

Looking Within: Examining Positive Relationships and Healthy Organizational Cultures in Departments of Educational Leadership

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Effective leadership begins with positive relationships and a healthy organizational culture. How well do professors of educational leadership model such leadership ideals within their own universities, departments, and work environments? This article addresses the critical need for professors of educational leadership to look within and determine if they are modeling that which they are teaching in their classes. It focuses on the academic environment of professors who are preparing and developing today's school leaders. Using the important concepts of academic freedom and shared governance, this article offers a theoretical construct and practical application for assessing departments of educational leadership. Just how collaborative, safe, supportive, productive, and creatively vibrant are our own professional environments?

Introduction

An elder Cherokee Native American was teaching his grandchildren about life. He said to them, "A fight is going on inside me. It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One wolf represents fear, anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority and ego. The other stands for joy, peace, love, hope, sharing, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, friendship, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith. This same fight is going on inside you and every other person too." They thought about this for a minute and then one child asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?" The old Cherokee replied, "The one you feed."

Positive Relationships and Healthy Organizational Cultures

Effective leadership begins with positive relationships and a healthy organizational culture. As professors of educational leadership, we understand, teach, and expect our students to demonstrate their ability to lead by creat-

ing positive work relationships and organizationally healthy schools and districts. Yet, do we ourselves model such leadership within our own universities, departments, and work environments? This article addresses the critical responsibility of professors of educational leadership. Do we practice what we teach? Do we treat others the way we want to be treated? Do we provide our colleagues with the safety and support they need to function in a healthy organizational culture? The 'Managed Heart' is CAPEA's theme designed to examine how effective leaders engender positive relationships and develop healthy organizational cultures. The goal is to identify how these relationships and positive cultures advance powerful teaching and learning. This article focuses on the academic environment of professors who are preparing and developing today's school leaders. How successful are these professors in creating positive relationships within their own organizational cultures? Just how collaborative, safe, supportive, productive, and creatively vibrant are their professional environments?

Departments Within a University Environment

An academic department is the critical unit in any university. If the majority of the departments work well, the university is likely to be successful in (1) student attraction and retention, (2) professorial achievement in the classroom and the laboratory, (3) student academic success, (4) alumni achievement, and (5) grants and donations. Taken together, the university departments create the reputation that defines the university. Therefore, any improvement in the university as a whole should begin with an analysis of the factors that create high achievement at the department level.

Further scrutiny leads us to the individual faculty member within the department. Does the department of educational leadership promote professorial success? Is there an alignment between the professors' priorities and department direction? Are members of the faculty free to create and disagree? Is department leadership skilled in strategic planning, leadership development, governance and conflict management? Discovering how faculty thrive in their department is the first step in the ongoing improvement of departmental academic success.

Academia's Special Role in Society

A department cannot, and should not, be measured by popular 'business practices' measuring success by stockholder profits, bottom line sales, or profit margins. Using such a gauge, university department functionality would be measured in terms of large student enrollments, even larger class sizes, and cost-cutting measures such as a preference for cheaper part time faculty over tenured faculty. According to Scott (2002), "... education is a different kind of activity, a unique culture that occupies a special place in our democratic society" (p. 2). Unlike the average workplace, the univer-

sity environment has long represented democratic ideals of free speech, unbridled and creative research in the search for truth, and a distinctly independent autonomy directed by faculty as they exercise two sacred academic principles. Academic freedom and shared governance are paramount. Both have long established academia as a unique professional environment around the world.

Universities have traditionally valued these two bedrock values that are critical to the advancement of knowledge. Academic freedom and shared governance are the issues that separate university organizations from business organizations. Business organizations move people in and out, follow a top down decision process, and measure value around profit and production. Universities tend to think in longer segments than the next fiscal quarter. The success of this universal academic organization depends deeply on the extent to which faculty at the department level are a critical part of the governance system. A true 'shared governance' system assures academic freedom.

Attracting high quality students is often the result of recruiting and retaining great professors. Student enrollment and institutional reputation are highly influenced by great teaching and creative scholarship. Professors, and the universities that employ them, hold these two key academic principles as extremely important ones. These core principles distinguish the university environment from any other. These two foundations are the guide in examining positive relationships and collaborative work environments within departments of educational leadership.

Shared Governance and Academic Freedom

What do these terms really mean, and how do they relate to the success of departments? Let's begin with basic definitions of both terms.

Academic freedom is commonly defined in two contexts. First, academic freedom is defined as the right of an individual faculty member to teach, conduct research, and associate freely. More specifically, it is "... the freedom enjoyed by those with disciplinary credentials grounded in their scholarly expertise to express their ideas, however critical; to call established beliefs into question; and to open new areas of scholarly inquiry, even if doing so meant challenging what was taken to be received wisdom or common sense" (Scott, 2002, p. 1). Second, academic freedom is defined as a collective right for a *community* of faculty. In the 1957 Supreme Court decision of *Sweezy v. New Hampshire*, the high court described the academic community, "... as a marketplace of free ideas where a free spirit of inquiry reigns" (Rajagopal, 2003, p. 4).

Shared governance is defined as the regular exchange of information, opinion, consultation, reflection, mediation, and compromise. This deliberate and consultative practice contributes to an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. The California State University System echoed these elements in a statewide study supported by the Academic Senate, CSU and Chancellor's Office. "The single most important element in effective

shared governance is mutual trust and respect” (California State University, 2001, p. 14). Tolerance and a civil regard for differing opinions and points of view are also key to shared governance. Other characteristics detailed by the CSU report included civility, honesty, truthfulness, early and effective communication, broad and frequent consultation, and open and frank discussions. In addition, “. . . procedures must be open and transparent. Closed meetings, processes or procedures undermine trust and the attitudes necessary for shared governance to succeed” (California State University, p. 16). A 1985 report by the CSU’s defined shared governance as consisting of twin elements: a process and a state of mind or a set of attitudes (Academic Senate-California State University, 1985). Birnbaum (2004) reported that the connection between effectiveness and shared governance is clear, “. . . proposals that suggest, either explicitly or implicitly, that the faculty role in shared governance should be reduced or limited are more likely to diminish rather than improve institutional effectiveness” (p. 4). Furthermore, the link between shared governance and academic freedom was articulated by Scott (2002) simply as, “The faculty’s role in governance . . . is the foundation for academic freedom” (p. 2).

These widely accepted and established definitions of shared governance and academic freedom transform simple words of general concept into useful operational terms. These operational terms will be used later as part of an informal process to examine your own department’s relationships and organizational culture.

Warning Indicators: Fear, Marginalization, Fair Weather Only and Contingent Faculty

With an understanding of what academic freedom and shared governance mean; let’s take a look at what they do not mean. There are four dysfunctional conditions within which, academic freedom and shared governance cannot survive. These elements run contrary to all features, aspects, and key processes needed for academic freedom and shared governance. The presence of any of these four dysfunctions is a warning sign, one that has disturbing impact on any department of educational leadership.

Fear

Fear, if present in a department, is an indicator of tremendous dysfunction. Are some faculty afraid to voice opinions, ideas, questions? Is keeping your head down the mode of some or all faculty in your department? Trust and respect are simply not compatible when fear is present (CSU, 2001; Nelson, 2008). If fear is present in your department, even by a few, one could seriously question the functionality of your department.

Marginalization

Assessing a department is not an individual endeavor. Instead, the very na-

ture of shared governance requires a broader perspective. A department cannot be functional for just one or a few favored faculty members if it wants to be successful in its endeavors. True department functionality is a team enterprise. Observe those faculty members exercising high levels of academic freedom, and even higher levels of expectation for shared governance. How are they treated within the department and/or by the department chair? Are they silenced, marginalized, ignored or worse—do they pay the price with no perks of money or release time; or are they simply given poor course assignments, office space or? Faculty members who challenge the status quo provide rich opportunities to observe the functioning of the department. Just as a democratic society cannot exist when some cannot vote, a department is not successful if only the few are heard. Shared governance

is the most effective process through which academic institutions can achieve their indefinite goals, just as concepts such as consent of the governed, checks and balances, and the right of legitimate yet contending voices to participate makes democracy itself ungainly yet ultimately effective. (Birnbaum, 2004, p. 4)

Fair Weather Only

The most revealing opportunities to observe and assess department function are during times of challenge. What happens when faculty exercise high levels of academic freedom and/or demand higher levels of shared governance? How does a department and/or department chair react? For example, assessing a boxer's ability requires watching him or her in the boxing ring at maximum stress. Assessing a department requires observing your department in action under conditions when maximum performance is required. Scott (2002) proposed a number of questions. During creative, complex or controversial challenges, does your department rise to the occasion in a collegial manner? Or does your department collapse under the weight of any significant internal challenge, intimidate key players, or worse yet, run from the experience? When the going gets tough, does your department abandon key elements of shared governance and academic freedom including respect, trust and a free spirit of inquiry?

High Contingent Faculty

“The model environment for shared governance would have faculty that is largely tenured or tenure track with a long-term commitment to the university [department], whose workload provides opportunities for participation in governance, is rewarded for participation, and is provided the resources to support effective participation” (California State University, 2001, pp. 9-10). Part-time faculty and full time lecturers, also known as contingent faculty, do not hold the same commitment, time, nor the investment in the department, and sometimes rarely participate or are invited to participate in department meetings and operations. What percentage of your department's courses are taught by part time faculty or lecturers? The higher the percent-

age, the higher risk of department dysfunction. The burden of developing department purpose, policies, operations, curriculum, decision-making, advising students, chairing projects, and chairing theses and dissertations fall to the few tenure and tenure-track faculty by the lopsided weight of contingent faculty. Or worse yet, the chair alone wields tremendous power over hiring, firing and evaluating a large cadre of contingent faculty outside the parameters of true shared governance. Tenured faculty are essential to the robust nature of shared governance. The more your department consists of tenured and tenure-track faculty, the stronger likelihood of true functionality through shared governance among equals.

What about disgruntled faculty (individuals and small groups), and their impact on the process? This article addresses key issues in department functioning at the macro-organizational level. However, when issues are raised by an individual related to shared governance or academic freedom, departments should listen carefully and analyze such criticisms. Simply dismissing faculty as disgruntled individuals, without addressing concerns anchored in shared governance or academic freedom, perpetuates department dysfunction. The next section will assist departments in engaging all faculty in the process of assessment.

How does YOUR Department Measure Up?

Being what you believe is the hard part. The 2001 CSU Study found strong support for the ideal of mutual trust and openness; however, their study found the perceived reality was far from what would be desirable. “The survey indicated that faculty, in general, are skeptical not only of administrators’ intentions and motives, but also of the notion that shared governance even exists. In short, it appears that some people believe the notions of ‘respect’ and ‘trust’ are so important to concepts of shared governance that their absence indicates that shared governance does not really exist—despite the presence of formal structures and processes” (p. 4). With an understanding of such academic skepticism, how would you rate your department and yourself?

The literature and collegial experience confirm that department functioning and operations can be negatively impacted or hindered by a single faculty member or small group of faculty. Neither shared governance nor academic freedom are immune from the negative effects of such individuals. If those individuals hold key decision-making positions in the department such as department chair, program director or coordinator, for example, their undermining of the department in these areas can be even more detrimental. So, how can faculty objectively evaluate their departments?

Department Assessment Instrument

The authors propose the following assessment instrument as a beginning, a foundation, for department reflection and analysis of shared governance

and academic freedom. Each individual faculty member should complete the assessment. The assessment focuses on indicators evident in the department from a macro-perspective of department operations and processes.

The assessment instrument contains seven areas. By identifying, reviewing and isolating widely accepted (and established) definitions/discussions of shared governance and academic freedom, the following seven key areas emerged: (1) trust and respect, (2) faculty freedom within a department, (3) healthy department environment, (4) communication and collaboration, (5) shared governance, (6) open procedures and processes and (7) severe warning indicators.

Each of the seven key areas provided a critical conceptual component to the assessment instrument. And each is used as key categories in the instrument. However, it was important to translate these conceptual terms into operational descriptors. Operational descriptors included the identification of behavior, skills, actions and/or processes within the department. The authors, experienced professors and educational leaders, used research models in education to articulate the operational elements. Four additional faculty contributed and edited the operational elements of the assessment instrument.

The following assessment survey is anchored in the important core foundations of academia: shared governance and academic freedom. The definitions provided earlier create a robust perspective and clarity to assess your department's functionality. As you move through the questions below, reflect on your time as a member of your department. Use your observations, experiences, impressions, and affective responses to assess your department's functionality.

Remember, your department's environment, climate, spirit, and state of mind are as important as actual events and processes. Reflect, not only on your own experiences, but what have you observed regarding the experiences of your colleagues. Try to answer each question, not from your singular vantage point, but from a larger more collegial perspective.

This article and survey have the potential to serve you and your department. Is your department open to beginning the discussion of department effectiveness related to academic freedom and shared governance? We suggest that you use this article and survey as a catalyst within your department to create more positive professional relationships, and a healthy organizational culture.

"The faculty are the primary upholders of the academic culture, so those that give precedence to the idea of a university as an academic institution believe that there are few earthly things more splendid than a university" (Masefield as cited in Birnbaum, 2004, p. 19). These individuals "are likely also to continue to believe in the importance of shared governance" (Birnbaum, 2004, p. 16). Creating organizations in which all members can thrive is not just a lesson to be taught. It is a lesson to be practiced by the very professors of educational leadership professing such an ideal to students.

Table 1
Survey: Examining Positive Relationships & Healthy Organizational
Cultures in Departments of Educational Leadership Based on
Indicators of Academic Freedom & Shared Governance

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
Part I: Indicators of Trust and Respect					
There is an overwhelming atmosphere of 'mutual trust' among & between all faculty					
Truth, honesty, fair play, high ethics, feelings of trust are all valued, expected & present in my department					
Cheating, dishonesty, back-biting, end runs, power plays, and favoritism are absent in my department.					
There is an overwhelming atmosphere of 'mutual respect' among & between all faculty					
All faculty are treated equally (with respect) by each other and by the chair/administration					
All faculty feel equally respected, regardless of their tenure or position					
All individual, group and dept. communications are equally respectful regardless of the speaker or listener					
Impressive levels of respect are extended to those with divergent ideas, recommendations, criticism, or questioning of the status quo					
No faculty members are cut off, interrupted, or disrespected					
No dialogs contain yelling, name calling, bullying, intimidation, or accusations					
Part II: Indicators of Faculty Freedom within a Department					
Faculty feel free and are invited to express ideas, however critical					
Truth, honesty, fair play, high ethics, feelings of trust are all valued, expected & present in my department					
Faculty are free to open new areas of scholarly inquiry					
Faculty are free to challenge 'what is taken to be' received wisdom or common sense					

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)
**Survey: Examining Positive Relationships & Healthy Organizational
 Cultures in Departments of Educational Leadership Based on
 Indicators of Academic Freedom & Shared Governance**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
PART III: Indicators of Healthy Department Environment					
Nurtures an atmosphere to create a 'community of scholars'					
Marketplace of free ideas exists					
Free spirit of inquiry reigns					
Collegial state of mind is positive					
Climate supports diversity of opinion, schools of thought, perspectives, and personal styles					
Part IV: Indicators of Communication and Collaboration					
Honesty is present and important in all communications					
Open and frank discussions are part of department communications					
There is civil regard for differences of opinion and points of view					
Faculty can express dissenting views without fear of reprisals					
There is early and effective communications					
There is a regular exchange of information					
Opinions are solicited, exchanged and are part of regular communications					
There is regular collaboration and consultation					
There is regular reflection as individual faculty and as a department					
The department regularly uses mediation processes					
There is regular compromise					
PART V: Indicators of Shared Governance					
Attitudes and actions of all faculty and chair support an atmosphere of genuine shared governance					
The chair position in my department changes regularly to reflect and include a variety of faculty in department leadership					
During an absence of the chair, other faculty represent the department at dean's meetings, and other university administrative meetings					

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)
Survey: Examining Positive Relationships & Healthy Organizational Cultures in Departments of Educational Leadership Based on Indicators of Academic Freedom & Shared Governance

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
PART V: Indicators of Shared Governance (Continued)					
Department meetings are led by a variety of faculty (not only the chair)					
Governance in my department is truly shared, not held by a few or solely by the chair alone					
Department meeting agendas are created jointly by faculty					
Budgets are regularly reviewed, discussed and debated					
All department expenditures are regularly presented and reviewed, particularly monies provided to individual faculty for supplies, release time, etc.					
Faculty regularly evaluate the department chair in a spirit of collegiality to offer constructive feedback					
The department is free of preferential treatment, perks, rewards, special monies, or special assignments to those faculty in the 'in crowd'.					
Faculty feel free to hold the chair accountable for actions and decisions the chair is making outside of Department meetings					
Political or manipulative power-plays are not part of my department					
Department decisions are not for sale with political rewards or perks. Faculty are not rewarded for supporting the chair or others					
Department decisions are not controlled with punishments or penalties.					
Faculty are not punished for disagreeing with the chair or others					
No top down administrative announcements or 'decision-forcing'					
Information is not controlled, censored, or withheld in my department					
There is no insisting on 'quick decisions'—feigning a need for speed					
No false information is provided to faculty to influence decisions					

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)
Survey: Examining Positive Relationships & Healthy Organizational Cultures in Departments of Educational Leadership Based on Indicators of Academic Freedom & Shared Governance

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
PART V: Indicators of Shared Governance (Continued)					
No bullying/intimidation are part of dept. decisions or meetings					
No meetings are cancelled, changed to avoid presence of some faculty					
Department decisions are not overturned by chair later					
No key decisions involving budget, release time, teaching assignments, etc. are made in secret, outside of formal dept. meetings					
Part VI: Indicators of Open Procedures and Processes					
Department actions involving budget, staffing, assignments, etc. are open and understood by faculty					
The faculty has an influential role in developing the department budget					
Department procedures and processes are open					
Department procedures are transparent, clearly understood and mutually developed					
There are no closed department processes					
There are no closed meetings					
Agendas are jointly created, not controlled by the few or chair alone					
Department meetings can easily take place in the absence of the chair					
Meetings are not scheduled, changed, cancelled or rescheduled at whim of the chair					
PART VII: Severe Warning Indicators					
If present, these warning indicators signal high department dysfunction.					
Fear is a part of the climate in my department					
Some faculty members in my department are marginalized					
During high stress my department displays dysfunctional characteristics					
My department includes a high percentage of contingent faculty					
I would feel uncomfortable discussing this survey within my department					

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)
**Survey: Examining Positive Relationships & Healthy Organizational
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Rating Scale

This survey is meant to begin the process of analysis and dialog within departments of educational administration. Use the following scale to rate your department?

AGREE: If most checkmarks are to the left (strongly agree or agree), congratulations! Your department is demonstrating commendable levels of academic freedom and shared governance as reflected in your professional relationships and organizational culture.

AGREE/DISAGREE: If a majority of checkmarks vary between agree and disagree, your department is struggling. Your department is in serious need of review, discussion and debate regarding healthy indicators of academic freedom and shared governance. Bring this survey to a department meeting and discuss the theoretical constructs and practical applications to build relationships and an organization which are positive, meaningful, productive, and durable.

DISAGREE/STRONGLY DISAGREE: If your checkmarks are primarily "disagree," "dysfunction" is unfortunately your department's middle name. 'Academic freedom and shared governance' are either absent in your department, or being held hostage. But you probably already knew this, but lacked documentation and constructive evidence. Now you have documentation. What are you going to do about it?

NO OPINION: If you or your peers selected 'No Opinion' responses, this may indicate a detachment from the functioning of the department, or fear. Catalyst for Change

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