

LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION: ENGAGING THE DEPARTMENT HEADS

Nancy S. Huber, Ph.D.
COrE Partner - Leadership and Outreach
and Associate Professor, AED
The University of Arizona
Tucson, Arizona

INTRODUCTION

The Context for Change in Higher Education

The context for leadership development in higher education is characterized by both immense change and blind inactivity (Apps, 1988; Bensimon and Neumann, 1993; Bogue, 1991; Greene, 1988; Leslie & Fretwell, 1996; Lucas, 1994; Millard, 1991; Munitz, 1995; and Tierney, 1993.) The extent and pace of change in colleges and universities is influenced by external pressures: declining public confidence and subsequent legislative support; demand for improved business practices; productivity and accountability funding, rather than formula funding; distance learning and virtual universities; competition for students is increasing as the proportion of high school graduates going on to college decreases; and private companies (Motorola, for example) are developing their own degree programs.

In addition, the nature of the student body is changing: university students are generally older and have job and family responsibilities in addition to their role as students; many students take more than four years to complete the requirements for a bachelor's degree; students expect high levels of technical support and creative use of technology in instruction; and students and their families are unable or unwilling to contend with the escalating cost of education.

At the same time, the pressure is mounting from within: again, students need more than four years to graduate; new ideas emerge concerning shared governance; scrutiny of tenure and job-for-life issues intensifies; new management and leadership paradigms operate within an old hierarchy.

Not Simply Survival, But Transformation

One feels that dramatic changes are imminent. To use Peter Vaill's metaphor, higher education is beginning to recognize the challenges inherent in trying to manage in permanent white water. Focusing on transformation of the institution, for those who recognize the need, seems next to impossible when those around us are in survival mode. Ironically, change is perhaps the only constant in the swirling rapids.

On the other hand, the academy has a reputation for maintaining tradition, the steady rock in turbulent waters. Change resisters lurk in the hallowed halls and ivory towers, many insisting that we just need to wait out the current round of budget cuts and then things will turn around so that we can get on with business as usual. Some are quite vocal about the extent to which the professorate knows best and must be ever vigilant in the battle to preserve and protect the status quo. Yet that same steady rock in the stream isn't going anywhere and, over time, is gradually eroding, diminished by its refusal (or inability) to participate in the changes being wrought by the activity within which it exists.

BACKGROUND - THE LEADERSHIP CONTEXT

Managers and Leaders

I don't believe we can manage a transformation of higher education in time to assure our relevance in the next century. However, I do believe that we can lead the system to greatness as yet undreamed. Please don't misunderstand -- management is a good thing and essential to the smooth functioning of any educational system. However, it will take leadership throughout the system to accomplish what must be done to create vibrant universities from the burden of venerableness which threatens to choke the spirit of discovery and the application of knowledge.

Management and leadership are both important -- both essential to the effective functioning and ultimate success of an organization. They are different, but not dissociated. Bennis is often quoted by those seeking to delineate the primary differences between leadership and management. (See below.)

MANAGER	LEADER
administers	innovates
a copy	an original
focus on structure	focus on people
controls	inspires trust
short-range view	long-range perspective
asks how and when	asks what and why
eyes on the bottom line	eyes on the horizon
imitates	originates
accepts status quo	challenges status quo
classic "good soldier"	own person
does things right	does the right things

Conger presents a similar view claiming that management involves planning and budgeting, organizing and staffing, controlling and problem solving, and produces a degree of predictability and order. Leadership, on the other hand, is concerned with establishing direction, aligning people, motivating and inspiring, and produces change, often to a dramatic degree.

Higher education will need to employ good management practices to deal with the challenges suggested earlier, but transformational leadership is essential to create viable new institutions from within. Senge, during a video conference last spring, suggested that we need to grow a new system from within, employing guided inquiry and facilitation, growing from the inside out in concentric circles. The process is invitational, not institutional. This is the essence of transformation. Managers are needed for incremental change. Leaders, however, will champion the transformation demanded of higher education by both internal and external pressures.

The leaders of the transformation may include, but are certainly not limited to, those with high ranking titles and positions. Leadership for change means a change for leadership -- how it is perceived, who does it, and how it is done. For those of us in higher education, we are all called to lead the transformation, each of us according to our passion and

capabilities. In fact, this is one of the essential principles guiding our Continuous Organizational REnewal (CORE) effort at the University of Arizona.

Academic Unit Heads' Role in Transformation at U of A

Our president, Manuel Pacheco, initiated the CORE program within a year of his arrival. Using Deming's principles, we have engaged in numerous process improvement activities over the past several years. (I would encourage you to check out the University of Arizona's Home Page on the World Wide Web and select "The CORE Connection" to see what we've been doing!) One of Dr. Pacheco's early endeavor's was to expose the President's Cabinet to his vision for continuous improvement, and to provide them a "safe" environment in which to experiment with some of the tenets and techniques. This series of seminars and workshops was called the President's Quality Leadership Program (PQLP). More recently, in recognition of the critical integrative role of Academic Unit Heads, PQLP was redesigned for their needs. My involvement came about through my work as a loaned resource person to the CORE program. It was underscored by a growing sense that more and more Department Heads and their faculty desired a means by which they might metaphorically sit in a circle, where they could see each other and work collaboratively on complex problems.

We have some truly excellent scholars at the University of Arizona serving in administrative roles. Many Heads of departments or academic units were pressed into service based primarily on their reputation within their discipline. Many of them are well recognized in their field for their research efforts and for excellence in teaching. However, the skills needed for excellence in an academic discipline are not the same ones needed to provide leadership within a college or at the unit level. Whereas, most academic units are well able to clarify what distinguishes them from any other discipline, and most faculty develop a line of scholarship uniquely theirs, leadership is a more integrative endeavor. Disciplinary reputations are built on specialization and competition among peers while departmental leadership demands a more collaborative approach.

Among Department Heads, the role is generally an entry level leadership position. Many new heads come into the position without much investment in management training or leadership education as part of their continuing professional development. What is needed is a program to assist and support heads as leaders. Management skills which have been honed on outstanding scholarship and/or exemplary teaching must be expanded to encompass leadership concepts and approaches required to guide and support an academic unit through turbulent times and the transformation of higher education.

It is important to point out that management and leadership are both required for the task, each applicable to a different set of functions. In her recent book, Lucas describes Department Heads leadership function as including: leading the department; motivating faculty to enhance productivity, teach effectively, and increase both scholarship and service; handling faculty evaluation and feedback; creating a supportive communication climate; managing conflict; and developing chair survival skills. The management or administrative functions, some of which she says may be delegated, include: preparing teaching schedules; ensuring teaching effectiveness of adjunct and part-time faculty; managing graduate assistants; managing administrative assistants, departmental secretaries, and clerical assistants; performing personnel decision-making; revising the curriculum; and managing the budget. I would hasten to add that the leadership and management activities cited by Lucas are not intended to replace those listed earlier, but are perhaps more specific to this particular role within academia. Department Heads are described as custodians of academic standards with expectations for attention to detail, decision-making expertise regarding professionals with whom they also deal on a personal basis, and willingness to carry a large share of the responsibility if things go wrong (Bennett & Figuli, 1990).

Leadership Education for Department Heads

Some Department Heads are looking for the right answers, some are looking for the right questions. For those at the University of Arizona wanting to know where to get timely information, who to go to for help in matters relating to personnel, and what policies are applicable in a particularly thorny situation, a series of management programs was offered through the fall semester last year. Topics included how to write recommendation letters for promotion and tenure candidates, where to find instructional resources, when to seek counsel with University lawyers regarding staff layoffs, and how to communicate more effectively with difficult people. However, for those who were seeking better questions and shared solutions, an alternative needed to be made available.

The President's Quality Leadership Program was viewed as a likely means to reach out to Department Heads, offering the support of a continuing professional improvement program designed to strengthen their leadership capacity and develop a community of interest around their unique role. However, repetition of the Total Quality Management (TQM) workshops which characterized the earlier PQLP effort for higher administration didn't seem to fit the current need. Many Department Heads already had CORE Facilitators within their college or unit who had received training in TQM principles and techniques. Instead, it was believed that a program which recognized the uniqueness of the Department Head as a leader (in addition to manager of the day-to-day operation), and then focused on leadership concepts and practices within the context of the academic unit could help bridge the gap. Additionally, the opportunity for Department Heads to interact and explore the broader issues of the campus community was determined to be vitally important.

PQLP II - THE PRESIDENT'S QUALITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

PQLP II Vision and Mission

Questions raised early in the design process helped shape the focus of PQLP II. In discussions with both administrators and Department Heads, there was an expressed need to understand the role of the academic unit head and to explore the context within which he or she works. What does it mean to be a Department Head? What are Heads expected to do -- by the Dean? -- by faculty? -- by staff? -- by others? How are they expected to carry out these functions? What sorts of information and resources are essential? What are some ways to ameliorate the tension between the need to administer and the need to lead? -- or the need to be an effective manager and the need to be a productive faculty member? Why are campus-wide issues of concern to individual department Heads? And, against this backdrop, what leadership concepts and skills should be included in PQLP for Department Heads (PQLP II)? Eventually, the vision and mission for PQLP II evolved into the following:

THE PRESIDENT'S QUALITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM - PQLP II

VISION: Transformational leadership will be valued and supported throughout the University as the means by which we will achieve recognition both as the number one Land Grant University in the country and as a student centered research university.

MISSION: The mission of PQLP is to enhance current and future leadership capacity throughout the organization. The goal of PQLP II, in recognition of their critical role in the transformation of the University, is to engage academic unit heads in leadership development activities designed to increase their conceptual understanding of leadership, provide opportunity for practice and application of leadership concepts, and foster continued collaboration and communication linkages.

PQLP II Topics and Goals

Design elements that emerged from the planning stage brought together some of the original TQM principles embedded in CORE, was framed around Senge's (1990) perspectives on learning organizations, and incorporated Apps' (1991, 1994) adult education philosophy and leadership education principles. PQLP was conceived as an interactive, experiential educational program grounded in the context of the department within the larger academic system. Time was planned for reflection and for building connections and shared meaning. Expectations included joint planning for coordinated action around specific issues generated by Department Heads. To accommodate the varied schedules of target participants and, at the same time, minimize time needed for preparation and setup, two cohorts groups would be created to run simultaneously, but on different days. Thus, a Thursday cohort and a Friday cohort would participate back to back in four, day-long sessions each semester.

Four themes formed the basis of the topics to be covered and were incorporated into the following schedule. The primary goals for each session were listed and circulated widely among potential participants as well as their Deans.

The President's Quality Leadership Program PQLP II - Session Topics and Dates

SESSION 1 -- February 1 and 2:

TOPIC: Department Dynamics - The Systems Perspective

GOAL: To achieve deeper understanding among Department and Academic Unit Heads of the nature of the Department as a system functioning within the University.

SESSION 2 -- February 22 and 23:

TOPIC: Leadership Effectiveness - The Personal Perspective

GOAL: To understand leadership as a relationship and assess individual strengths in personal leadership approach.

SESSION 3 -- March 21 and 22:

TOPIC: Building a Community of Excellence - The People Perspective

GOAL: To develop the capacity to create shared meaning and coordinated action within the Department and, more broadly, within the University.

SESSION 4 -- April 11 and 12:

TOPIC: Leadership in Context - The Action Perspective

GOAL: To integrate PQLP II concepts and skills and apply them to a critical campus issue to be determined by each cohort group.

METHODOLOGY

Implementation of PQLP II

Participants were encouraged to self select for the program. At the same time, the academic deans were asked to either nominate heads from their college or encourage them to apply. The series was designed to accommodate as few as ten participants per cohort group or as many as thirty. It was felt that more than thirty would make the

experience a bit unwieldy.

To foster linkages between the two cohort groups, a closed listserv was created using electronic mail. All information, both preceding and following the sessions, was shared on the listserv and responses were encouraged. As issues were generated within each group and shared on the listserv, some crossover discussion occurred to the benefit of both groups. Posting of related concepts and sharing of new ideas or relevant readings helped round out listserv activity.

Notebooks were prepared for each participant which included information about the program and copies of relevant articles. As each session was occurred, more materials were added to the notebooks. In addition, each participant received two books: Strengthening Departmental Leadership by Anne Lucas (1994), and Credibility by Kouzes and Posner (1993). A bibliography of suggested readings was provided for those who wished to explore various aspects of the leadership literature on their own.

The original plan called for the introduction of take away tasks related to the day's topic and/or leading up to the topic of the next session. It was believed that this would provide some continuity between sessions and give participants an opportunity to work with new information and shared learning. This was modified over time as participants were encouraged to come forward with ideas, requests, and suggestions to improve the program.

Actual presentation time during the retreats was kept to a minimum so that participants could interact, explore the content, and practice using new leadership concepts. Though some of the readings were from contexts other than higher education, discussion and activities were grounded in the concerns more relevant to Department Heads. The first three sessions were designed to generate and investigate cross cutting issues while the fourth and final session would focus on actually engaging a campus-wide issue and developing strategies for action to ameliorate the problem.

Participation of administration in the four retreats was intended to demonstrate high level commitment and a willingness to dialogue on important issues. The President opened the first session, the Vice President for Human Resources participated for a portion of three sessions, and the Provost came in for a portion of the second session. However, neither the President nor members of the Provost Team were asked to participate for the full length of the sessions. This balance was struck to provide an environment of safety for participants to openly discuss their issues and to minimize the possibility that Department Heads would use retreat time to compete for the attention of higher administration for their own purposes.

In an effort to provide continuity throughout the program, an external facilitator was brought in to work specifically on communication issues. Using ROLE Play™, an approach similar to Myers-Briggs™, The Personal Profile System™ or one of several other typology tools, she linked appropriate use of breath, voice, and body to successful strategies in dealing effectively with others. The facilitator participated throughout as an observer, using a segment of each session to add to previous teaching within the context of departmental issues. The only other external presenters were representatives from the Orange Grove Middle School who had been deeply involved with Peter Senge and others in the transformation of their school into a learning organization.

Evaluation of each session was done at the end of the day and the information garnered each time was then integrated into the planning process for the next session. Evaluation questions focused on the extent to which information and activities were relevant and whether they were satisfied with how concepts were presented and learning facilitated. For each learning segment, participants were also asked to describe how they might apply the material in their leadership role or within their department. Finally, additional

comments and observations were solicited. A follow-up evaluation is planned for later this fall to assess longer term personal leadership growth through application of principles and processes from PQLP II.

Just prior to the first session, a review team was assembled by administration to provide input regarding whether the proposed topics, goals, and methods were suitable. This small group of legitimizers was made up of representatives of higher administration, the human resources organization on campus, the academic deans, the faculty senate, and a department head who had participated in the earlier PQLP program. Throughout the semester, there was a great deal of involvement and interaction with the administration, particularly the vice-provost for human resources, in planning meetings and evaluation discussions.

Program Results

Initial registration for PQLP II included forty heads of academic units out of a possible 120 originally targeted. The distribution between the two cohort groups was nearly even, even after four participants dropped out of the program. Distribution across the Colleges, however, was spotty, with the Faculty of Science in particular proportionately under-represented. Since participation was primarily accomplished through self-selection, it was apparent that, though relatively small, the two cohort groups were clearly the early adopters.

As early as the first session, it became clear that the Department Heads who had elected to participate in PQLP II were ready to step up to the leadership challenges inherent in the higher education transformation process. Affirmation of the effectiveness of a loosely structured program grounded in departmental issues came quickly! As might be anticipated, the two cohort groups evolved differently with varying degrees of concern about diverse issues and with dissimilar preferences for the learning processes employed during the four retreats. At the same time, there was congruence in their understanding of the role of Department Head and agreement, in principle, on their overarching concern regarding the need to “build community” at the University of Arizona.

The Thursday cohort called it the “we/they” issue. Friday’s group identified “collaboration” as the most pressing concern. In both instances, a number of related matters were brought to the table and discussed at length. Each cohort group prepared a core statement of the issue from their group’s perspective and invited the entire Provost Team to come for the morning of the final session for a dialogue. This team is made up of the Vice Presidents for Undergraduate Programs, Research and Graduate Studies, Student Affairs, and Human Resources, and led by the Provost who is the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs.

The two core statements were developed during session three following a visioning exercise designed around a visit to the campus in the year 2001. The Thursday group’s statement was succinct: At the core of the we/they issue is the need to “develop common perspectives and values while developing trust to achieve mutually beneficial goals.” The Friday cohort provided a bit more detail: At the core of the collaboration issue is the desire for “more collaboration within the hierarchy by providing access, information, and opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. . .with the outcome of that participation recognized and considered necessary. . .with results that reflect shared values and goals.”

At the request of participating Department Heads, an abbreviated session designed to acquaint the Provost’s Team with the nature and content of the PQLP II experience was scheduled following the third session. The timing was linked to the Team’s invited participation in the final session. The Department Heads were anxious to open a dialogue with them to stimulate a collaborative effort to build strategies for problem-solving and to

initiate some of the measures believed to be critical to the transformation of the University.

As part of the dialogue, Department Heads and the Provost Team brainstormed possible solutions to the situation under discussion. Everyone present was given yellow sticky notes on which to jot down ideas under the following headings:

I can_____;
Department Heads together can_____;
Heads and the Provost Team together can_____; and
Resources needed include_____.

Using the ideas generated in the morning activity and adding more as they occurred, the Department Heads spent the last afternoon of the final session developing a listing of action items, stating who was going to do what and by when. Commitments made by each cohort group were then combined via the listserv and further refined. They have agreed to hold each other accountable for the action items listed and that work is already underway.

OUTCOMES

Early Outcomes

It is still early, by most standards, to determine the long term outcomes of the PQLP II effort this spring. The commitment to action items is a good indicator of early enthusiasm and, at this point, several projects have been initiated and appear to have the momentum needed to carry them forward. Here are a few of the early outcomes:

Building community - One of the greatest benefits is in the linkages formed among Department Heads who have participated in PQLP II. Members of both cohorts have scheduled joint monthly lunch gatherings and are developing a series of agendas for discussion among themselves and with the Provost Team. Plans include meeting in conference rooms of the various departments to further acquaint themselves with areas of the campus which are less familiar than their own surroundings.

Communication within departments - Participants have agreed that a first step in diminishing the we/they attitude, and fostering better communication throughout the University, is to stop the negative comments about 'them' - the administration.

Joint retreat - Department Heads from Aeronautical and Mechanical Engineering the Art Department have facilitated a joint retreat among their faculties. Discussions are under way about shared curriculum and joint course offerings. They even dream of graduate students working together to design a fountain for AME's new building.

Forum for dialogue - Several Department Heads are working with the Provost to establish an integrated administrative group including representation from Department Heads, Deans, and the Provost's office. The objective is a collaborative voice in management and policy decisions.

Faculty governance - In cooperation with the Faculty Senate, several participants are exploring ways to increase the scope and quality of the debate concerning shared governance.

Post-tenure review - A number of the Department Heads are currently working with the Vice President for Human Resources and the Faculty Senate in determining how best to deal with a demand from the Board of Regents to devise a workable plan for post-tenure review.

Interdisciplinary possibilities - A small group of Department Heads has taken on the task of finding better ways to integrate an academic focus on environmental studies.

And still other activities are spinning out as Department Heads begin to work together in new ways. The initial effect of PQLP II is a catalytic one. As the idea for a leadership education program began to take shape, it was with the underlying belief that the time was right to bring people together -- to sit in a circle face-to-face and work collaboratively on complex problems. The time has come. The transformation process at the University is under way and Department Heads are ready to do their part.

AN OBSERVATION

Influence of Mental Models

Those of us in leadership education ought to speak of some of the "undiscussables" (Roberts & Ross, 1994) influencing our work in academia. Actually, Senge (1990) has given us a nice framework for presenting some of the biggest challenges to our efforts. He talks of mental models as one of the five disciplines of a learning organization. To understand mental models is to achieve breakthrough communication by surfacing and testing assumptions. With that in mind, the following list of quotes from various stakeholders and legitimizers suggest mental models which, if not explored for understanding, can change the nature of the planning process for leadership education:

"You don't seem to understand. . .let me explain hierarchy to you."

"I want results. You've had this project for six months now . . . where are the results?"

"Where's the pedagogy? There are no details in your plan."

"What we need is someone to tell these guys what their role is, what they are held accountable for, and then generate some enthusiasm for doing it."

"I don't see any time in these sessions devoted to policy and procedures. We wouldn't have any problems at the department level if the Heads just knew and understood the University Handbook for Appointed Personnel. All the answers are right there. That should be a big part of these training sessions."

"Why do you want to talk about systems thinking with Department Heads? Departments aren't systems. They are simply structural units in the organization, not decision-making bodies."

"You talk about leadership qualities, but what about competition. That's the most important quality. If you're not competing -- and winning -- then you're not leading."

"One of the problems working with Department Heads is that they don't know they need help."

"We need to empower these people to do what we know needs to be done, then hold their feet to the fire and make them accountable. The Deans should mandate attendance so that we're sure we get the job done."

As leadership educators, we know that we must work within the context of the organization. We need to be cognizant of the role of positional leaders in the process and

to be alert to the influence of their mental models in the ultimate design and implementation of a learning plan. It is difficult, for example, to simply say that the intent is to give as much of the planning and content away to participants as is feasible. If, as often happens, learning is viewed as part of the process rather than as an outcome, then designing a leadership program with measurable outcomes pushes us in the direction of training rather than facilitating adult learners. I believe it is incumbent upon us to recognize a viable link between leadership and lifelong learning and to educate accordingly. Leadership education is not about telling people what to think, it is exploring and expanding how to think, applying a personal leadership approach within the context of the organization. In this case, that organization is academia, a system on the brink of transformation.

CONCLUSIONS

The vision for PQLP II called for valuing and supporting transformative leadership. I believe we are moving in the right direction. The mission includes three goals associated with engaging Department Heads in leadership development activities: increase their conceptual understanding of leadership, provide opportunities for practice and application of leadership concepts, and foster continued collaboration and communication linkages. Evaluations of each session indicate that participants' awareness of leadership concepts within the context of their Department Head role increased, particularly through some of the ROLE Play™ activities and the visioning exercise. A number of Department Heads cited specific applications of new ideas and use of materials following the sessions. Many were appreciative of the time spent working within their own group to raise issues, discuss them, and think about approaches to solutions. Perhaps the single most beneficial aspect of the program, however, is reported to be the opportunity to connect with each other, to think and dream together, to begin to build a community of Department Heads.

EPILOGUE

PQLP II will not be offered again. A decision was made to discontinue the program and replace it with a multifaceted Department Head development approach. Offerings of this new program, managed by the Vice President for Human Resources, include a broad array of management workshops, a special focus on working with new Department Heads, mentoring of new department heads, and an off site leadership program for selected participants who will then design a new leadership development program for the University of Arizona's Department Heads.

The PQLP II experience afforded me a new opportunity for growth while providing a few of our institution's academic leaders a forum for coming together, exploring issues, creating shared meaning, and stepping up to the challenge of engaging the transformation of the University. I will miss working with PQLP II again this fall. However, more important than the personal reward which comes from organizing and facilitating an effort such as this, is the recognition that this critical group of leaders will continue to have opportunities to grow in their leadership role with continued support from higher administration. What is really important is that these key players in the transformation of higher education will be strengthened and supported in their development as leaders. I truly believe that the future of higher education rests primarily with hard-working and creative Department Heads.

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