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Managing Professional Competencies of Teaching Staff in the University: Views of Finnish University Leaders

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INTRODUCTION

Background and the Aims of the article

In the changing environment of higher education institutions, characterized by competitive global educational market, the importance of staff development has been recognized as essential to support new approaches to learning and teaching and the changing needs of institutions (Blandford, 2001). In this changing environment, one of the obligations of university leadership is to choose to grow its staff professionally so as to support learning and improve student performance (Bank and Mayes, 2001). This improvement in the professional competencies of academic staff in the university helps to develop knowledge and skills of the staff in support of current role, or prepare a staff for future role (see Fullan, 1992). Jocelyn Butler defines competencies as knowledge, skills, attributes and behaviour traits required for individual and organizational success (Butler, 2006). As the ultimate outcomes of the educational process must be student progress, development and achievement, a crucial contributor to student learning is teacher learning. When teachers are professionally fulfilled, demonstrate job satisfaction, skills and knowledge, and have a strong feeling of efficacy around their practice, they are more likely to motivate students to want to learn (Stoll and Fink, 1996). Stoll and Fink further claim that probably, nothing in educational institution has more impact on students in terms of knowledge and skills development, self-confidence, or classroom behaviour than the personal and professional growth of their teachers. Therefore, teacher learning has to be a goal, a key component and outcome of institutional development. If classrooms are going to be effective, institutions must be effective as well, and teachers as major part of the institution must be developed (Stoll and Mayes, 1996: 152).

The approach required to achieve teacher competency development offers a framework for an institution-wide staff development strategy in the university. The Policy Statement of The Queen's University of Belfast defines staff development as:

Institution policies, procedures, and practices designed to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of staff, and by so doing, improve the effectiveness and efficiency both of the individual and the institution (The Queen's University of Belfast, 2006).

According to Human Resource Policy (HRP) of the University of Western Australia, staff development is also a commitment to optimize opportunities for all staff to improve their levels of skills and knowledge to improve the quality of workforce productivity and staff satisfaction (University of Western Australia, 2006). A definition given by the University of Sussex in its Policy statement on staff development is that which says that staff development policy of the university is to "commit itself to the development of its staff through encouraging an environment conducive to learning, and providing resources for learning in a variety of ways" (University of Sussex, 2006). For Piper and Glatter, staff development is "a systematic attempt to harmonize individual's interests and wishes, and their carefully assessed requirements for furthering their careers with the forthcoming requirements of the

organization within which they are expected to work" (Teather, 1979; 14).

Emphasizing the importance of staff development in increasing effectiveness in the university, it was argued that staff development facilitates personnel and professional development for individuals and groups, enabling them to achieve their potential and contribute to the provision of excellence in teaching and research in the university (University of Cambridge, 2006). In another contribution Bell (2006) pointed out The Dearing Report of 1997 emphasizes the importance of staff development in the current changing higher education landscape. According to the report, higher education institutions are highly recommended to put in place appropriate staff development strategies to support all staff and encourage involvement in the development is essential to support new approaches to learning and teaching, and meeting changing needs of institutions. Bell hinted that in a competitive global educational market, universities are keen to be awarded national prizes and investor in people (IIP) award through a framework of an institution-wide staff development strategy.

Higher education institutions should recognize that their staff are their vital and valued asset. The university should therefore, commit itself to encouraging and enabling staff to realize their potential by providing opportunities for all colleagues to gain the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary for them to enhance their contribution to meeting individual, area, and organizational objectives. Not only that staff development should be among a clutch of institutional innovations thrust upon universities, it is a technique or tool to increase quality, efficiency and output, it can be associated with high quality professional performance resulting in career advancement, strategic development, and initiative to sustain change (Duke, 1992: 98, 105). The purpose of this article was to understand the nature of staff development in Finnish universities in helping staff fulfill their roles as educators. In line with this objective, the crucial question that this paper seeks to answer is: How would the professional competencies of teaching staff in Finnish universities be developed in order to bring quality in their academic work of student teaching. It is believed that answer to this vital question would present best practices in academic staff management in institutions of higher learning in other countries.

The rest of the paper will, first of all, review staff development or competency development issues in the university, followed by a discussion of the survey, consisting of research strategy and method, while the final sections present the results, discussion and conclusion.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Enabling Strength of Staff Development

Staff development is central to the quality of higher education. The way it is considered and delivered owe a lot to the general employment framework and conditions of service for university staff (Fielden, 1998). Higher education institutions, such as universities, colleges and polytechnics, are labour intensive organizations. These institutions depend on people for the delivery of their services. The quality of the staff in institutions of higher education are thus central to their effectiveness, in the same way that it is to all people-centred organizations. A recent World Bank paper on staff development comments "a high quality and well motivated teaching staff and a supportive professional culture are essential in building excellence" (World Bank, 1994). Unesco has on its own recognized the important role of staff in higher education by passing a recommendation on the topic at its General Conference in

1997.

In business and the professions there is a wide recognition that the skills of their staff need to be continually strengthened and enhanced. In the face of challenges from national and international competitors, the better companies are investing more resources in the continual training and re-training of employees at all levels. They focus not only on the competence of their staff, but also give time to stressing the need for commitment to organization's goals and to promoting a capacity to change. This is also true of higher education. They are crucial to national aspirations for economic development and, if when this is achieved, institutions will have to make most effective use of all their human resources (Fielden, 1998).

One can say that it is almost impossible for an individual staff member to remain in touch with the subject without conscious investment in scholarship and self-tuition. Surely, institutions should recognize these changes and have a strategy for enabling each individual to confront this task. Institutional leaders should not sit back and ignore the fact that their teaching staff are providing out-of-date information in an inefficient way. Therefore, in considering any strategy for developing staff in the university as an institution must consider that its staff can play crucial roles in helping students to learn, and in enabling and facilitating environment that favours learning. Thus, one of the key weapons in a Vice-Chancellor's armory is to offer key academics the staff development opportunities and then the subsequent linkage and international partnership arrangement which usually follows.

Broadening Faculty Competence through Staff Development

One of the ways of enhancing the quality of academic staff in the university is the introduction of development and appraisal scheme for all academic staff within the university. This will allow them the opportunity to discuss their professional needs and development in research. This process provides a valuable channel of communication between staff and encourages academics to view their own contribution to the quality of university teaching (Nightingale and O'Neil, 1994). In an attempt at broadening faculty competence, emphasis was focused almost exclusively on helping teachers master their subject matter. Peter Seldin and associates have identified four main approaches to faculty development programmes that stress teaching improvement:

undefined undefined1. In-service workshops that develop specific skills.

undefined undefined2. Feedback that provides professor with information on students' and colleagues' perception of their teaching effectiveness.

undefined undefined3. Lectures and discussion groups devoted to broad issues of higher education.

undefined undefined4. Financial incentives that encourage innovative instructional practices

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(Seldin, 1990: 16-17).
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Wilson reports that the University of California at Berkeley (UCB) has developed an increasing fusion of student evaluation and faculty development called Personal Improvement Teaching Guide (PITG), an approach tailored to the needs of the individual faculty member. In this programme, faculty members

were supplied with simple, proven, and practical suggestions that can be used to improve their teaching (Seldin, 1990: 18).

In a study concerning quality assurance for university teaching, Sandra Griffiths associates staff development to quality assurance in which the key determinants of quality are attitudes and behaviour of staff. According to Griffiths, a comprehensive and positive staff development policy is essential to help staff deal with a changing demands and circumstances. In this case, total quality management may be conceived as a massive exercise in staff development, and the requirement is that organizations should make sustained commitment to staff development and training. Griffiths concludes that as good teaching is becoming crucial, staff development promotes quality assurance in university teaching (Griffiths, 1993: 248).

Any university that wants its faculty to be motivated to teach well must hold as central to the institution's mission and commitment to high-quality teaching. Universities in which good teaching is truly an organizational commitment finds ways to bring teaching issues into prominence. When teaching becomes a primary institutional goal, it should be reflected in the ways in which faculty are evaluated and rewarded. Formal and informal rewards for good teaching serve as strong incentive. In addition to formal rewards, universities can show interest in teaching and offer incentives to faculty through more informal means. For example, awards for high quality teaching – bestowed with the same respect and honour attending research awards – can serve as incentives (Rice and Austin, 1993: 23-42).

In the New Meaning of Educational Change, Michael G. Fullan tackles the issue of staff development. His view of staff development falls into two different but complementary ways. First, it can be seen as a powerful strategy for implementing specific improvements. Second, for a long-term effectiveness it must be seen as part and parcel of the development of schools as collaborative workplace. In combination, Fullan sees staff development as a strategy for specific, instructional change, and a strategy for basic organizational change in the way teachers work and learn together (Fullan, 1991: 319). These new approaches attempt to refocus teacher development so that it becomes part of an overall strategy for professional and institutional reform (Fullan, 1991: 321).

In differentiating faculty or staff development, Menges (1997) identified three perspectives on faculty development, which, according to his argument, differ significantly depending on whether one takes the perspective of the organization, the perspective of professional development of programme or the perspective of the faculty. From organization's perspective, Menges (1997) views faculty or staff development as human resource management. This 'people side of the organization' as a term began to appear in the 1950s. The 'human element' in organization has been acknowledged somewhere else as including 'people as individuals and groups, their recruitment, selection, assignment, motivation, compensation, and retirement' (Tracey, 1991: 159). Universities, like other educational organizations, should be seen as providers of services rather than as producers of goods, when considering human resource management. The current tendency to adopt the phrase "human resource" from the business world as an alternative to staff development is objected to by Bottery on the grounds that it signifies a management attitude of manipulation. The question raised is whether staff can be developed? In a sense, if we are humans blessed with free will, we can only develop ourselves, choosing to accept or reject the attempts of politicians, managers and trainers to alter our knowledge, skills, values, and performance (Oldroyd, 1995: 77-78). Instead, Oldroyd calls for a replacement of the term "staff development" by the phrase "continuing professional development (CPD)" to signify the notion of

career long learning as an entitlement and necessity in rapidly changing modern societies. Oldroyd explained that as individual staff and their group strive to cope with new curriculum, increasing school autonomy and changing social norms and expectations, the imperative for continuous learning grows. In this consideration, the tension between the needs of the individual and of the team and school remains a central challenge to the managers and providers of continuing professional development (Oldroyd, 1995: 78). It was gathered from this perspective that the task of faculty development is to manage human resources in ways that create and maintain a climate consistent with the organization's mission, that is, a climate that emphasizes the quality of teaching and learning.

The second perspective on faculty development is the teacher-centred development, also referred to as professional development. It was proposed that those who work in college and university centers for faculty development and teaching improvement commonly refer to their work as "professional development, defined as 'maintaining and improving the professional competence of the individual faculty member within the context of the many roles the faculty member has in fulfilling his or her obligation to specific institution" (Menges, 1997: 409).

Menges (1997) offers three-dimensional approaches intended for planning and assessing faculty development. The first dimension is temporal, referring to career stage or amount of experience, ranging from trainees (Graduate students) to Professors. The second dimension delineates the roles that faculty fulfills; namely, instructional, scholarly/creative, service and personal, since faculty development activities should specify which role or roles they are addressing. The third dimension deals with organizational level at which faculty development is targeted, ranging from the individual faculty member through particular units in the organization, to the academic and profession and non-academic community (Menges, 1997).

The third and final dimension is the faculty perspective in coping and growth. Faculty members are likely to take pragmatic view of professional development. Faculty work carries multiple demands; carrying a large repertoire of skills, and it must respond to varied constituencies including students, colleagues (both on campus and in the discipline beyond one's own campus), administrators and segments of the general public (Sorcinelli and Austin, 1992; Finkelstein and LaCelle-Peterson, 1993).

From this perspective, faculty development should enable academic staff to cope more effectively with daily demands at work, to protect significant time and energy for life beyond work, and to grow personally and professionally in ways that enhance feelings of intellectual excitement, accomplishment and esteem.

All organizations profit from attention to the well-being and productivity of their employees. In universities, this means giving support to faculty for their development and improvement to the quality of their teaching. This is so because teaching is the activity that consumes the greater amount of faculty time and energy. In recent years much has been learned about the ways teachers can be helped to learn and contribute to improved school functioning and student learning. In the basic sense, all learning must be self-development, whether supported or unsupported (see Nyerere, 1967).

THE SURVEY

Research Methodology and data of the article

The study was aimed at getting deeper understanding of the experiences from the perspectives of the participants selected for the study; a qualitative research study was designed to discover what could be learned about the phenomenon of interest. While collecting the data for the study, a questionnaire designed from the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) criteria, written in the English language, was e-mailed university leaders in all Finnish universities. Although not a complex one, the questionnaire, however, permits exploration in depth. A broad range of documents was also used to cross-validate the data from the questionnaire. Few university leaders were also interviewed for the study (N=5) (Anyamele, 2004). The primary data were derived from an unstructured open-ended question, which permit an intensive analysis of the issue (see Neuman, 1993).

In March 2001, a questionnaire was e-mailed to all university leaders in Finland, in order to explore the perceived roles of university leadership in quality improvement in university management. Although there were no criteria for selecting the participants for the study, the survey was targeted at those holding key administrative and managerial positions in Finnish universities. The study participants included Rectors, Vice-Rectors, Quality and development officers, faculty Dean, Heads of Departments, Research, Estates and Finance, officers. The literature in the field of organizational management considers this group important because intellectual autonomy resides in senior academics in different disciplines that espouse intellectual values and cultures (Clark, 1983). For this article I will use the leadership questionnaire and interviews obtained during the major study of which staff development and the preliminary analysis of them is a part. The data were analyzed contextually based on the responses obtained from the respondents.

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The goal of the present article was to understand the nature of staff development in the university. In reaching this goal, the following question was posed to university leaders in Finland: "How would the professional competencies of teaching staff in Finnish universities be development in order to bring about quality in their academic work of student teaching as educators." The responses to this question, selected from several responses obtained during the major study of which staff development constituted a part is listed below in table 1.

Table 1. APPROACHES TO STAFF DEVELOPMENT INFINNISH UNIVERSITIES

Techniques of staff development in Finnish universities Number of occurrences

Staff education and training:

Training at Administrative Unit and pedagogical and computer education 10

Staff participation in EFQM 8

Empowerment and job satisfaction 8

Systematic continuous education 8

Participation in decision making in the university 5

Development projects 5

Teaching courses in the university 4	
Retraining through Internet 1	
Staff and faculty mobility 1	
Electronic book-keeping 1	

Source: The author.

As shown in table 1, there are a number of variables that dominate in the responses of the leaders; whereas the numbers in brackets represent the number of mentions, where there were more than one mention: staff education and training in which academic staff of Finnish universities are led to training at the Administrative Units, referred to in Finnish language as " palveluyksikko"; Finnish equivalent to service unit, and pedagogical and computer education (10), staff participation in the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) training (8), staff empowerment and job satisfaction (8), systematic continuous education (8), Participation in decision making (5), Development projects (5), teaching course in the university (4).

As the data have shown, Finnish university leadership put the training in Administrative units as consisting a key process in staff development. In universities, the service units carry out key services in support of primary processes of teaching and research. However, assessment may refer more to services provided than to services desired by staff in a changing environment of the university. In administrative units, university wide training priorities arising from careful analysis of development/training challenges are formulated; for example training in Information Technology (IT), management and academic leadership, quality assurance and enhancement, personnel issues such as equal opportunities, media-based learning and pedagogy, international activities. These training events are a means of cross-fertilizing good practice across the university (Davies et al., 1999).

Staff development also extends to participation of staff in European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) training. In recent years since the development of the foundation, Finnish universities have been training some of their staff in the use of EFQM Excellence Model in the improvement of university services, from leadership and management improvement to overall university development. Given the fact that the EFQM model is a systematic process in strategic planning and development of education and staff, self-evaluation procedures would be achieved through the process. The idea of leading university staff to participate in EFQM training suggests the move to direct university institutions towards the vision of high quality by continuous improvement in educational skills. In this way the university institution will become a centre of know-how. In addition, the institutions will take strategic steps in curriculum, quality and personnel development. Apart from its importance in quality and quality development, a study by Westlund (2001) shows that the EFQM Excellence Model is used by many larger European Corporates to measure and manage their quality development process, and as statistical requirement for 'best practice' measurement.

Empowerment and job satisfaction are related to workers' superior performance. In modern organization job satisfaction for staff takes the course of making staff feel satisfied in their academic work. One way of doing this is to provide the staff the necessary rewards and incentives, as a way of

empowerment that enhances job performance. It is only when the staff in the university are satisfied in their work that quality teaching can be ensured, which in turn can raise the level of student learning in the university.

The next result from the data is systematic continuous education. Continuous education as a form of staff development was deemed important because it will prevent knowledge obsolesce. Continuous education of staff plays a key role of advancing knowledge and skills of staff for them to play new roles. It prepares staff for development needs as well as for better teaching and research. In addition, continuous education is seen as a way in which staff are empowered to perform well in teaching and research roles. As universities are faced with accelerating changes in their environment, teachers need to improve their skills in the acquisition and management of new knowledge. The aim here is that staff working in the university will acquire the skills and knowledge needed for pedagogic purposes and for teachers to have teaching skills.

The importance of continuous education and training is that institution's competitiveness in a global or national setting will depend on the expertise of the staff. If the competence of staff is continually maintained and developed, they will gain a lasting motivation. This approach to staff development is lent support by a study by Kautto-Koivula (1997) concerning Nokia's Technology Education and Training Programmes (NTETP). One of the findings of the study show that it was realized that in order to cope with ever-increasing global competition, Nokia had to offer its employees better opportunities to develop and educate themselves while remaining in full time employment, as a means of providing long-term training and education that were highly motivating. Hence staff education and training does not only upgrading an individual teacher's professional skills but must serve the whole institution (see

Participation in decision making in the university boards by academic staff as a form of staff development suggests the availability of democratic values and principles in the campus in which staff learn from the freedom to make decisions in matters that concern them, and affect their work and well being. Finally, participation in development projects by the institutional leaders was identified as a form of staff development. This response suggests that Finnish universities engage their staff in development projects that enable staff learn new innovative ideas in effecting new technical solutions to problems facing society. One such example of development projects, according to my observation, is that relating to local wastewater pollution source that was carried out between National Technology Centre (TEKES) and University of Jyväskylä Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences.

However, it would be wrong to underestimate the key importance of four other responses that got fewer responses in the data: teaching courses in the university (4), retraining through the Internet and emails (1), faculty and staff mobility (1), and electronic book-keeping (1). Teaching courses in the university as a technique of staff development in universities might imply the use of graduate students as teaching assistants to acquaint them in the art of teaching in higher education.

The potential role and use of the Internet in the provision of information services for both research and learning in higher education is receiving much attention in the academic world. The Internet and emails are good tools for academic information needs. In Finland staff training in the use of the Internet and email facilities is aimed at making staff acquire the knowledge and skills to conduct their own Internet search for information related to research and study. For instance, access to technology allows staff to satisfy curiosity, pursue interests, communicate information, solves problems, and facilitates the natural process of learning. Matthew Serbin Pittinsky's work The Wired Tower: Perspectives on the Impact of

the Internet on Higher Education, has been cited as critical in higher education (Pittinsky, 2003).

Faculty and staff mobility has to do with the expansion of the use of joint appointments with other institutions and of flexible forms of contract allowing staff to spend time in other university and non-university funded activities. At the same time, staff mobility is very important staff in different institutions to build relationships with staff from other institutions.

DISCUSSION

The paper has shown that staff development or improving the professional competencies of academic staff is a part of Finnish university culture. The data show the techniques that are capable of offering academic staff the opportunity for development as educators. Also, the data reveal that job enrichment programmes in form of staff education and training such as trainings at administrative units, pedagogical and computer training, participation in quality management training, engagement in development projects, staff/faculty mobility, following systems of continuous education, staff empowerment and job satisfaction, retraining through Internet, are aspects of staff training and development that can contribute meaningfully in adding to the changing behaviour of individual academic staff. These are part of systematic process in strategic planning and development of education and staff in line with the anticipated needs, as well as personal development programmes to ensure up-to-date skills of teachers; especially where new teaching methods require support and training for teaching staff.

As a tool for increased quality, efficiency and output according to Chris Duke, staff development is associated with high quality professional development and performance resulting to career advancement. Staff development can also assist in strategic development; when broadly conceived to initiate change: it is a way of producing strategic training programmes for clients organizations, involving the classification of future purposes and objectives, the identification of training needs within this framework and encourage staff at all levels to see staff education and training as a key support of organizational change. Furthermore, staff development satisfies individual learning needs as well as the enhancement of institutional capacity to manage and thrive in a new environment. The learning and change that are required must take place within individuals but as a result the organizational learning occurs (Duke, 1992: 95-109).

In addition, Staff development is critical to building a learner-centred higher education institution. Education in general and higher education in particular is concerned with the development of human potential and the quality of the human resources that are touched by the endeavour as pointed out by the vice president of human resources unit of College of the Desert, Davis Burge (<u>http://www.college</u> of the desert.edu/facultystaff/SD/) assessed 8/8/2006). Consequently, as one of the key functions of human resource department of an institution, staff development, by providing these range of services such as staff training and development, individual coaching, management support and development, the institution's mission is achieved.

The commitment to staff development and the belief in the performance appraisal and planning process is the integral part of individual and institutional development. This process is designed to improve job understanding on the part of the staff and the promotion of more effective job performance, and establish future goals for career growth. Staff development programmes also assist staff in

understanding their job responsibilities and leaders' performance expectations.

CONCLUSION

It has been found from the study that improving or rather enhancing the professional competencies of academic staff of the university is of crucial importance, and is critical to any success colleges and universities have with diversity education. As a way of keeping staff current in their respective fields, the most forward thinking institutions must incorporate staff development into budget and performance expectations. Such activities are critical in the face of increasingly diverse campuses and in the light of scholarship and global diversity that has transformed knowledge base.

It is equally gathered from the study that career development and acquisition of new knowledge and skills to play new roles is one of the key responses to the imperatives of surviving, adapting and evolving. Development and training need to prepare staff for this as well as for better teaching and research will make staff grow and be judged in the context of organizational learning and development.

Universities in both developed and developing countries should be committed to staff development and have to acknowledge the crucial role it will play in assisting the delivery of the academic plan; for staff development is among a clutch of institutional innovations thrust upon the universities in managing the professional competencies of their academic staff.

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