



Academic Leadership Properties for the 21st Century

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What makes a strong academic leader? At minimum faculty and staff who are in leadership positions need to be able to manage change, build consensus and promote collaboration, advance the development of campus faculty and staff, set academic properties, champion programs and evaluate faculty effectively and fairly, amongst other responsibilities. The criteria for leadership may change with position: university presidents, provosts, and chancellors have different roles than do university deans. Community colleges and two year schools will have different challenges than four year and research heavy schools. Schools in different countries will have different challenges. At the core, leadership has some common characteristics. In this booklet, I will explore these issues. I will first briefly describe leadership and summarize major theories of leadership. Given the importance of motivation to leadership I will then briefly overview what is known about motivation. Finally, I shall describe strategies to increase leadership skills in the form of explicit tips and suggestions. Specifically, I shall cover the following objectives:

- What is academic leadership?
- What makes a good department chair?
- What makes a good Dean and Provost?
- What are the key elements of motivation that leaders can use?

After reading this booklet, you will better understand the characteristics that underlie leadership and be able to incorporate this understanding into career planning.

What is Academic Leadership?

Segesten (2013; <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/university-venus/what-makes-academic-leader>) provides a recent and useful assessment of how leadership in academia can compare with business and politics. For the most part, when we think of leaders we think of Kings, Presidents, or other heads of state or, if one were to go back over hundreds of years, God. In contemporary times, leaders are also those who make companies successful, who can make the difficult calls when needed, who inspire those that follow them or those that they are in charge of. Leaders in academia appear different.

First, it is important to separate out the main forms of leadership in an academic institution. In most North American universities, there are almost two major categories of leaders. There are the administrative leaders who are in charge of running the university and those who are lead in different service categories at the department level or across staff or faculty lines. Universities have a Chancellor or a President in the lead with Associate or Vice Chancellors and Provosts, or Vice Presidents below them. Each major part of the university (e.g., Professional Studies, Liberal Arts and Sciences) may then have a Dean with Associate and/or Assistant Deans below them. These terms may vary across the globe. In New Zealand, for example, the Dean of a college is near the equivalent of a Provost or even President in North America.

Going beyond the higher administration, departments are led by department chairs who can be classified as using a form of collegial leadership (Segesten, 2013). Collegial leadership, often practiced by faculty who are then voted or appointed to the role of department chair, is collegial and limited in time. Collegial leadership means that the administrative responsibilities are taken over by one member of the faculty at a time. This has consequences for the job criteria:

not only must the proposed leader demonstrate managerial capacities (flexible, adaptable, strategic and most of all effective), but she or he must also be a resourceful scholar with a good publication record and deserving academic performance. One obvious problem is that there is no transfer of merits between research and administration. A very good researcher does not automatically make a good academic leader. But since the principle of collegiality must be enforced, the academic performance criterion must be always included, despite its probable lack of relevance, for the sake of legitimacy in the eyes of the other members of the faculty (Segestrom, 2013).

The second feature that is particular to the academic leadership is its time-restricted nature. None of the positions in the administrative hierarchy is permanent; after usually two terms, the chair returns to her/his original position as university teacher. This poses a challenge typical for all limited positions, namely the difficulty of formulating and implementing long-term goals and far reaching transformations (Segestrom, 2013). Moreover, in combination with the collegial idea, the fact that the administrative term is time-limited makes highly unlikely the inclination for dealing with deep-seated problems within the institution as well as long-term change. No one would like to take some unpopular decisions during one's administrative mandate knowing that someday, sooner or later, they will return and be depending on coworkers' support and collegiality (Segestrom, 2013).

A final component of the academic leadership conundrum is the normative component of the academic culture. Traditionally, a "good academic" is a person whose merits fall primarily in the scientific/research areas. Innovative research resulting in new knowledge is the apex of academic achievement. Taking on an administrative duty means reducing the time left for research; thus administration and leadership are valued not as high as scientific achievements.

Because of the necessity of collegial leadership most academics accept the leadership role, but often their perception of it is that of a “necessary evil” (Segestrom, 2013). They see themselves primarily as scholars who temporarily fulfill an administrative role, as persons who have a leadership position, but who are not academic leaders (Rowley & Sherman, 2003).

Given that the role of department chair is perhaps the most common form of academic leadership, I next turn to some key characteristics of good department chairs.

Academic Leadership: Department Chairs

Perhaps the best advice on being a good department chair comes from Leaming (1998) whose book on the topic is a comprehensive listing of key attributes of academic leaders. I summarize his main points below.

Leaming (1998) defines academic leadership as “the skills to motivate others to take certain courses of action, to persuade others that prescribed tasks must be done on time and in a particular way, and to garner respect of others, especially those with whom one works and/or associates” (p. 29). Chairs have to develop plans, encourage faculty development, set budget priorities, update the curriculum, recruit faculty members, encourage higher standards of teaching, resolve conflicts, and serve on committees together with a host of other responsibilities. One can divide up a Chair’s responsibilities according to the main constituencies served. The key areas include faculty, the curriculum and programs, budget and instructional resources, external relations, and to students.

Leading faculty calls for paying attention to faculty needs across many different levels of the system. Chairs need to help new faculty become oriented to the university, improve faculty teaching, improve the scholarship of faculty and help refocus faculty efforts when morale is low (Wheeler et al., 2008).

It is important for leaders to have vision that they are able to articulate and convince others in the department to share their vision. Strong leaders should have a good idea of what their department should become and the key steps of how to get there. Sometimes this will mean changing the way things have always been done. There may be faculty who do not want to change, but a strong leader works towards change that he or she feels is needed. It is often key to stay focused to make sure that the many multiple smaller responsibilities do not detract from the fulfilling of the vision.

To get a lot done well a good leader is not afraid to delegate responsibility. While some individuals do not trust their faculty enough and feel a need to micromanage the activity, good leaders should give their faculty space to execute their assignments without having to frequently check in with the chair. This means a Chair should be confident in their staff and themselves.

Good leaders know themselves well so they are aware of what they need to learn or get better at. Questions one could ask include are you decisive enough? Are you afraid of making mistakes? Can you accept blame for failure and share credit for success? How sensitive are you to change? Some personality characteristics of academic leaders include vigor, decisiveness, and a willingness to take chances (Seagren, Creswell, & Wheeler, 1993 in Leaming, 1998).

Other important attributes of good Chairs are possessing strong communication skills, being sensitive and caring, being flexible, honest, fair, and having a good work ethic.

The seven habits of successful Chairpersons (Leaming, 1998) include having goals, getting to know their colleagues and fellow administrators, being agents of change, understanding and appreciating teaching, research and public service, being honest, forthright and decent, fair and evenhanded, and being consensus builders and good communicators. Often individuals may possess many of these skills but need work in some areas.

Academic Leadership: Deans and Provosts

Although Chairs are ubiquitous on college campuses, the tough decisions of the college or university have to be made by the Deans who hold sway over many different departments, and the Provosts and Chancellors who are then situated about them.

The roles and responsibilities of a Dean represent those of a Chair but at a higher level. Deans also need to have vision, and share many of the same constituents (e.g., students, faculty) but now also deal with parents, other Deans, upper administrators, community members and members of the board. Deans have larger budgets and hold more control over faculty promotions and merit raises. The Dean also has specific challenges such as terminating a faculty member, replacing Chairs, responding to emergencies, dealing with the media and even managing intellectual property disputes (Buller, 2007).

The area when a Dean's leadership skills are perhaps most important come in the realm of one on one meetings. Some key leadership guidelines for one and one meetings include (Buller, 2007):

- Whenever possible, plan as carefully for one-on-one meetings as you do for formal presentations before large groups,
- When blindsided, listen carefully, offer little reaction, and then reflect on what has occurred,
- Remember that demonstrating concern is not the same as committing to a particular course of action,
- When making a decision or commitment, always do so within the context of your core beliefs as an administrator,
- When the other person does not accept your decision, make it clear the decision is final.

When supervising a meeting, good leaders should:

- Be sure they are thoroughly grounded in parliamentary procedure,
- Organize meetings to be as task oriented as possible,
- Remember that delegation helps both you and your committee members,
- Foster an environment in which all voices are heard and given due consideration.

The material that relates to Deans above also relates to other higher administration. There is a lot of variance in job descriptions for Deans, Provosts, and others. Provosts are often the second in command at a university (after the President or Chancellor). The Provost, like the Deans, face more internal challenges and have to lead their faculty and staff, whereas the Presidents and Chancellors face more external challenges facing the community (Nielsen, 2013).

Martin and Samels (1997, in Nielsen, 2013) suggest the top 10 characteristics of Provosts are:

- Being expert with ambiguity
- Championing new technologies
- Being an institutional entrepreneur
- Being a student affairs advocate
- Being a savvy fund-raiser
- Supporting selected excellence
- Being a legal interpreter
- Being a public intellectual
- Being a shaper of consensus, and
- Being a visionary pragmatist.

Why Motivation Is Important

There are three commonly used measures of motivation: choice, effort, and persistence (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011). Students who are motivated to learn choose activities that enhance their learning, they then work hard, and continue to do so even when there are obstacles to learning. A good leader uses this same idea when motivating those who work under them.

There are many psychological variables linked to motivation. Some people are driven by a high need for achievement, some are said to be extrinsically motivated (those who work primarily for pay or approval of others), other are intrinsically motivated (those who work for the value of the outcome in its own right). Staff are generally focused on activities that they value and in which they expect to succeed (expectancy-value theory). Motivation is also said to be directed towards goals. Some staff adopt mastery goals where the primary desire is to understand and master the responsibilities. Other staff adopt performance goals where they focus on their evaluations in relation to the evaluations of others. The four motivational theories that relate to success (with key points on each) are summarized below:

1. Autonomy and Self Determination

- People have a need for control over their lives
- Control helps people feel that they have choices

2. Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

- People are motivated by both internal (enjoyable and interesting) and external rewards (social recognition, professional development, money)
- Leaders tap intrinsic motivation when they arouse student curiosity, provide appropriate challenges, and give staff some control

- Leaders tap extrinsic motivation when they provide useful and constructive feedback
3. Expectancy-Value Theory
- People direct their energies toward activities they value and in which they believe they can be successful
 - Thus, leaders best promote performance when
 - They show value
 - They foster expectations of success
4. Mastery /Performance Goal Theory
- Mastery Orientation
 - Primary desire is to learn and master subject matter
 - Performance Goal Orientation
 - Primary desire is to achieve relative to others (compete)

As seen above, there are many different theories of motivation in the psychological literature. To help consolidate the different ideas, Svinicki, (2004) presented an Amalgamated Model of Motivation, which suggests motivation is influenced by two major factors:

1. Value of the Goal: There are many factors that influence how valuable a person will perceive a job to be. The main factors are:
 - The perceived need for the knowledge or information
 - Intrinsic quality of goal
 - Utility of goal (what use will achieving the goal have?)
 - Control and choice (how much control and choice does the person have?)
 - Influence of others (are the persons' peers important factors?)

2. Staff member's Expectation that the goal can be achieved:

- Difficulty (is the role challenging?)
- Prior experience (how much experience or knowledge does the staff member/faculty have on the topic?)
- Match with staff member skills (is the level of the challenge suitable?)
- Encouragement/examples of others (what support or modeling is provided?)
- Self-efficacy (does the staff member think they can achieve the goal?)
- Attributions of success/failure (what does the staff member believe success or failure is caused by?)
- Beliefs/attitudes about the goal (what does the staff member see as the role of the goal?)

One of the easiest things a leader can do to motivate staff is to help increase the value of their jobs for them. If leaders see staff lacking motivation, assessing the extent they value what they are trying to get them to learn is the first critical step to take.

It seems obvious that motivation is an important component of leading, but what exactly is the connection? There have been many different ideas on this topic (e.g., Svinicki, 2004).

Motivation:

- Directs the staff members' attention to the task at hand and makes them less distractible. Anything that focuses attention helps task performance,
- Changes what the person pays attention to,
- Helps the person persist when they encounter obstacles,

- Helps the person set goals which then serve as benchmarks that they can use to monitor their performance and recognize when they are making progress and when they are finished a task.

Tips for Increasing Motivation

Based on the five theories of motivation reviewed previously, McKeachie and Hofer (2001) suggested the following suggestions for improving student motivation:

1. Provide Opportunities for Choice
2. Share Your Own Motivation for Your Job
3. Make Meeting Time Valuable
4. Encourage Mastery By Offering Extended Opportunities for Task completion when needed.
5. Use Criterion-Referenced Performance evaluation
6. Provide Immediate and Helpful Feedback

In this booklet I reviewed a number of different theories on motivation and tips to increase motivation that corresponded to each. The annotated references provide additional information on many of the topics discussed above.

Annotated References

Buller, J. L. (2007). *The essential academic dean: A practical guide to college leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

As suggested by the subtitle, this book provides the essential tips for the college dean to develop leadership qualities. It goes over each of the main roles and responsibilities and then provides key tips on how to get better and improve in that sector. The book is a checklist of what a dean can do to be a strong leader.

Leaming, D. R. (1998). *Academic leadership: A practical guide to chairing the department*. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.

This is perhaps the single best resource for any department chair. After first listing the key characteristics of a strong academic leader, the author spends separate chapters on key elements of the chair's job listing best practices to successfully navigate the different roles and responsibilities that come with the job.

Nielsen, L. A. (2013). *Provost: Experiences, reflections, and advice from a former "Number Two" on campus*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

One of the few (if not only) books talking about the role of the Provost on university campuses. The book is part memoir, part guide and covers every different aspect of the life of the Provost including major roles and responsibilities and leadership suggestions.

Svinicki, M. D. (2004). *Learning and motivation in the post secondary classroom*. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.

This book presents a comprehensive review of theories of learning and motivation and also provides explicit tips on how to increase motivation (many of which are summarized in this

booklet). Svinicki is the current author of McKeachie's Teaching Tips, one of the classic books on pedagogy.

Wheeler, D. W., Seagren, A. T., Becker, L. W., Kinley, E. R., Mlinek, D. D., & Robson, K. J. (2008). *The academic chair's handbook*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Similar to the Leaming book mentioned above, this is a strong resource on many different aspects of being an academic chair. It provides many self-assessments for the reader to measure where they stand and perhaps get a sense of what they need to work on.