

Academic Leadership: The Online Journal

Volume 4
Issue 3 Summer 2006

Article 4

7-1-2006

Executive Succession Practices in Land Grant Universities

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Recommended Citation

Miller, Michael and Bisbee, Diane (2006) "Executive Succession Practices in Land Grant Universities," *Academic Leadership: The Online Journal*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 3 , Article 4.
Available at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/alj/vol4/iss3/4>

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Academic Leadership Journal

The importance of succession planning is attracting more interest from scholars and practitioners who are looking at the implications of high turnover rates and people not suited for their present jobs. Heuer (2003) found human resource officers at nine Ivy League institutions felt much of the unfavorable hiring decisions could be linked to the lack of succession planning. These Ivy League respondents also felt that any higher education institution would have difficulty moving forward and meeting current challenges if they are constantly replacing leaders with those who are under-prepared. This lack of trained leaders has created a huge cost in human and capital resources and time for institutions as they not only had to replace bad leaders, but cope with the loss of morale caused from bad decision making. Heuer wrote that these turnovers have a cost in job experience and historical knowledge of the institution. Byham, Smith, and Paese (2002) also noted that succession planning could save resources as well as create a better work environment for the high potential, talented employee.

Looking at the current practices found in academe with respect to identifying and training current leaders, will broaden our understanding of institutional involvement, succession planning and leadership development. Within the scope of land grant universities, this study will quantify how higher education institutions identify academic leaders as department chairs, associate deans, deans, and provosts, how they provide training, and how they support these leaders in their careers. A survey of current institutional practices for department chairs, associate deans, deans and provosts will offer a better look at the scope of academic leadership identification and preparation.

Framework of the Study

Leadership is a complex issue with many dimensions that can be difficult to research. Many authors agreed that leadership was more than developing competency in job skills (Collins, 2001; Conger, 1992; Gmelch, 2004; Kotter, 1999; Kotter, 1996). Daft (1999) discussed the abilities of a leader which included personal characteristics, an innate ability to work with people, and job competencies. Gmelch (2004) suggested three conditions were necessary to develop effective academic leaders. These conditions included the conceptual ability of the individual to understand the unique roles and responsibilities found 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 to perfect the art of leadership.

Conger (1992) stated that successful training of leaders must be designed to “develop and refine certain of the teachable skills, improve conceptual abilities, tap individual’s personal needs, interests and self-esteem, and see and move beyond their interpersonal blocks” (p. 34). Kotter (1999) summed up the leadership issue by stating the problem was not a lack of high potential, talented individuals trying to do the right things, but organizations not producing the kind of leadership needed for today’s environment.

Given the complexity of leadership responsibilities and the wide range of abilities necessary to be effective, leaders need support in developing those skills and characteristics that will help them, and

their organization, to be successful. Conger (1992) stated that organizations played a critical role by providing job assignments that were challenging, and providing decision making opportunities, in addition to programs that taught job related skills.

Several authors stated the importance of organizational support for the identification and training of potential leaders (Byham et al., 2002;

Charan et al., 2001; Heuer, 2003). Strong, effective leaders are critical to the success of any organization, therefore institutions have a vested interest in identifying and training leaders (Byham et al., 2002). Heuer (2003) stated that the responsibility of an organization was to provide developmental opportunities and concluded "strong leadership in higher education is a future point of excellence" (p. 78).

In higher education the tradition has been for human resource departments to be the source of career development and skill training. Heuer (2003) stated they took the role of providing structure, training, processes and support programs. In contrast, McDade (1990) found human resource departments did not seem to be as involved in training for department chairs, associate deans, and deans as much as professional organizations, commercial leadership training program or higher education leadership institutions. Conger (1992) also found many educators turned to outside training consultants and professionally organized conferences to prepare their leaders.

Educational research is needed to understand the scope of leadership development in academe. This study can be considered an evaluation of current practices. Rossi, Freeman, and Lipsey (1999) explained that until a problem is clearly understood, a "program cannot be effective at ameliorating a (social) problem" (p. 119). This study will assess current practices of leadership identification and training within the land grant university systems, specifically examining the academic leadership positions of department chairs, associate deans, and deans. Provosts will be surveyed for their institutional viewpoint. By surveying academic leaders, this research will help to understand the current leadership practices, and continue to clarify what institutions are doing to support their leaders.

Research Procedures

The population for the study was the 1862 United States Land Grant Universities. According to the 2004 National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC) web site, there are 106 land grant universities (LGU), including the 1865 land grant universities, the 1994 (Tribal Colleges) land grant universities, the 1890 (Historically Black) land grant universities, and the land grant universities from American Samoa, Guam, Micronesia, and Puerto Rico. The sample population was chosen by a stratified, random sample using the 1862 land grant institutions to control for selection bias. Tribal Colleges, Historically Black Universities, and Universities from Samoa, Guam, Micronesia, and Puerto Rico could be considered as statistically different because of inherent differences in their development, funding, and cultures which could create a threat to internal validity. Subtracting these institutions left a total of 52 institutions in the population.

Neuman (2000) suggested that 30% of a small population will allow an accurate sample. Thirty percent of the 52 land grant universities equaled 16 institutions. These 16 institutions were selected using a table of random numbers. Four academic units (colleges) were chosen from each of the 16 institutions: Business, Education, Arts and Science, and Agriculture. There were two department chairs/directors

selected from each college to participate in this survey. These department chairs/directors were also selected using a random number table. This resulted in a sample size of 264 potential participants.

The evaluation design was a survey instrument that gathered descriptive, quantitative data, as well as two open-ended questions to allow for more in-depth comments on leadership development. Creswell (2002) stated “surveys are best used to describe trends or characteristics of a population” (p. 421). Neuman (2000) wrote “surveys are appropriate for research questions about self-reported beliefs or behaviors” (p. 247).

The survey instrument was developed using questions suggested by scholars and authors in existing academic leadership literature. In addition, the survey instrument was pilot tested for clarity, using academic leadership at the University of Arkansas in similar positions. Reliability was established through changing any questions that were unclear or ambiguous.

The survey instrument was administered through a web survey program. There was an initial email contact to the designated sample population describing the project and inviting them to participate by linking to a web site to complete the survey. Follow up data collection included additional individual emails as reminders. The response time in a web-based survey is approximately two weeks. For web-based surveys, as in mailed surveys, the response rate can vary depending on the subject matter, the availability of computers and the computer knowledge of the participants (Kaplowitz, Hadlock and Levine, 2004). The participants in this survey were all higher education graduates, and use computers in their daily activities. They were accustomed to answering questions, and familiar with web surveys as a normal occurrence. The subject was one that should have been of interest to them, as the questions were based on their personal experiences.

Findings

Using three reminder emails, 169 responses were received to the web survey, representing a 64% response rate. This study specifically addressed how institutions develop academic leaders and to what extent institutions are committed to leadership succession.

Participants were evenly divided on whether they felt well prepared or somewhat prepared for their current position or leadership in general. Only a small percentage (3.6%; n = 6) felt unprepared for their current position and only 1.3% (n = 2) felt unprepared for leadership in general. A majority of deans (61.9%; n = 26) and provosts (80%; n = considered themselves well prepared for their current position. About half of the department chairs/directors (48%; n = 41) felt well prepared for their current position. 😊

Survey participants responded to questions about the type of leadership training offered to them, the perceived value of that training, and how much of their total leadership development was in specific types of training. Respondents indicated that they received various types of training, including participation in workshops (70.9%; n = 105), seminars (63.4%; n = 85), and conferences (60.1%; n = 83), and a small group

(2%; n = 32) indicated that 100% of their training consisted of professional association programs.

When asked which training they valued the most, 89% (n = 140) found the most valuable training was

on-the-job experiences. Sixty nine percent (n = 110) indicated that

personal initiatives (reading, personal research, etc.) were of some value and nearly as many (51.8%; n = 79) indicated mentoring was of some value. Almost a quarter of those responding (23.3%; n = 37) indicated that they did not have access to any structured training programs, whereas 14% (n = 22) indicated no value in the structured programs they did receive.

When examining the value of training by position, associated deans rated job experiences as being the most valuable (93.3%; n = 28) with personal initiatives (63.%;

n = 19), mentoring (53.3%, n = 16), and structured programs (51.7%; n = 15) providing some value. Deans also agreed that on the job experiences were the most valuable (92.9%; n = 39) in preparing for leadership, and another 42.9% (n = 18) of the deans indicated that mentoring was the most valuable training they received. Deans found personal initiatives (80%; n = 32) offered some value as did structure training

(50%; n = 21). Provosts similarly most valued on-the-job experiences (90%; n = 9) and found personal initiatives to be of some value (70%; n = 7) along with mentoring (55.6%; n = 5).

Institutions trained their current leaders using a variety of training programs and experiences. Over half of those responding indicated that 25% of their total training was in workshops, seminars, and conferences. Twelve percent (n = 18) did not have workshops, 25.4% (n = 34) did not have seminars, and 26.1% (n = 36) did not participate in conferences. The majority of respondents (87.5%, n = 96) were never involved in any type of internship program.

Participants were asked how their institution motivated people to participate in training and leadership development, how leadership training was funded, and whether they had an established leadership develop program. As shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents were motivated by personal satisfaction and growth (77.3%; n = 116). Release time was an additional motivator as indicated by 48% (n = 72), as was financial remuneration (26.7%; n = 40) and credit towards promotion and tenure (25.3%; n = 38). When examined by positions, all were motivated by personal satisfaction and growth with department chairs/directors at 72.2% (n = 57), associate deans at 80% (n = 20), deans at 86.1% (n = 31) and provosts at 80% (n = 8). The next highest motivator for all groups was release time with department chairs/directors at 34% (n = 43), associate deans at 44% (n = 11), dean at 55.6% (n = 20) and provosts at 70% (n = 7). Credit for promotion and tenure was the lowest response category with ranges from 20% (n = 2) for provosts to 29.1% (n = 23) for department chairs/directors.

Institutional commitment to leadership development can be evidenced by such activities as prioritizing money to pay for programs. As shown in Table 2, participants indicated if and where the funding for professional training came from in their institution. Thirty six percent (n = 59) indicated that there was no specific budget from training. Examining those that did have a training budget, almost half (41.7%; n = 68) had a budget at the institutional level, 41.1% (n = 67) had college level funding, and 19.5%

(n = 31) had funding at the department level. Thirty two percent (n = 53) felt that funding was position dependent.

When compared by position, department chairs/directors indicated funding at either a college level

(39.8%; n = 33) or from the institution (42.2%; n = 35). Approximately one third of the associate deans had college funding (39.3%; n = 11) and insitutional funding (32.1%; n = 9). Deans also indicated that funding was available at the college level (47.6%; n = 20) and institutional level (42.9%; n = 18). Provosts indicated institutional funding (60%; n = 6) and that funding was position dependent (40%; n = 4).

Over half of the participants (66.9%; n = 111) indicated no established leadership development program existed in their institutions, 29% (n = 49) indicated there was a leadership and 3.6% (n = 6) of the respondents were leaders at institutions that had a succession program. Institutions offered release time to approximately half of the respondents (48%; n = 72) although 77.3% (n = 116) were motivate to participate in leadership training because of personal satisfaction and growth. Approximately

64% (n = 104) had some funding available, either on a departmental level (19.5%; n = 31), a college level (41.1%; n = 67), or an institutional level (41.7%; n = 68). A majority of respondents considered themselves prepared or well prepared for their current position and leadership in general.

Discussion

As has often been inferred but not studied extensively, over half of the institutions in this study did not support leadership training and development by an established, formal development program. In terms of training, there were a high percentage of respondents who indicated that up to 25% of their total training was in workshops and seminar, with on-the-job experiences indicated as the most valuable form of training.

Again inferred but not reported extensively in the research was how institutions motivate their faculty to participate in training. Although there were about a quarter of the respondents who indicated both release time and credit in the promotion and tenure process, by far the largest majority of respondents were motivated by personal satisfaction and individual growth.

One area that the study findings did not agree with previous research was in the self-perception of leadership preparedness. Almost half of the respondents felt well prepared for their leadership position, with another quarter who felt somewhat prepared as opposed to earlier research that indicated most of those in leadership positions felt unprepared.

A clear challenge for leadership in academia is to fund, identify, develop, and reward individuals who are effective and efficient leaders. The value of leadership needs to be a cultural change driven by existing academic leadership. Although many faculty will never want to serve as academic leaders, understanding the challenges administrators face would allow the university to function more smoothly, and bring greater satisfaction to the whole campus community.

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Table 1.

Institutional Motivation to Assume Leadership Role by Position

Chair Asc Dean Dean Provost Total

n=79 n=25 n=36 n=10 n=150

Financial 26.6% 20.0% 30.6% 30.0% 26.7%

Remuneration (n=21) (n=5) (n=11) (n=3) (n=40)

Release Time 34.0 44.0 55.65 70.0 48.0

From other (n=43) (n=11) (n=20) (n=7) (n=72)

Work

Credit for 29.1 20.0 22.2 20.0 25.3

Promotion/ (n=23) (n=5) (n=8) (n=2) (n=38)

Tenure

Personal 72.2 80.0 86.1 80.0 77.3

Satisfaction (n=57) (n=20) (n=31) (n=8) (n=116)

Table 2.

Institutional Leadership Budget by Position

Chair Asc Dean Dean Provost Total

n=83 n=28 n=42 n=10 n=163

No Specific 31.3% 42.9% 35.7% 60.0% 36.2%

Budget (n=26) (n=12) (n=15) (n=6) (n=59)

Departmental 20.3 17.9 19.0 20.0 19.5

Funding (n=16) (n=5) (n=8) (n=2) (n=31)

College Funding 39.8 39.3 47.6 30.0 41.1

(n=33) (n=11) (n=20) (n=3) (n=67)

Institutional 42.2 32.1 42.9 60.0 41.7

Funding (n=35) (n=9) (n=18) (n=6) (n=68)

Position 26.5 35.7 40.5 40.0 32.5

Dependent (n=22) (n=10) (n=17) (n=4) (n=53)

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