

Leadership Strategies for Department Chairs and Program Directors: A Case Study Approach

Robert W. Comer, D.M.D.; N. Karl Haden, Ph.D.; Robert L. Taylor, M.B.A., D.B.A.; D. Denee Thomas, Ph.D.

Abstract: As a part of the 2000-01 American Dental Education Association (ADEA) Leadership Institute, the Leadership Institute Fellows conducted a faculty development workshop for department chairpersons and program directors during the 2001 ADEA Annual Session. A central premise of the workshop was that successful chairpersons and program directors are both effective leaders and effective managers and that leadership and management involve complementary activities. The workshop was case-based. The ADEA Leadership Institute Fellows developed the cases and led roundtable discussions of each case. A group facilitator led large group debriefings to apply management and leadership theory to each case. The purpose of this paper is to review leadership challenges and management concepts as they were applied in a case-based faculty development workshop. The program was structured to address leadership challenges relating to managing people, mission management, conflict recognition, and conflict management. The cases were developed to relate management theories to situations in academic administration. The situations were designed to encourage debate from numerous perspectives. Each case presented general dilemmas that could be addressed from the vantage point of the dean, chair, or individual faculty member. Reinforcing discussion followed and included identification of central issues, key management concepts, and action alternatives. Because of the breadth of possible discussion, group case analyses at the workshop and in the appended case reviews explore only one perspective. This overview article introduces concepts of leadership and management that provide the foundation for analysis of three case studies that follow. These cases address common leadership and management issues in academic dentistry through three typical cases: the frustrated faculty member (case 1), the misdirected faculty member (case 2), and the faculty member stuck in the middle (case 3).

Dr. Comer is Associate Dean for Patient Services, School of Dentistry, Medical College of Georgia; Dr. Haden is Associate Executive Director and Director, Center for Educational Policy and Research, American Dental Education Association; Dr. Taylor is Dean, College of Business and Public Administration, University of Louisville; and Dr. Thomas is Associate Professor, Periodontics and Microbiology, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. Direct correspondence and requests for reprints to Dr. Robert W. Comer, Associate Dean for Patient Services, School of Dentistry, Medical College of Georgia, Augusta, GA 30912-1241; 706-721-2607 phone; 706-721-6276 fax; rcomer@mail.mcg.edu.

Key words: faculty development, leadership, management, academic administration, department chair, program director, case study, conflict management, personnel management, mission management

Submitted for publication 9/11/01; accepted 2/13/02

The department chair and program director are the links between faculty and administration, between one department or program and another, and between the discipline and the institution. Ensuring the quality of the curriculum; recruiting, developing, and retaining faculty; and communicating up and down the administrative ladder are among the daily responsibilities of the chair or director. Some studies suggest that the responsibilities of chairs and directors are increasing, thereby making the positions more demanding.¹⁻⁴ The range of activities and competencies required of the modern department chair is exemplified in a recent article in which Wilson⁵

describes the chair as a “beggar, psychologist, mediator, and maid.” In using these analogies, he argues that the chair’s job is thankless, powerless, and paperwork-laden. Many would disagree with these negative perceptions, but few would deny the need for superior leadership and management skills to address the increasingly complex responsibilities of these positions.

In 1999, the American Dental Education Association (ADEA), at that time the American Association of Dental Schools, initiated the ADEA Leadership Institute to develop the nation’s most promising dental and allied dental faculty to assume adminis-

trative leadership positions in dental and dental hygiene education. Among the curricular components of the year-long program were: leadership theory; self-assessment and peer assessment; team-building and strategies for interpersonal communication; educational and public policy; financial management; vision development; strategic planning; and the theory of the learning organization and systems thinking. Nineteen Leadership Institute Fellows were selected for the 2000-01 class. Of these, six were assistant or associate deans, and eight held the positions of chair or director. Additional detailed information on the institute is available from the ADEA website (www.adea.org/DEPR/Leadership/overview.htm).

As part of the 2000-01 Leadership Institute curriculum, fellows were responsible for developing a faculty development workshop for the ADEA Annual Session. Department management and program leadership are two areas of need frequently requested of ADEA by dental school deans, chairs, program directors, and those who have career goals that include chairing a department or directing a program. This request is based on these individuals' perceived need for educational programming to address specific issues related to leadership and management. Therefore, in combination with the fellows' Leadership Institute learning experiences, the 2000-01 class developed and facilitated a full-day workshop, "Leadership Strategies for Department Chairs and Program Directors."

The Complementary Activities of Leadership and Management

Formal education programs to develop leadership and management skills were initiated as part of the curriculum at several business schools in the late nineteenth century. In 1881, the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School developed the first undergraduate commerce program. In 1900, masters programs in commerce were developed at Dartmouth's Tuck School; and, in 1908, Harvard University began to offer the Masters in Business Administration degree. Conger notes that, until the 1960s, courses devoted to the study of leadership were more likely to be found in political science departments than in management schools.⁶ Substantial studies of academic leadership and formal programs

in academic leadership have only emerged within the last two decades.⁷⁻¹¹ In contrast to mid-level business managers and executives, roughly the administrative corporate counterparts to higher education's chairs, program directors, deans, and senior university administrators, few formal opportunities exist for higher education administrators to study and develop leadership and management skills. Most leadership and management development in higher education is "on the job training."¹²⁻¹⁶

The terminology associated with the concepts of leadership and management often overlaps and is used interchangeably in the literature.¹⁷⁻¹⁹ For example, is "planning" a leadership or a management activity? Does one "lead" or "manage" change? Who has the greatest responsibility for motivating employees: leaders or managers? Looking at positional roles, is the chair more appropriately considered a manager, while the dean is viewed as the leader? The answers to these questions and the explanation for the overlap and interchangeability of leadership and management terminology are found in the complementary qualities of leadership and management. A central premise of the ADEA Leadership Institute workshop was that successful chairs and program directors are both effective managers and effective leaders.

Kotter provides a helpful taxonomy of leadership and management.¹⁸ Both leadership and management involve determining what should be done, engaging people to accomplish the task or tasks, and ensuring that the work is actually completed. However, Kotter maintains that the respective systems of action associated with leadership and management approach tasks in different ways. Kotter argues that management is about coping with *complexity*, that is, bringing order and predictability to a situation. Leadership, in contrast, is about coping with rapid *change*—guiding an organization and its people through major internal and external challenges. Table 1 delineates further differences in leadership and management drawn by Kotter. In addition, the table lists a typical, but by no means exhaustive, set of activities associated with chairing a department or directing a program. The purpose of Table 1 is to illustrate that chairing a department or directing a program is both a leadership *and* a management responsibility.

The line between leadership and management is often blurred, and to maintain strict categories seems to have little pragmatic significance. Using

Table 1. Differences between leadership and management

The Essence of Leadership

- **Coping with change**
- **Setting direction:** envisioning the future; developing strategy
- **Aligning people:** communicating a vision; gaining buy-in from a broad range of stakeholders
- **Motivating and inspiring:** focusing on shared values; role modeling; establishing a culture characterized by a sense of belonging, recognition, and achievement

Typical Activities of the Chairperson or Program Director

Leadership

- Strategic planning; getting commitment from the dean, faculty, staff, and students
- Motivating faculty
- Mentoring faculty for tenure and promotion
- Advocating for faculty tenure and promotion
- Encouraging change and innovation
- Personal development
- Building interdepartmental and multidisciplinary collaborations
- Setting curricular objectives

The Essence of Management

- **Coping with complexity**
- **Planning and budgeting:** developing predictable processes and procedures
- **Organizing and staffing:** ensuring the fit between people and jobs; implementing a plan
- **Controlling and problem-solving:** ensuring that processes and procedures are working efficiently; monitoring essential tasks to make certain they are getting done day after day

Management

- Implementing a departmental or program plan; allocating resources
 - Recruiting faculty
 - Supervising staff
 - Evaluating faculty performance
 - Ensuring that established policies, procedures, and programs are followed
 - Assessing the development needs of the department
 - Handling interpersonal conflicts
 - Assessing outcomes
-

Kotter's conceptual framework, department chairs and program directors are continuously exercising the roles of both leader and manager. It is arguable that, given their responsibilities and resources, chairs and program directors are uniquely positioned in the academic administrative structure to employ both leadership and management practices. Furthermore, professional development for department chairs or program directors should strike a balance between leadership and management skills.

without the stress of immediate action. The expected outcome is to prepare leaders to act appropriately when a situation arises or, ideally, to preempt a potential problem through planning and appropriate interceptive action.

The Case Study Approach to Leadership Development

The ADEA Leadership Institute workshop for department chairs and program directors utilized a variety of case studies that addressed both leadership and management skills. Application of management theory by case study analysis is an established learning method in leadership and management training.^{2,20} This method has been a primary teaching vehicle for schools of business administration and in corporate training.² The relevant theories may be understood by exploring the relationships among people, organizational structures, and problems that are either actual situations or simulations of reality. The realism of cases enhances one's ability to review theory and apply knowledge to the problem

Method

The full-day workshop was based upon a series of situational case studies written by the ADEA Leadership Institute Fellows to simulate administrative dilemmas faced by department chairpersons and program directors. The cases were distributed to participants one week before the workshop. The cases were presented in roundtable discussions with approximately eight to ten participants per table. Two ADEA Leadership Institute Fellows facilitated each roundtable discussion. An internationally recognized scholar in leadership and management theory led large group debriefings, with a specific focus on the application of leadership and management theory to each case and corresponding action steps. The workshop format included an overview of background leadership and management theories followed by a case presentation designed to illustrate or apply a particular theory. The discussions included identification of central issues, key management concepts, action alternatives, and expected outcomes. The topi-

cal areas for each case and related subjects are presented in Table 2.

The cases were an amalgamation of actual situations (three cases used in the workshop follow this article). Each case was designed to emphasize specific leadership and management challenges that frequently occur in academic administration. Cases were written to focus on three general topic areas:

- leading and managing people,
- mission synthesis, and
- conflict management.

Each case reflects the collective experiences of several authors and presents unique opportunities for discussion. As with any case review, the participants initially engaged in role-playing and problem analysis. The participants were encouraged to select an approach from various perspectives—the institution, the administration, or the person in the middle. Changing the perspective provided opportunities for interesting possibilities for analysis and action. Perhaps a secondary benefit from changing roles may be that participants gained empathy and insight when adapting to a different perspective.

Each of the case situations reflected a variety of administrative challenges for several reasons. First, there was the challenge of uncertainty: all the facts were not known. Furthermore, as in reality, all the facts could not be known. Second, as in actual cases, all repercussions of action were not predictable. The possibility of an unexpected action may have profound consequences. The third challenge in the case situations was the pressure or impulse to act. Even though taking no action may be a viable or preferred action, the internal and external pressures to act may prevail. The fourth reason that the case analyses were challenging is that there was an underlying agenda. Effective leaders and managers are expected to learn and move forward; capitalize on adversity; or convert crises into opportunities. To take advantage of case study analyses, participants were encouraged to do the following:

1. Think.
2. Speculate on “What if . . . ?”
3. Apply theoretical principles to realistic situations.
4. Explore self (including experiences, education, and values).

Table 2. Summary of principle theories and issues addressed by each case study

General Topic Areas	Managing People	Conflict Recognition	Managing Conflict
Background Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation • Mentoring • Performance counseling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sources of conflict • Types of conflict • Impact of conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Options <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —avoidance —accommodation —negotiation —collaboration • Conflict as a positive • Conflict as a negative
CASE STUDY TITLE*	“The Frustrated Faculty Member”	“The Misdirected Faculty”	“Stuck in the Middle”
Central Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misplaced position priorities • Unavailable collaborative opportunities • Uncertainty of support • Fairness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unacceptable performance • Victimized faculty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resentment • Scarce resources
Key Management Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust • Mentoring • Motivation and development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication and feedback • Expectancy theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity theory • Resource allocation
Action Alternatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare action plan • Clarify position description • Negotiate revisions • Redirect faculty resources • Expand collaboration network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Prompt intercession • Contingency development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change • Perceptions • Input:output ratios • Personnel actions • Standards

*Each of these case studies follows this article.

5. Discuss and assess the issues and opportunities.
6. Develop conclusions that improve self-confidence to analyze and act appropriately.

Case Analysis

After reading the cases, the workshop participants discussed and identified the central issues of each situation. These issues were the observed problems or conflicts inherent in the scenarios. Next the participants defined the challenges and opportunities. And finally, the participants were directed to define the next step that administrators should take. How can a positive outcome be realized from a negative situation? What are the projected consequences of action alternatives? It is assumed that this action plan would achieve a result for which the chair or director willingly accepts accountability for the outcome.

Each of these tasks involved in case analysis was designed to yield specific outcomes. First, the participants interested in leadership strategies were presented foundation information in theory. Second, the participants were engaged in a process that fostered an environment in which they were challenged to think, apply fundamental concepts, articulate their perceptions, and organize their thoughts for problem analysis. Third, the exercises were designed to present opportunities for growth and development. A central premise of the workshop was that knowledge of theory and analysis of hypothetical, yet realistic, situations could prepare chairs and program directors to confront the unexpected with increased awareness and confidence.

Approximately sixty individuals, not including the 2001 ADEA Leadership Institute Fellows, participated in the workshop. Fifty-one of the participants responded to an evaluation of the workshop. Forty percent of the respondents had worked in dental education for ten or more years, while another 37 percent had been in dental education for five to ten years, indicating that workshop participants were sufficiently knowledgeable of dental education to judge the reality of the cases and the applicability of the corresponding theories. Overall, 80 percent of the respondents rated the workshop as excellent and 20 percent as good. No participants rated the workshop as fair or poor. One hundred percent indicated a high level of interest in another such program. Seventy-one percent of respondents rated as excellent their probability of implementing ideas from the workshop, while 20 percent rated their probability

of implementing the ideas as good. Many written comments requested that the Association provide similar programs at each Annual Session. The workshop evaluation data are summarized in Table 3.

Conclusion and Preface to the Case Studies

In a recent study of faculty development in U.S. and Canadian dental schools, O'Neill and Taylor conclude that many chairs have little opportunity for leadership and mentoring. The authors maintain that there is a significant need for mid-level and senior faculty development at the national level throughout the year. O'Neill and Taylor's conclusions are corroborated by ADEA Leadership Institute workshop experience. Measured against other ADEA Faculty Development Workshops at the 2001 Annual Session, the ADEA Leadership Institute workshop for chairs and program directors was one of the best attended. Most participants were mid-level to senior faculty. Assuming that attendance reflects need, there is a broad interest among ADEA members for this type of faculty development. Finally, the evaluations make clear that a case-based approach is a highly effective methodology for professional development programs.

Three case scenarios and related discussion follow this article. The participants were directed to consider salient features of the case. Following the case presentations, participants were challenged to identify central issues, applicable management concepts, and action alternatives.

Case-study analysis was selected as an aid for planning and preparation of future contingencies for the following reasons:

1. Case studies are viable vehicles for learning.
2. Changing the perspective or principal alters the challenge.
3. Case analyses allow a forum for pragmatic learning.

Case evaluation provides a nonthreatening experience when dissecting complex and convoluted situations. The three case studies that follow were developed specifically to emphasize one or more of these theories and techniques:

- resource allocation
- expectancy theory
- mentoring
- motivation and development

- leadership
- conflict as a positive or negative influence

After each case is presented, at least two aspects of theory are summarized. This summary should aid the reader in focusing on central concepts that apply to the situation. However, one must realize that reality is characterized by multiple influences. Therefore, the conclusions of the cases may draw on multiple facets of theory and techniques. There are rarely any circumstances in which a unidimensional approach may yield a solution to multifactorial problems. For simplicity, the leadership and management theories are discussed briefly, but the principles may be applied to any specific aspects of each case study. Each case is intended to be a building block for the next case. Readers are encouraged to read the cases; define the issues; list the challenges and opportunities; and define or discuss an action plan before reading the summaries of the workshop participants. Readers may change the perspective or roles and prepare an entirely different scenario and possible outcome.

In the final analysis, these case studies were designed to assess leadership and management strategies so that one may ponder the unexpected and prepare for reality.

REFERENCES

1. Gile-Gee H, McMahon MJ. System-wide and institutional development programs for chairpersons. *The Department Chair: A Newsletter for Academic Administrators* 1997;8(1).
2. Leaming DR, ed. *Academic leadership: a practical guide to chairing the department*. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company, Inc., 1998.
3. O'Neill PN, Taylor CD. Responding to the need for faculty development: a survey of U.S. and Canadian dental schools. *J Dent Educ* 2001;65(8):768-76.
4. Morahan SP, et al. Training future leaders of academic medicine: internal programs at three academic health centers. *Acad Med* 1998;70:1159-68.
5. Wilson R. Beggar, psychologist, mediator, maid: the thankless job of a chairman. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 2, 2001.
6. Conger JA. *Learning to lead: the art of transforming managers into leaders*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1992.
7. Birnbaum R. *How academic leadership works: understanding success and failure in the college presidency*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1992.
8. Bright DF, Richards MP. *The academic deanship: individual careers and institutional roles*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2001.
9. Wolverton M, Gmelch WH, Montez J, Nies CT. *The changing nature of the academic deanship*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers, 2001.
10. ACE Fellows Program, American Council on Education, One Dupont Circle, NW, Washington, DC 20036. At: www.ACENET.edu.
11. van Ameringen H. *Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine (ELAM) Program for Women*, Harvard University Medical School, Boston, MA. At: www.hms.harvard.edu/fa/fellowship/fel20a.htm.
12. Birnbaum R. *How colleges work: the cybernetics of academic organization and leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1990.
13. Cahan SM. The missing step in searches for academic administrators. *AAHE Bulletin* 1997;50(2).
14. Crawford AL. Skills perceived to lead to success in higher education. (ED 232 519.)
15. Lutz FW. Deanship selection and faculty governance in higher education. *Planning and Changing* 1979;10(4).
16. Twombly SB. The process of choosing a dean. *J Higher Educ* 1992;63(6).
17. Collins J. Level 5 leadership: the triumph of humility and fierce resolve. *Harvard Business Review*, January 2001.
18. Kotter JP. What leaders really do. *Harvard Business Review*, May/June 1990.
19. Mintzberg H. The manager's job: folklore and fact. *Harvard Business Review*, March/April 1990.
20. Montana P. *Management*. New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1991.