"Academic leadership is the act of building a community of scholars to set direction and achieve common purposes through the empowerment of faculty and staff."[1]

Chair as Leader

Significance of the Chair Position

The chair position is the most important administrative position on a university campus. The chair will work more closely with faculty, students, parents, and the community than the president or any other administrative official of the university. The success of the university will be measured on the quality of departments that make up the institution and the knowledge and abilities of its students.

By virtue of accepting the chair position, your status on campus has changed. You have assumed a leadership role. You will lead by example. You will set the standards of behavior, conduct and accomplishment. Your colleagues will notice when you arrive at the office, when you leave, how you dress, how long you are away for lunch, who accompanied you to lunch, and they will be aware of every statement you make no matter how small it may seem to you. You have become a role model.

The chair is not only the corporation "president" accountable for every area of the corporation (without the assistance of vice presidents or a large staff), but the chair is also the "parent" of a large family of faculty and students. In addition to being a leader, organizer and manager, the chair will need to be a facilitator, a negotiator, a disciplinarian, an evaluator, a visionary, a listener, a dictator, a follower, a provider, a researcher, a teacher and will at various times fulfill many other roles. You will need to be able to listen well, to communicate well and to give moral support to your faculty. You will need the ability to prioritize assignments and responsibilities and to see the "big picture."

When you assumed the chair position, the first difference you probably noticed was the dramatic change in responsibility. You had been accustomed to set class schedules and office hours, time for scholarship and research and a relatively liberal schedule of personal time. All of a sudden this "freedom" disappeared and was replaced with committee meetings; requests from the dean; a multitude of reports and paperwork; faculty concerns; student issues; class scheduling; budgeting and fiscal crises; evaluation of faculty; performance counseling; recruitment and hiring; staff issues; an overload of e-mail; telephone calls; faculty development; space assignments; parental contact; community relations; fund raising; and many routine tasks and duties.

In addition, you may have found that your standing with colleagues has changed. You are now viewed as a part of *administration*. How can you possibly do all of this? What have you done?

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[1] Source Unknown

Finding Your Way

You have accepted the responsibility of being chair of your department and you have the opportunity to make a difference! Until you assumed the chair position, you viewed your department from a faculty perspective rather than from the chair perspective. When you accepted the position, did you have a vision for what you would like to accomplish? Did you feel you could make a difference? As chair, will you endorse the current goals of the department or have you assumed the chair position with a different set of goals in mind?

Now that you are *administration* and are in a position to make a difference, evaluate your department and decide immediately what you would like your department to be. If you set departmental standards high, the department may reach them. If standards are set to an average or low, you can be sure higher standards will never be reached. This applies not only to major areas of the department such as the quality of new hires, expectations for granting promotion and tenure, the quality of book and journal publications, but also something as obvious as the décor of the office and the cleanliness and general ambiance of the workplace.

You will need to prioritize needs and to decide upon a course of action. At this point, it is a good idea to ask the following questions:

1) What is the department doing now?
2) Why are we doing it?
3) How can we do it better?
4) What does the dean expect?

You may discover your department needs some change such as curriculum updating or revision; a new focus to match a changing environment; planning for impending retirements that will have an impact on the direction of the department; or you may decide the department is doing very well and no immediate change is needed. Remember, even if you plan no immediate departmental change, the mere fact that there is a new chair is change. There will be faculty who readily accept the change of leadership and even departmental change. There will also be those who are reluctant to accept change, and those who absolutely resist change.

If you were in the department prior to becoming chair, you may know where your support will be, who will follow your lead, and who will be confrontational. If you are new to the department, you will need concurrently to assess the department and get to know faculty. Whether you are new to the department or have been a member of the department, it is important that you know the strengths and weaknesses of your faculty. Learn about each faculty member, not only his/her professional background and research interests, but also something personal. Try to drop by the faculty member's office where he/she is comfortable rather than asking for a formal meeting in your office. Evaluate the overall morale and tenor of the department. How does it feel? Is it collegial? Is there some unrest? Additionally, help them get to know you. You might share your thoughts on the department, your own research interests and, perhaps, something personal. Ask for their thoughts related to the strengths and weaknesses of the department. Does he/she see a need for change?

Meet with staff. Staff can be a valuable resource on the inside operations of the department and idiosyncrasies of faculty. Let staff know you value their opinions and appreciate their support. They will know who to contact for information, when reports

are due, which faculty require more attention than others, where files are located, and many other important aspects of managing the department.

Once you are familiar with the personalities and areas of interest of the faculty and staff, you will be able to determine how to proceed in accomplishing the vision and goals you desire for the department.

The Chair's Powers

Power is the ability to achieve a purpose. As chair, believe and embrace the fact that you possess three types of power—*formal, position, and personal*.

Formal power gives you the authority to enforce policies and regulations and to make departmental decisions and commitments. Formal power has been delegated to you, as chair, from the dean. This formal power allows you to be the final signature in the areas assigned to you as chair.

Position power comes from having been appointed chair. Position power is recognized both by your faculty and colleagues within the university community. Your position power allows you to make teaching assignments; determine classroom space; evaluate faculty performance; manage student issues; manage the budget; influence the goals of the department; communicate regularly with the dean; and an assortment of other chair-related duties. These areas have a large impact on both the faculty and department.

Additionally, you also have *personal power*. Personal power is earned whereas formal and position power is given and received. Personal power comes from how faculty perceive your fairness, honesty, integrity, openness, ability to communicate, ability to obtain resources for the department, knowledge of the department, recognition in your own area of expertise, and ability to make decisions and manage the department. In other words, the respect you earn from demonstrating leadership qualities and your ability to manage the department.

How will you use these powers in your role as chair? A wise chair will determine areas of importance to faculty, both singularly and as a group; areas of importance to the dean and upper levels of administration; and areas in which faculty should be included in the decision-making process. Having an awareness of faculty expertise within the department, will allow the chair to use the skills and abilities of faculty (and staff) to accomplish some of the many tasks and to assist in decision-making when appropriate. The judicial use of formal, position, and personal power will place the chair in a respected leadership role.

The Chair as a Leader

You, as chair, have a vision for the department and a hope that your faculty will want to be a part of that vision. At the same time, the faculty may simply want the ability to pursue ideas and to teach. You will need the ability to combine leadership skills and especially your personal power to guide your department toward your departmental vision.

The definition of lead is "to show the way" and implies the direction of an individual or a group. Therefore, leadership, at its best, will be a combination of skills depending on the situation, timing, characteristics and traits of the group, and your own personality. Very few individuals are born leaders. Leading is a skill that is learned through dedicated effort, trial and error. Keep in mind that *leading* is far different than

managing. The definition of manage is to "carry on matters." Of course, you will manage many tasks in the department, but the hope is that as chair you will be a leader in addition to being the manager.

Your knowledge of the characteristics of your colleagues, their strengths and weakness, areas of interest and expertise, and their likes and dislikes will play a large part in your ability to lead. You will need to know who works well individually, who works best in a group, what combination of faculty works well together and which combination would be unable to work together to reach a consensus. What a leader is hoping for is synergy—the ability to work together.

Your Leadership Style

You will need to determine what type of leadership style to use. Does the particular situation need a directive or a non-directive approach? Is it best to assign the task to a group or to an individual? Should you be supportive or non-supportive?

Allan Tucker (1992) describes leadership styles as being directive, non-directive, supportive or non-supportive. (See Appendix) As the term "directive" implies, this chair will generally tell faculty what is expected, how to accomplish the task and indicate a timeline. This chair will also closely monitor progress. On the other hand, a chair that is non-directive will take a "hands-off" approach. He or she will describe the task, give very little direction, indicate no timeframe, and seldom monitor the progress.

Using either style, directive or non-directive, the chair may be supportive or non-supportive of the group or individual. A supportive leader communicates, shows concern, praise, and encouragement for the group or individual. A non-supportive leader communicates very little with either the group or individual and offers little encouragement, if any. You will need to decide which style is best at any given time or in a particular situation. Most often you will combine styles according to timing, the nature of the problem, your style and personality along with the characteristics of the individuals involved.

Leadership styles are linked to decision-making skills. Most likely your leadership style influences your manner of making decisions. Decisions involve timing, a problem/question, a group or an individual to be effected, the characteristics of your personality, and a process to arrive at a decision. You may involve others in the decision or make the decision yourself. The terminology in decision-making is autocratic or democratic; in leadership terms, directive or non-directive. Ultimately, the personalities of all involved will play a large part in the decision-making process. What do you consider your leadership style?

Building Personal Skills

The following are several areas that are involved in developing good leadership and decision-making skills.

Communication - Communication is, without a doubt, the most difficult trait in leadership. Good communication is not simply making a clear statement. Communication involves building a relationship by showing interest, by giving and receiving information, by attentive listening, and by thinking and responding. It is both professional and personal and involves a high-level of trust.

Listen – Concentrate on what is being said. It is difficult to listen well and completely. Try not to plan your response while the speaker is talking. Take a moment after the speaker has finished to formulate your response.

Confidence - Show confidence in the decisions you are making. Gather as much information as possible and become as knowledgeable about the issue as you can. Feel comfortable with your knowledge and with your action.

Integrity - At all times be honest, open, fair and sincere. Share as openly as possible the reasons for your action and the foundation of your decision. Be willing to really listen to an opposing idea before the final decision is made. Be fair and balance the pros and cons of any action.

Manage the workload - Utilize the expertise and talents of your colleagues. The chair does not have to lead every committee, create every report, or handle every issue. A wise leader will recognize individual abilities and let those individuals assume responsibility for an area or a task. Use individuals and committees to manage your workload.

Recognize abilities of others - Always remember to support and recognize the leadership of others. Give credit where credit is due. The department is successful based on the abilities of all members, not just the chair.

Leadership is a learned skill that grows and improves with each decision and with each new day. Above everything else, remember that anyone who makes decisions sooner or later will be criticized. Try to make more good decisions than bad and admit when a poor decision has been made.

How can you handle the change from faculty to chair and how can you possibly handle all of the administrative tasks, teach, and continue a viable research program? Perhaps, the answer lies in the ability to communicate, your leadership skills, the use of your powers, and in recognizing and taking advantage of the abilities of others.

And most important, the chair must believe in the university and in the department to be a successful leader.

Working with the Dean

Regardless of whether you became chair by rotation within the department, selection by the dean, or by committee search, the dean approved your appointment and you serve at the dean's pleasure. The dean's hope is that you will provide leadership so that the department and college goals will be met, the faculty will be satisfied, students will receive a quality education, and the department will be run within the allocated resources. A good working relationship with the dean is essential.

Keep the dean informed - The dean, especially if he/she is from another discipline, needs to know what your department stands for, exactly what your department does, and what your students accomplish. Find a concise way to communicate the most important initiatives of the department, the departmental standards, how those standards are measured, and how the allocated resources are used.

Make certain the dean knows of all faculty accomplishments—new books, published articles, appointment to national or state committees, recognition in a professional society—and the success of your students. Don't wait for a formal meeting, write a short note or e-mail, or mention it when you see him/her in the hallway. Include this information in your annual report, but make certain it was also communicated in a timely manner.

Let the dean know of conflicts or potential problems within the department. Do not let the dean be blindsided or hear rumors circulating within the college.

Let the dean know of decisions you have made, not just the good ones, but also those that may initiate change of some kind within your department or decisions that may not have satisfied all faculty. Even if the dean does not support the decision, he will know your reasons for making the decision and will be able to address the issue from a knowledgeable viewpoint.

Let the dean know when you will be out of town and exactly why you are not on campus. Give him a way to reach you.

Respect Allocated Funds - Stay within the budget that has been allocated to your department. Keep good track of your funds. If a need arises to discuss budget with the dean, be open and above all else honest. Do not ask for additional funds without documentation as to the reason additional funds are needed, how the funds will be spent, and how the additional funds will enhance the goals of the department. Do not overstate your need or present an "if I only had more" scenario. Advocate for your department but be honest in your requests. A dean who knows you are open and honest about your budgetary status will show you more respect and consideration.

Support the Dean - There will be times when the dean asks that your department do something that will cause faculty tension, such as increasing teaching loads, managing without a new position, reducing expense funds or preparing an accountability report and describing student learning outcomes. Try to present the request to faculty in a positive manner. Remember the dean has probably received the same request from higher up in administration and must accomplish this for the entire college. Try to give the dean support rather than making him the "scapegoat." Guide faculty in developing ways to accomplish the request. Cooperation ultimately will be best for the department.

Meet deadlines the dean has imposed - The dean has a set of guidelines he/she is required to meet. Work hard to get reports and information to the dean in a timely manner and be certain the data is accurate, can be supported and is a true representation of the department.

Internal Decisions - The dean appointed you to manage and to lead the department. Be a "low-maintenance" chair. Manage the decision-making within the department. Do not run to the dean with every problem or question. Take results to the dean. But, do not hesitate to ask for advice from the dean, other chairs, and your faculty colleagues when you have a particularly bothersome decision to make. Many good decisions are made by listening to the experiences of others and by selectively using that information when making your decision.

Both you and the dean desire a good working relationship. Respect and communication will go a long way in establishing this relationship. As in any relationship, building respect and trust will require work and a dedicated effort.

Conclusion

Being a department chair can be intimidating or a very satisfying challenge. Be confident in your abilities, believe in what you are doing, work toward improving your skills, and take advantage of the experiences and knowledge of others. It will take a year or so as chair to rotate through all departmental responsibilities and longer to feel comfortable handling those responsibilities. Don't get discouraged. Maintain your integrity, trust and openness with your colleagues. You will find satisfaction in the success of your colleagues, your department, and yourself.

Questions

1. Did you assume the chair position willingly and enthusiastically? Did your career goal include administration? Do you believe in your university?

2. Some chairs believe that each institution should have a written statement spelling out in detail the duties, responsibilities, and formal authority of its chairs. Other chairs strongly oppose the idea. Does your position have a written description? To what extent, if any, might such a written statement be helpful to the chair? To what extent might it be a hindrance?

3. When you became chair, did you have a clear understanding of what the dean expected of you and of the department?

4. The roles of department chairs were listed in the chapter. Which of the following apply to you? Are there other roles that you play that are not included in this list?

president	negotiator	researcher	evaluator	parent	visionary
leader	fundraiser	listener	counselor	organizer	dictator
manager	follower	facilitator	provider	disciplinarian	teacher

5. Which of these roles do you think your faculty expects you to assume as chair? Which of these roles do you think your dean expects you to assume as chair?

6. One or more of your responses to Question 5 may conflict. What problems do conflicting roles pose for the chair? How may chairs resolve these problems?

7. Does your faculty see you as an "administrator." How do you see yourself?

8. Do you embrace and believe you actually have "powers" as described in the chapter?

9. Do you see your faculty as having the ability to work together? Have you determined which faculty work best together?

10. What types of decisions could you, as chair, make without involving your faculty that would not cause conflict or loss of morale with the department? What types of decisions does your faculty feel should be made only with their input?

11. How do you make decisions? Are you directive? Are you supportive? Do you seek input from others?

12. How do you communicate with the dean?

13. Think about your relationship with the dean. Is the relationship satisfactory? Would you like to change something?

Appendix

Determining Your Leadership Style Following the Directive-Supportive Model

Following is a list of questions to evaluate yourself in terms of how directive and supportive you perceive yourself to be in providing leadership to your faculty members. By answering the questions and following the instructions, you will be able to place yourself in one of the quadrants on the leadership style graph. This questionnaire has not been validated, nor is there any intention to try to validate it. The result, therefore, should not be taken too seriously. However, working through the exercise will help clarify the concept of leadership style and give you a general idea of your style. Those who chair departments or divisions composed of two or more distinct academic or vocational programs may prefer to determine their leadership style as applied to the group of faculty members in one of the programs rather than to the department as a whole.

Questions

1. How **directive** are you? (In each question, circle the number preceding the response that best describes your situation.)

1. How often do you review the department's goals and missions with at least one-third of your faculty members?

   0 Hardly ever
   1 Occasionally but not too often (1 or 2 times/yr)
   2 Fairly often (3 to 5 times/yr)
   3 Quite often (more than 5 times/yr)

2. When you give an assignment to a faculty member or a committee, how much detail do you give the individual or committee on how to carry out the assignment?

   0 Hardly any detail
   1 Some but not much detail
   2 A fair amount of detail
   3 Lots of detail

3. During the period that the faculty member or committee is carrying out the assignment, how much monitoring do you do of the progress being made?

   0 Hardly any monitoring
   1 Occasional but not much monitoring
   2 A fair amount of monitoring
   3 Lots of monitoring

4. In meeting with individual faculty members to discuss their assignments, how specifically do you discuss the assignments?

   0 Not specifically at all
   1 Not too specifically
   2 Somewhat specifically
   3 Very specifically

Add the four numbers you circled. On the leadership style graph on the following page, place an "X" above the number on the horizontal axis that corresponds to the total of your four circled numbers. This number represents on a scale of 0 to 12 the extent to which you are directive. Draw a straight vertical line from the "X" upward.

2. How **supportive** are you? (In each question, circle the number preceding the response that best describes your situation.)

1. How many of your faculty members have come to you to relate personal accomplishments or problems during the past year?

   0 Hardly any
   1 Less than 25 percent
   2 Between 25 and 50 percent
   3 More than 50 percent

2. With how many of your faculty members have you made a point of meeting socially during the past year?

   0 Hardly any
   1 Less than 25 percent
   2 Between 25 and 50 percent
   3 More than 50 percent

3. To how many of your faculty members have you made a point of giving personal encouragement during the past year?

   0 Hardly any
   1 Less than 25 percent
   2 Between 25 and 50 percent
   3 More than 50 percent

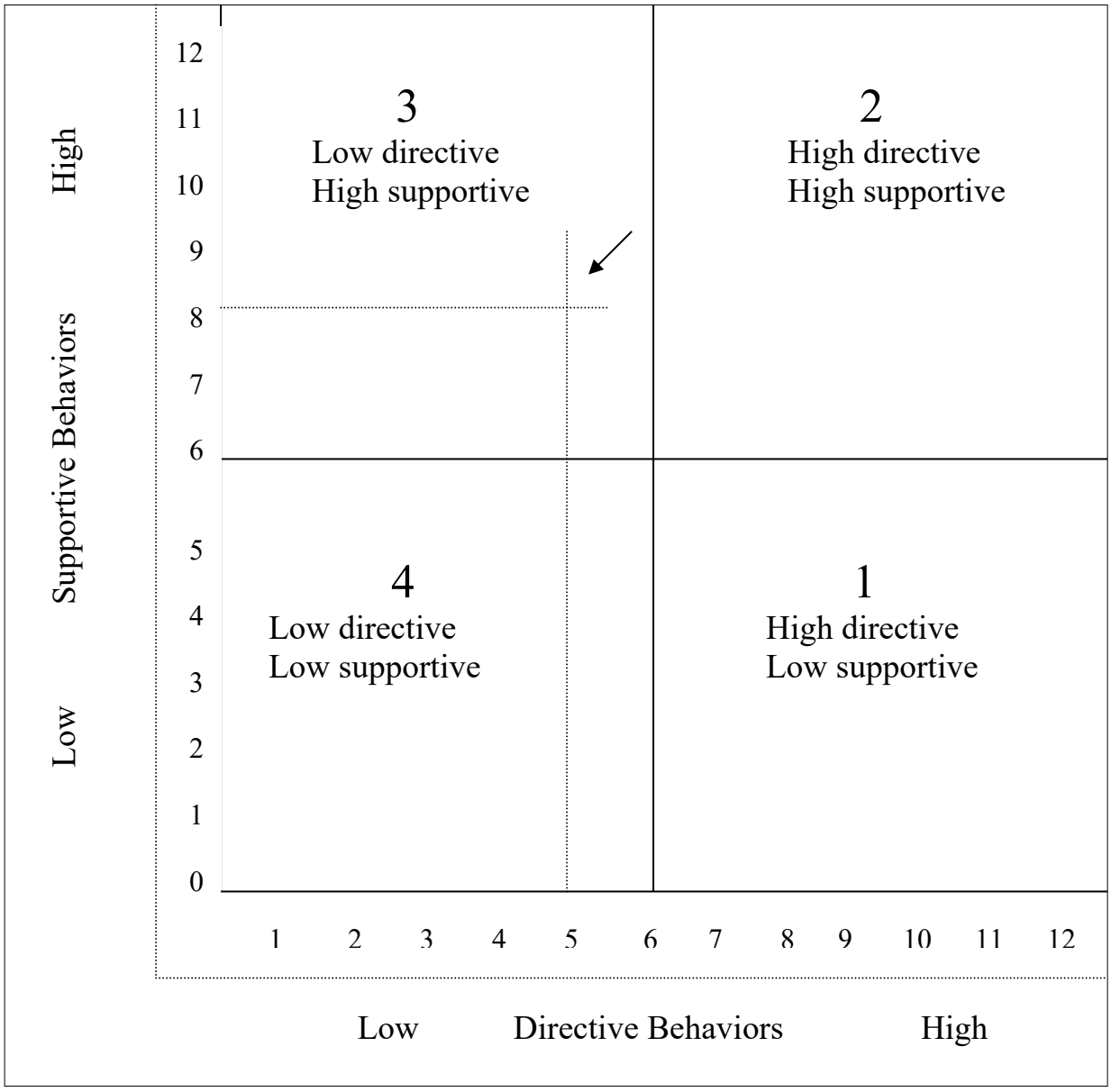
4. To how many of your deserving faculty members have you written unsolicited informal or formal notes commending them for special achievement during the past year?

   0 Hardly any
   1 Less than 25 percent
   2 Between 25 and 50 percent
   3 More than 50 percent

Add the four circled numbers. On the leadership style graph, place an "X" to the right of the number on the vertical axis that corresponds to the total of your four circled numbers. This number represents on a scale of 0 to 12 the extent to which you are supportive. Draw a straight horizontal line from the "X" to the right.

The vertical line and the horizontal line that you have drawn will intersect in one of the four quadrants of the graph. For example: suppose your "directive" total was 5 and your "supportive" total was 8. The vertical and horizontal lines that you have drawn will intersect in Quadrant 3. Your leadership style, according to this simple and non-validated test, is low directive and high supportive

Leadership style graph—style determination



Quadrant 1—High directive and low supportive (a great deal of direction to the faculty members, not much personal and psychological support)

Quadrant 2—High directive and high supportive (a great deal of direction to the faculty members, a great deal of personal and psychological support)

Quadrant 3—Low directive and high supportive (not much direction to the faculty members, a great deal of personal and psychological support)

Quadrant 4—Low directive and low supportive (not much direction to the faculty members, not much personal or psychological support)

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Case Study
Academic Leadership

You are chair of the department of mathematics in a middle-size university. Your department has an unusually high failure rate in freshman-level mathematics courses. In a meeting called to discuss the problem, the dean of arts and sciences points out that he has received numerous complaints because too many students were failing the mathematics courses required to enter full-time study in their majors. Two colleges are suggesting they will begin to offer their own entry-level mathematics courses.

As chair you recognize the problem and need the faculty to see that a problem exists. Your faculty feels that the high-level failure rate simply reflects inadequate preparation on the part of the entering students. The director of institutional research counters this suggestion by revealing that many students who ranked in the top quartile of the College Board Examination were included in the large number of failing students.

How can you as chair get the department to recognize that the present situation cannot continue?

What are the options for changing? Will your faculty resist changing: the grade policy; course content; teaching methods?

How might you involve faculty in developing a plan for solving the problem?