

Building Effective Administrative Teams



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One of the chief challenges for any dean, particularly a new dean, is building an effective administrative team. The extent to which a dean can attract a team of competent, motivated, committed department chairs and associate deans will determine the amount of time the dean may be able to spend on external, rather than internal, responsibilities of her/his job. Once these individuals are in place they must be provided opportunities for development, as well as rewarded appropriately to ensure their commitment and performance.

Recruiting

One means of effectively recruiting department chairs is to consider those faculty members who provide effective leadership on committees and in other service endeavors. A tandem key personal trait for a prospective chair is someone who has clearly gained the respect of peers and colleagues within the academic unit. When appointing department chairs it is advisable to avoid using “rotating” chairs, where senior faculty simply rotate through the position for a fixed term. Here, the chair’s job is seen more as an obligation than as a true leadership/administrative position. Because the chair and other department faculty realize that the practice of rotating chairs creates temporary leaders, this practice not only fails to allow chairs to fully immerse themselves in an administrative role, it often prevents chairs from confronting challenging issues regarding department faculty. This is due to the fact that the chair knows that when her/his term has concluded (s)he will return to the faculty and cannot risk alienating those individuals who might succeed him/her in the chair’s role and seek retaliation.

While the role of department chair is usually still considered a faculty role, the role of associate dean is clearly an administrative role - although the associate dean usually holds senior faculty rank and a concurrent faculty appointment. Two different kinds of individuals usually show an interest in the associate dean role. The first consists of those in their mid to later career years who simply want to reduce their teaching and/or research and see the shift to administration as a means of accomplishing such. The second group consists of faculty members who seek a true entry-level administrative role to determine if they wish to opt for a career in administration. While the selection of an associate dean who previously served as a department chair can certainly assist in the “ramp up” period in learning administrative procedures and policies, the most desirable attributes of an associate dean are 1) skills and interests which complement (rather than replicate) those of the dean and 2) trustworthiness.

Developing

Once a department chair has reached a level of comfort with her/his duties and role, the dean needs to consider opportunities for ongoing professional development. This can be accomplished, in part, through delegation of previously-centralized tasks, such as assurance of learning, faculty development, budget oversight, scheduling, etc. Any development opportunities which are presented to chairs, particularly those that extend the responsibilities of the chair’s job, should involve the clear communication of expectations from the dean with the

agreement of the chair as to those expectations. This is particularly important for critical assignments such as maintaining accreditation standards and requirements.

Development of associate deans can parallel those opportunities provided to chairs, particularly relative to delegation of the oversight for maintenance of accreditation. Assuming that the associate dean is committed to exploring a career in administration, AACSB conferences targeted for associate deans and prospective deans afford significant development and networking opportunities. Deans can provide associate deans with additional development opportunities simply by allowing them to participate in or fully informing them about activities the dean is undertaking. The specific nature of the development opportunities provided might be determined relative to whether the dean is attempting to develop a potential heir/successor, based on the dean's own career plans which might involve moving on to another position and/or institution.

Rewarding

In considering how best to reward department chairs, the dean needs to consider not only what motivates individual chairs but also the strategic objectives of the school. One chair might be motivated by an additional course release while another would prefer an increased administrative stipend. Rewards can be further designed that encourage either cooperation or competition among different departments, based on the larger strategic objectives of the school. Rewards for chairs also need to consider equity and differences among departments within the school relative to the numbers of majors, number of faculty (both junior and senior), course enrollments and revenue generation. Some departments with a relatively small number of majors may be involved with the delivery of a significant number of service or core courses, some of which, particularly in economics and accounting, are taken at the lower levels and can greatly impact retention.

Associate deans can often find their jobs thankless due to the fact that faculty suddenly no longer see the associate dean as a peer but a bureaucrat. One main reward and motivator for an associate dean is the experience and training (s)he receives for higher level administrative positions. However, the associate dean is often the chief operating officer of the school and can have a significant impact on the unit's budget and expenses, and become a driver/coordinator for curriculum revisions. Because of the importance of the role of the associate dean, these activities should be acknowledged by the dean with appropriate credit given to the associate dean for her/his work. In managing and rewarding both associate deans and chairs, successes should be shared, initiatives should be publicized, and inclusion of activities as part of a team should be encouraged by the dean.

Conclusion

Deans can only be effective to the extent that the myriad of internal administrative details of their schools are being adhered to by members of their administrative teams. Deans need to be particularly sensitive to the adjustments associate deans and chairs make when they assume their administrative responsibilities. Moving from 9/10 to 12 month contracts and having direct supervisory responsibility for co-workers who previously were peers needs to be understood and appreciated by the dean and support needs to be provided to these individuals in their transitions. More so, the dean needs to listen actively to members of her/his administrative team and provide support for their needs and activities as well as keep them informed about her/his own work and the administrative support it will necessitate. Every dean should realize that the recruiting, development and maintenance of an effective administrative team is the foundation for successful advancement of the school's mission and strategy.