Kellogg Foundation (1999) to the Global Consortium of Higher Education (Acker, 1999) call for bolder and better college and university leadership. The search for solutions to this leadership dilemma leads us to realize that the academic leader is the least studied and most misunderstood management position in America. The preparation of academic leaders takes time, training, commitment, and expertise.

Not all department chairs make the complete transition and develop the expertise necessary to lead their departments. To become an expert takes time. Studies of experts in the corporate world who attain international levels of performance point to the ten-year rule of preparation (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Romer, 1993). In the American university, seven years represents the threshold for faculty to attain the status of expert in order to achieve tenure and promotion at the associate professor level, and another seven years for full membership in the academy. If it takes seven to fourteen years to achieve

expertise in our academic disciplines, why do we assume we can "build a chair" in a weekend seminar?

Chairs' Leadership Development

One of the most glaring shortcomings in the leadership area is the scarcity of sound research on the training and development of leaders (Conger & Benjamin, 1999; Gmelch, 2000a, 2000b). Since many academic leaders first receive their training in their academic careers in research and teaching, they scarcely anticipate their current leadership positions, and thus have had minimal management training. This is true in corporate culture as well. The head of a large corporation once said: "We recruit you people fresh out of college, and for thirty years we reward them for keeping their noses to the grindstone, doing their narrow jobs unquestionably. The when a top post opens up, we look around in frustration and say 'Where are the statesmen?' No one consciously intended to eliminate the statesman; but the organizational culture produced that result" (Gardner, 1987,p. 19). We promulgate the same in higher education, socializing and rewarding our new Ph.D.s to become internationally renowned experts in narrow fields and then complain that no one is willing, nor prepared to be a generalist and serve in a leadership capacity.

Obstacles to Leadership Development

Why do some professors choose to lead and others not? What conditions do we create in higher education that acts as barriers to attracting academics into leadership positions?

Snuff out the spark before the leadership flame is ignited. First, our institutions of higher education have themselves to blame. If a spark of enthusiasm for leadership is ignited in any of our young faculty, our institutional system may well snuff it out (Gardner, 1987). Far from encouraging faculty, we hold the needs for experts and professional higher than that of leaders. In fact, many academics prefer an institution in which there were no leaders, only experts. "Far from wishing to be a leaders, they may conclude that they do not even wish to associate with one." We fail to cultivate leadership talent in our junior faculty. We pay little attention to structuring academic leadership duties

and opportunities, offering role models, or providing ongoing reinforcement and guidance in leadership skills and competencies?

Exalt the prestige and prowess of the professional expert. Second, some academics may possess the requisite skills and leadership ability but choose not to respond to the call (Boyatzis, 1990). The prestige of one's professional discipline drains off potential leaders into "marvelously profitable non-leadership roles." From the graduate school days institutions of higher education drive academics down the road to specialization.

Academic leaders, on the other hand, must be generalists. "Tomorrow's leaders will very likely have begun life as trained specialists, but to mature as leaders they must sooner or later climb out of the trenches of specialization and rise above the boundaries that separate the various segments of society" (Gardner, 1987, p. 7). Administrators must be generalists to cope with the diversity of problems and multitude of constituencies and look at the academy with a broader vision and more systemic point of view.

Ignore the rigors of public and personal life. Many faculty have joined the academy in search of a professional life characterized by autonomy and independence. They observe the stormy years of deans and scathing criticisms of presidents and wonder "why would I want to subject myself to such scrutiny and public criticism?" We cannot ensure a decent amount of personal privacy for deans as they are public servant leaders every moment of their day, with every appointment, message and memo open to open to public scrutiny, critique, comment and review. Even at home, academics find that leadership is not a "family friendly" profession. Thus, most academics are not willing to give up their professional and personal lives for ones of servant leadership.

Precarious state of executive selection. Experts contend that the state of selection of the top three levels of the organization precarious at best (Sessa & Taylor, 2000). In higher education that includes presidents, provosts and deans, although one might even question the state of selecting department chairs. Why? First, universities and colleges have very little expertise in the selection of executives and at times leave that process to executive search firms. Also,

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executives themselves do not feel particularly competent in the skills needed in selection and therefore gravitate to the more pressing day-to-day needs. Finally, most institutions of higher education have inadequate hiring, training, promotional, and succession-planning systems.

To recount these obstacles is not an attempt to deafen the call to leadership, but call attention to the obstacles we must overcome in order to develop our next generation of academic deans. Given these conditions, how do we send a call out to awaken the laden leaders in the academy? How do we make some academics aware of their leadership potential? How do we make leadership feasible, tolerable, and inviting for academics?

The Development of Academic Leaders

The call to leadership in higher education occurs at a particular time. However the success of a selection process cannot be gauged when the final decision is made and the offer accepted. How new chairs are socialized into the college and how departments adjust to the new chairs are also part of a chair's success (Sessa & Taylor, 2000). While it takes up to two and a half years to master the executive position (Gabarro, 1987), leadership development does not stop there. John Gardner points out, leadership development is a process that extends over many years (1987). It calls for repeated opportunities for training and on the job experiences.

The development of leadership ability is a long and complex process. The influence of family, peers, education, sports and social activities in high school and college (Wolverton & Gmelch, 2001) impact individuals ability to lead and their need for achievement, self-esteem, power, and service. "If experience is such an important teacher, and the motivation to lead is rooted in one's past, and leadership skills are indeed so complex and related to one's work and past, what role can training hope to play?" (Conger, 1992, p. 34). Rather than search for answers in specific training programs, I propose three spheres of influence needed to create the conditions essential to develop academic leaders: (1) conceptual understanding of the unique roles and responsibilities encompassed in academic leadership; (2) the skills necessary to achieve the results through

working with faculty, staff, students and other administrators; and (3) the practice of reflection to learn from past experiences and perfect the art of leadership. These three spheres and their intersections (see Figure 1) serve as our analytical framework for what is needed to develop department chairs in the academy.

Conceptual Understanding. Conceptual knowledge or understanding is the ability to conceptualize the leadership role of the department chair. Chairs need to understand leadership from a conceptual or cognitive point of view – mental models, frameworks, role theory that will allow them to grasp the many dimensions of leadership (Conger & Benjamin, 1999). Two issues are most important here: (1) as managers move up into leadership positions, the concept of the job shifts; and (2) institutions of higher education have unique challenges not typical of managers and leaders in other organizations.

As academics move into the role of department chair from previous positions in the academy they start to perceive themselves differently. For example, using Lee Bolman and Terry Deal's terms (1991), department chairs initially think in terms of their human and structural frames of leadership but as they gain comfort and confidence two new frames demand greater attention, the political and symbolic.

Second, the dimensions of leadership may be different given the context and organizational conditions of the colleges and universities. The department chair position has been characterized as having no parallel in business or industry They serve the external and political relationships, manage college resources, promote internal productivity, attend to personnel matters, and engage in personal scholarship. Some of these roles are unique to the academy (i.e. personal scholarship) but others represent new responsibilities chairs accept when they move up the hierarchy.

Whether it is in terms of frames, roles, responsibilities, models or tasks, chairs need to understand the dimensions of their position. Universities typically have taken the lead in teaching leadership to others by imparting a conceptual understanding of the phenomenon. It is now time to teach academics what we know about leadership. Chairs also need to define academic leadership for

themselves. What does it mean to build a community, empower others, and set direction? While conceptual understanding of department chair roles is a necessary condition to lead, it is not sufficient without application of appropriate behaviors and skills.

Skill Development. In order to perform the roles and responsibilities, chairs need to hone their skills. They can "formally" learn to develop their leadership skills through clinical approaches such as seminars, workshops and lecturettes, then practicing the principles through simulations, case studies, role playing, and action planning. Some skills such as communication, performance coaching, conflict resolution, negotiations and resource deployment are more readily teachable than complex competencies such as strategic vision which requires a long gestation period and involves a multiplicity of skills (Conger, 1989; Westley, 1992).

Many training opportunities for academic leaders are designed to have institutions send their mid-managers off site for a general three to four day training program. While these are effective in instilling key ingredients for skill development, research has shown that it is more effective if work teams with their supervisors attend the same program such that each supports and reinforces each other's skill-building efforts (Conger, 1992).

Formal training is only one part of acquiring key skills. While particular skills in themselves can be most powerful, individuals often require on-the-job practical experience to translate a skill from the intellectual level to a personal understanding and then to application. According to a Chinese philosopher: To know and not to use is not yet to know. Experience is critical to skill building. It takes multiple and varied experiences – experimenting, receiving feedback, coaching, refining and perfecting (Ericsson & Smith, 1991).

Reflective Practice. Understanding the roles of the dean and skills required to be successful is not enough. Leadership development is an "inner" journey, often the most difficult part of professional growth. Self-knowledge, personal awareness and corrective feedback must be a part of deans' leadership journey. Moral, ethical, and spiritual dimensions are necessary to complete the

dean's journey. Leadership development is very much about finding one's voice (Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Matusak, 1997). Because credibility and authenticity lie at the heart of leadership, determining and finding one's own guiding beliefs and assumptions lie at the heart of becoming a good leader. By providing structured feedback, promoting reflection, and developing self-awareness we can create conditions for the reflective executive to flourish.

Donald Schon in his book *Reflective Practitioner* asks: What is the kind of knowing in which competent practitioners engage? How is professional knowing like and unlike the kinds of knowledge presented in academic textbooks, scientific papers, and learned journals. We can begin with the assumption that competent practitioners know more than they say and that they exhibit a kind of knowing-in-practice, most of which is tacit. Reflection-in-action is central to the art through which leaders cope with the troublesome divergent situations of practice. When practitioners reflects in action, they become a researcher in the practice context.

Schon discloses his personal communication with deans at Harvard and MIT: "The dean of a major school o management speaks of the inadequacy of established management theory and technique to deal with the increasingly critical task of "managing complexity. The dean of a famous school of engineering observes that the nineteenth-century division of labor has become obsolete" (Schon, 1983, p. 14). Times change as do constructs and skills needed to lead. This calls for the art of practice which might be taught if it were constant and known, but it is not constant. Some of the major professions in universities are disciplined by an unambiguous end – health, law, sciences—and they operate in stable institutional contexts. Deans are embroiled in conflicts of values, goals, purposes and interests. Schon contends that it is the reflection-in-action which is central to the "art" by which practitioners sometimes deal well with situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict.

For this reason alone, the use of reflection-in-action is critically important. We must develop strategies for reflection which place technical problem solving within a broader context of reflective inquiry. Chairs' isolation in their respective

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positions works against reflection-in-action. Schon contends: "Managers do reflect-in-action, but they seldom reflect on their reflection-in-action. Hence this crucially important dimension of their art tends to remain private and inaccessible to others. Moreover, because awareness of one's intuitive thinking usually grows out of practice in articulating it to others, managers often have little access to their own reflection-in-action" (1983, p. 243). As a result, chairs need to communicate their private dilemmas and insights, to test them against the views of their peers. Leadership development does not take place within a vacuum (Beineke & Sublett, 1999). It's nurishing flourishes best within a group or with trusted colleagues acting as mentors, partners and coaches.

Summary

Leadership development must incorporate all three approaches: conceptual development, skill building and reflective practice. Each integrates and builds upon the other. Nevertheless, development of leadership rests with the individual's own motivation and talent and with the receptiveness of their organizations to support and coach such skills. Is your university prepared to build chairs?

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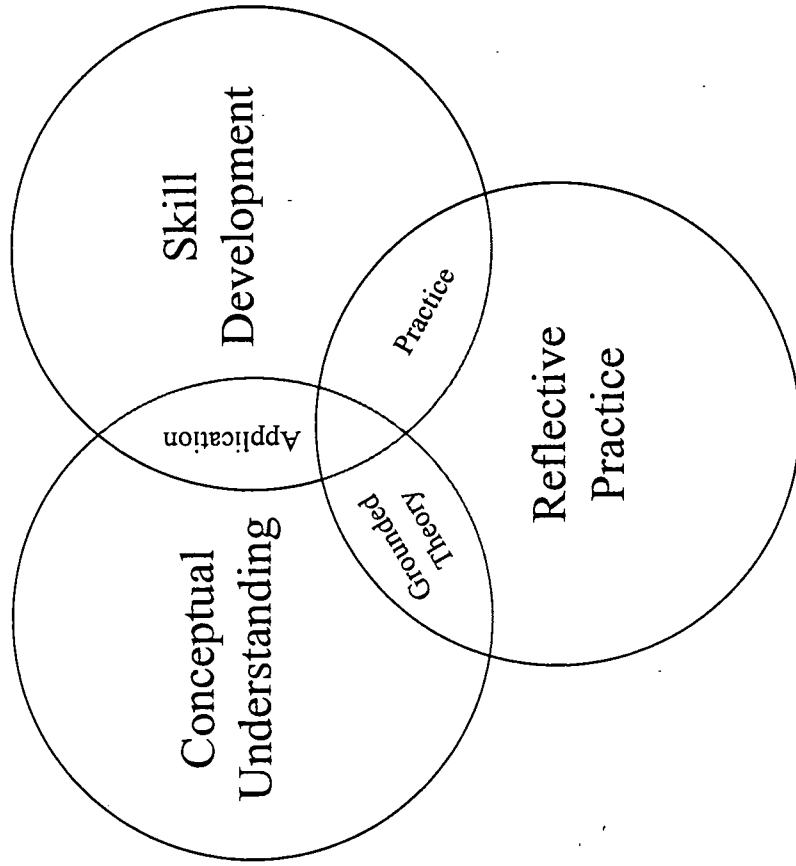
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Department Chair Development

Skill Development

Conceptual Understanding

Reflective Practice

Application

Practice

Grounded Theory

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