

ADMINISTRATIVE HIERARCHY AND FACULTY WORK: EXAMINING FACULTY SATISFACTION WITH ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Academic administrators at all levels have some impact on the performance of faculty members, yet each level of administration may interact differently with faculty. Literature has strongly supported the notion that department chairs, deans, and provosts can positively influence the performance and livelihood of faculty members. This study was designed to explore faculty satisfaction with each level of academic administration making use of the 2014 survey data collected by the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. We found that faculty members at research universities were more satisfied with leadership at the departmental than college or institutional levels. Furthermore, assistant professors were significantly more satisfied with academic leadership at all levels than both associate and full professors.

INTRODUCTION

At the central functioning of the academic department are the activities of faculty members. As these individuals teach, conduct research, and provide valuable service, their combined success ultimately defines the success or failure of an academic department (Guvendir, 2014). Through the work of academic faculty, students are inspired to learn, research advancements are made, service is provided to local communities and professional societies, and all of these activities are to some extent harnessed and directed by an administrator typically referred to as a 'department chair.' The department chair or head does not work alone, however, and is linked directly with those working as deans and central academic administrators,

such as the provost, also called a vice president for academic affairs or chief academic officer. A key activity for these administrators is the coordination of their efforts to advance the work of faculty members.

Faculty members become motivated to engage in productive practices based on a variety of factors, including their preparation for their current roles, mentoring, student quality, research resources, and self-motivation (Conley & Onder, 2014; Fitzmaurice, 2013). One area in particular that has been highlighted as a success-enabling factor is the support of the department chair and other academic administrators (Monteiro, Wilson, & Beyer, 2013). These individuals create reward systems and distribute resources that allow faculty members to complete their work, but they also create a culture in which faculty members can

be creative and find self-motivation to be high performing (Kaufman, 2009).

Among the varied activities administrators can create to support faculty in their teaching and research roles are providing money to attend conferences and workshops on teaching strategies, resources to meet with grant funding agents, release time from teaching to write grants, and at some institutions, sabbatical leave programs to allow a dedicated time for research. Increasingly administrators are the individuals who structure the work of faculty members, determine workload and effort, and ultimately, evaluate those efforts and reward them with increased pay, rank promotions, and recognition.

Faculty productivity is strongly correlated with workplace satisfaction and the culture created and maintained by academic administration, especially at the departmental level (Czech & Forward, 2010; Fitzmaurice, 2013; Monteiro et al., 2013). The result of greater workplace satisfaction can be documented in higher retention rates of faculty, higher levels of academic output, increased teaching effectiveness, the recruitment of better faculty and students, and prestige indicators such as program rankings. But despite the obvious benefits of high faculty satisfaction and morale, many institutions fail to “treat faculty as a resource to be retained and developed” (Sanfey, Savas, & Hollands, 2006, p. 370). The current study was subsequently designed to explore faculty satisfaction with academic leadership at the departmental, college, and institutional levels.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The roles and functions of academic administrators have changed significantly over the past three decades. Academic deans, for example, were once primarily tacticians who planned curriculum, scheduled classes, and evaluated faculty members (Vacik, 1997). Today these individuals are the public faces of their academic colleges and are required to engage in active fund raising and public relations. They are responsible for establishing the priorities of an academic unit along with setting a vision and goals for the unit. These might include a heightened research profile or graduate degree presence, a greater emphasis on diversity, more value on outreach and partnering with non-academic entities (Wolverton, Gmelch, & Montez, 2001). Additionally, their energy is increasingly being devoted to the management of the growing business operations of academic units such as web-presence, computing and information systems, service units, and facility maintenance. The same evolution has been seen in the provost, and to some extent, increasingly in the department chair position (Gmelch, 2011; Hammond, 2004; Sibley, 1998).

Similar to the decanal position, the provost position has changed at some institutions and remained consistent at others, often depending on the role and mission of the institution. Increasingly the position is seen as the individual next to the president or chancellor with overall responsibility for the institution. In some instances the provost position has the responsibility for all internal operations, including budgeting and facilities, allowing the president to focus on more external operations, such as board relations, political relationships, and fund raising. The provost's office is also responsible for regional accreditation and has broad responsibility for all instructional matters, including the faculty of the institution. As the office with final responsibility for instructional quality, individuals in the office have found creative and innovative strategies for enhancing and encouraging faculty performance. Some of these include offices or centers dedicated to teaching improvement, workshops on research strategies, special pay or financial rewards for academic accomplishments, and both formal and informal recognition ceremonies (Hammond, 2004).

The department chair position has also been changing, assuming many of the responsibilities once required of the dean. Chairs combine technical implementation with strategic planning to both build departmental cultures and atmospheres conducive to effective teaching and research, while also managing the technical aspects of classrooms, technology, course delivery methods, and even ordering teaching supplies. This administrative evolution to some extent can be empowering for faculty as they have more independence in some areas of their work, but can also reinforce the idea that faculty members are part of a managed profession (Gmelch, 2011).

Ultimately, all three levels of administration have some impact on the environment of faculty members, in addition to their recruitment, retention, and promotion, and therefore, play a critical role in shaping the faculty members' work climate and environment. Thus the relationship between faculty and administrators is critical to building an environment that supports the mission of higher education.

Some research (Rose, 2012) has found a strong relationship between organizational culture and commitment. The better an employee feels about the employer, the greater the productivity, workplace loyalty, and retention. This idea is grounded in social exchange theory where positive behaviors are demonstrated toward an employer based on the feelings of the employee (Deluga, 1994). This social exchange has been noted to be particularly well suited for higher education, as these human resource-rich environments function based not just on formal job descriptions, but on individual discretion to implement job duties

(Birnbaum, 1989). Implementing directives is particularly difficult in a higher education setting where faculty experience significant amount of freedom in completing their assigned academic tasks. In such settings, fostering positive and mutually respectful relationships between faculty and academic administration becomes essential.

METHODS

Sample

This study utilized survey data collected by The Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. We selected the sample of 2,355 full-time tenure-track or tenured faculty members at research universities who participated in COACHE survey in 2014 (Benson, Mathews, & Trower, 2014). Faculty members who held an administrative appointment at the time of survey administration were not included in the final sample. The final sample was evenly divided by rank with 785 (33.3%) faculty members at the assistant, associate, and full professor levels, respectively. Of the total sample, 1,556 (66.1%) were tenured and 799 (33.9%) were not tenured but on the tenure-track. Majority of the participants were White (78.1%) and male (60.6%). The final sample included 1,502 (63.8%) faculty members from research universities with very high research activity, 733 (31.1%) from research universities with high research activity, and 120 (5.1%) from doctoral/ research universities.

Measures

The COACHE survey is designed to investigate faculty satisfaction with the nature of their work, institutional support, mentoring, institutional climate, and other conditions of their employment (COACHE, n.d.). The COACHE survey contains fifteen themes, one of which is institutional governance and leadership. Based on the purpose of this study, we included 12 institutional governance and Leadership questions from the COACHE data set that asked faculty to rate their level of satisfaction with different aspects of departmental, college, and institutional leadership using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) very dissatisfied to (5) very satisfied. Specifically, faculty members were asked to rate their satisfaction with pace of decision making, stated priorities, and communication of these priorities to faculty at all three levels. In addition to these questions, faculty were also asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with ensuring opportunities for faculty to have input into departmental policy decision and school/college priorities. Finally, at the departmental level, faculty also rated their department

head's or chair's fairness in evaluating their work. Table 1 includes descriptive data on each of the variables used in the study for the total sample as well as by academic rank.

Data Analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics 22 software was used to analyze the data. First, we conducted factor analysis with Principle Component Analysis and Varimax rotation to explore the underlying factor structure of 12 variables selected for this study. The factor analysis confirmed three-factor structure with a strong validity: Departmental Leadership (Q185H, Q185I, Q185J, Q185K, and Q185L), College Leadership (Q185D, Q185E, Q185F, and Q185G), and Institutional Leadership (Q180L, Q180M, and Q180N). After the factors were confirmed, we conducted paired samples *t* tests to compare faculty satisfaction with leadership at the departmental, college, and institutional levels. Finally, one-way ANOVA tests were conducted to examine the differences in faculty satisfaction with leadership by academic rank. Prior to ANOVA tests, we checked for violations of normality and homogeneity of variance. ANOVA tests are typically robust to these violations when sample sizes are equal as was the case in this study (Field, 2013). Examination of skewness and kurtosis values did not reveal violations of normality in the data. However, Levene's test revealed that assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated for the satisfaction with departmental leadership factor; therefore, we used the Games-Howell post-hoc test to examine the group differences. Tukey's post-hoc tests were used to examine the group differences in faculty satisfaction with leadership at the college and institutional levels. To compensate for the effects of multiple testing and large sample size, alpha levels were set at $p < 0.001$.

RESULTS

Paired Samples *t*-Tests

Paired-samples *t* tests revealed that faculty were significantly more satisfied with departmental level (Mean = 3.57, SD = 1.18) than college level leadership (Mean = 3.12, SD = 1.10), $t(2354) = 17.41$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = .39$. Similarly, faculty indicated significantly higher levels of satisfaction with leadership at the departmental than institutional level (Mean = 3.15, SD = 1.01, $t(2354) = 15.18$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = .38$). However, faculty perceptions of leadership at the college level were not significantly different from their perceptions of institutional level leadership. Similar results emerged when we conducted paired-samples *t*-tests separately for assistant, associate, and full professors. Table 2 presents the summary of these results.

**TABLE 1
FACULTY SATISFACTION WITH
DEPARTMENTAL, COLLEGE, AND INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP BY RANK**

Variable	Assistant Professor (n=785)	Associate Professor (n=785)	Full Professor (n=785)	Total (N=2355)
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
	Satisfaction with department head's or chair's...			
Pace of decision making (Q185H)	3.72(1.21)	3.40(1.25)	3.47(1.28)	3.53(1.25)
Stated priorities (Q185I)	3.68(1.23)	3.32(1.30)	3.35(1.34)	3.45(1.30)
Communication of priorities to faculty (Q185J)	3.69(1.29)	3.38(1.35)	3.41(1.36)	3.49(1.34)
Ensuring opportunities for faculty to have input into departmental policy decision (Q185K)	3.8(1.27)	3.51(1.39)	3.53(1.40)	3.61(1.36)
Fairness in evaluating my work (Q185L)	3.97(1.12)	3.59(1.32)	3.69(1.31)	3.75(1.26)
Satisfaction with dean's or division head's...				
Pace of decision making (Q185D)	3.39(1.09)	3.11(1.12)	3.10(1.16)	3.20(1.13)
Stated priorities (Q185E)	3.31(1.16)	3.06(1.19)	2.99(1.22)	3.12(1.20)
Communication of priorities to faculty (Q185F)	3.32(1.20)	3.05(1.22)	3.01(1.22)	3.13(1.22)
Ensuring opportunities for faculty to have input into school/college priorities (Q185G)	3.23(1.20)	2.96(1.22)	2.89(1.27)	3.03(1.24)
Satisfaction with institution's chief academic officer's (provost, VPAA, dean of faculty)...				
Pace of decision making (Q180L)	3.33(.97)	3.11(1.00)	3.13(1.04)	3.19(1.01)
Stated priorities (Q180M)	3.31(1.04)	3.01(1.09)	3.02(1.16)	3.11(1.11)
Communication of priorities to faculty (Q180N)	3.32(1.09)	3.09(1.11)	3.04(1.16)	3.15(1.13)

One-Way ANOVA Tests

Results from one-way ANOVAs indicated significant differences in faculty satisfaction with leadership at all three levels by academic rank. More specifically, the Games-Howell and Tukey post-hoc tests revealed that assistant professors were significantly more satisfied with departmental, college, and institutional leadership compared with both associate and full professors. No significant differences existed between associate and full professors. The summary of the results from one-way ANOVAs with the post hoc tests is presented in Table 3.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Considering the critical role of the departmental context in the life of a faculty member, the findings from our study

are encouraging. Faculty members in general were significantly more satisfied with departmental than college and institutional level leadership. Academic department is the most important community for faculty members, and the role of the department chair is critical in shaping the identity of this community. In various contexts, the chair is not only the individual who hires the faculty member, but is also the individual most responsible for faculty development, support, and creating a culture that ensures faculty success. In large institutions this departmental culture can supersede institutional cultures, expectations, and norms. Through strong leadership, department chairs can encourage productive behaviors and serve as a resource for faculty as they learn to identify the criteria necessary for success. Therefore, the findings that faculty members in general were satisfied with department chair's decision-making, fairness in evaluating their work, and efforts

**TABLE 2
RESULTS FROM PAIRED SAMPLES T TESTS**

Pairs		Assistant Professor (n=785)		Associate professor (n=785)		Full Professor (n=785)		Total (N=2,355)	
		t	p	t	p	t	p	t	p
Department	College	10.59	<.001	8.96	<.001	10.6	<.001	17.41	<.001
Department	Institution	10.04	<.001	7.48	<.001	8.92	<.001	15.19	<.001
College	Institution	-0.23	0.819	-0.61	0.54	-1.67	0.095	-1.47	0.141

Note. Degrees of freedom 784 for t-tests by rank and 2,354 for the total sample.

**TABLE 3
RESULTS FROM
ONE-WAY ANOVAs WITH POST HOC TESTS**

Variable	Assistant Professor	Associate Professor	Full Professor	F	p	η ²	Multiple Comparisons p <.001
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)				
Satisfaction with Departmental Leadership	3.77 (1.10)	3.44 (1.20)	3.49 (1.22)	17.91	<.001	.02	a > b, c
Satisfaction with College Leadership	3.31 (1.08)	3.04 (1.09)	3.00 (1.21)	18.79	<.001	.02	a > b, c
Satisfaction with Institutional Leadership	3.32 (.97)	3.07 (.98)	3.06 (1.04)	16.96	<.001	.014	a > b, c

Note:
a = Assistant Professor,
b = Associate Professor,
c = Full Professor;
Degrees of freedom were 2, 2352.

to engage them in the departmental policy decisions are positive and reassuring.

However, we also found that associate and full professors were less satisfied with academic leadership at all levels than assistant professors. As faculty members progress through the life cycle or seasons of their academic life (Knefelkamp, 1990), they seem to become more critical of the decision-making process and the priorities set by the leaders as well as the opportunities awarded to them to provide input in setting these priorities. Faculty members who have successfully passed through the initial gateway of the academy and have been tenured and promoted, no

longer have a singular goal of earning tenure. They have, in a sense, made it into the institution's life and are now in a position to exert influence and dominance over different processes through involvement in campus life and activities. The rewards for these faculty members are less driven by the immediacy of tenure and promotion and are more strongly linked to individualistic behaviors. As faculty progress through their careers, they may develop higher and clearer expectations of their leaders, and if these expectations are not being met, dissatisfaction will arise.

Findings may also highlight the changing nature of the academic leadership, particularly at large, research-ori-

ented institutions. In these environments, the dean for example plays more prominent roles in fund raising and external relations, including working with policy makers, legislators, and others who have influence on institutional resources, rather than in the internal functioning of the college. Faculty may not find high levels of satisfaction with their guidance, precisely because these administrators are not employed in such settings to provide it. The lack of satisfaction with the senior academic officer, however, is somewhat surprising as a growing number of institutions have invested in enhancing faculty quality through provost-level activities, such as teaching centers, faculty ombudsperson offices, more structured research support, etc.

Based on this study, we are not able to determine the reasons for dissatisfaction of associate and full professors with academic leadership; but the findings do speak to the difficulty in generalizing discussions and programs targeted at “the faculty” at large. Further research is needed to unwrap the causes of this dissatisfaction. Studies that explore how men and women or faculty of color respond to leadership differently would also be helpful in creating programs and processes that take into consideration the needs of different segments of the professoriate. This study represents a modest first-step in unpacking and understanding the differences in faculty perceptions of their academic leaders, but more in-depth examination of what drives faculty satisfaction or dissatisfaction with leadership priorities and decision-making at different institutional types is clearly warranted.

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