Chapter 92

Higher Education Leadership:
Issues Concerning Theory and Practices

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ABSTRACT

This chapter illustrates gaps that exist between leadership theories and practice. Well-reasoned theories are described in many academic books, yet they may not apply in practice. In higher education, these gaps may seem to be compounded by the lack of technical skills or leadership ethics. To demonstrate the true gaps between leadership theories and practice, the authors provide a scenario that illustrates this effect. While the different leadership theories are briefly reviewed, the authors' intention is to demonstrate that applied theory to practice will assist leaders in guiding followers in the right direction for the benefit of these specific stakeholders as well as for the academe at large. A model is developed to help ameliorate the gap between leadership theory and practice in terms of teaching and leadership within the academe, inclusive of faculty and administration. The conceptual framework encapsulates: (a) the interaction of one's teaching philosophies and teaching theories; (b) the interaction of one's teaching philosophies and leadership theories; and (c) behaviors and interactions of leaders and followers to prevent leaders from ganging up on followers.

INTRODUCTION

If we were to examine the many higher education administrative job descriptions advertised, we might find the following characteristics of leaders sought who are:

1. Visionary and can take the university or program to a new height.
2. Committed to a shared governance model.
3. Conceptual and possess human and technical skills.
4. Experts in their field, with an excellent record of teaching, scholarship, and service.
5. Steadfast in doing the right things and doing things right.

Of course, this list can be expanded and be more specific regarding curriculum or required technical skills; it is critical that there exists a strong skill set, whatever the area of study. As a faculty member who wishes to enter the arena of administration a tri-fold requirement of teaching, research, and service must be in place. In order to be an authority in a particular field, these "would be" leaders must have practiced for quite a few years before they can be "labeled" as experts. In terms of Taylor's principles of scientific management as an efficiency model, as cited in Wang, (2011, p. 15), leaders, whether they are hired as department chairs, college deans, university provosts, or presidents, first and foremost, must know their field of study. Therefore, to come full circle with Taylor, without being experts, efficiency and effectiveness may not be optimized and leaders may not be able to ferret out what best leadership practices work with their perspective followers. Leaders must assure that followers are highly productive in their own right, and as stated in the principles of scientific management (Taylor, 1911) "…leaders, like managers, should focus on that one best method that motivates the follower to do the work of the organization" (p. 9). However, to digress from Taylor, there may not be one best way in which leaders can evaluate followers' performance and find the one best method (based on principles of scientific management; of course leaders may use multiple methods) to help followers be productive in the field. Therefore, the question then becomes, how can leaders, at the top look for the best method to affect optimal leadership capacity?

Institutions of higher learning have a variety of the standards, policies, and procedures in place. Some of these standards seem to be set in stone, however, a university is a dynamic environment and flexibility within leadership and with faculty is essential for positive organization evolution. Taking the premise that leaders are experts, it would possibly be helpful if administrators in higher education model teaching, research and scholarship, as well as define expectations for their faculty. When we examine history, common sense will tell us that learning by example from experts has been common practice. For example, even in the trades, in order for the protégé to pass an internship or apprenticeship, fathers had to be experts in a certain field first (Roberts, 1965; Wang & King, 2008; Wang & King, 2009). It was in this way apprentices could venture off on their own with their own level of expertise.

However, we can debate that not all leaders are experts in their subsequent fields. Leaders may be learning through their own personal process or by "trial and error." There may be some types of leadership-type academes, but the level of depth and breadth of leadership may not always be adequate, and again, the specific environment in which the leader operates is dynamic or may be narrow in scope. Some leaders also just emerge as leaders, while others are trained to be leaders; instead of seeking administrative positions, some faculty members may also be chosen by other administrators, based on the trifold of faculty ability, and the fact that these particular faculty members possess traits of effective leaders. Most leaders do not have a degree in business management or leadership, but have expertise in their respective content area. Therefore, it may be only after a certain number of years, having been hopefully excellent faculty members in teaching, scholarship, and service, do they venture into the arena of administration.

However this is the case, potential leadership can be chosen based on seniority, irrespective of teaching, scholarship, and service, or due to interpersonal connections with already seeded administrators. In higher education, we might call these installed leaders "puppet" administrators, in that they were not meritoriously promoted. If we take this notion slightly deeper, we might assume that these installed administrators will do the bidding of the higher echelon, no matter the circumstance. If in fact these installed administrators perform to specification, they may be considered "team players" by their supervisors, and actively promoted further. Within another discourse, those who may oppose a directive due to the ethical nature of the directive, may be labeled as "loose cannons", and therefore will not

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