

Cultivating a Community of Change Through the Implementation of Shared Leadership Theory

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Abstract

In an effort to move toward a Shared Leadership Model, the researcher's university administration directed all faculty and support staff to foster initiatives which promoted cross departmental research and collaboration. This study defines how pilot programs, in particular the New Faculty Induction program, were aligned with the framework of Shared Leadership and fostered the domains of Social Cohesion among participants.

Keywords: Shared Leadership, faculty vitality, Learning Organizations, Social Cohesion

Introduction

In higher education, it is a given that the recruitment process of hiring new faculty requires much time and financial commitment on both the candidate and institutions; therefore, it is essential that an orientation system be designed to move the new hire through the "honeymoon" phase and toward a path of contributing to the greater good of the institution. According to Camblin and Steger (2000), the new approach to initiating new faculty is focused on (1) addressing issues of vitality and ongoing personal awareness, (2) providing opportunities to foster relationships among colleagues, (3) developing purposeful ways to support the institution's mission, and (4) providing support to new faculty during the tenure and promotion process (p. 5).

For the researcher's institution, the previous new faculty program was a series of monthly meetings facilitated by two assigned faculty members. In each fifty minute session, participants were presented detailed policies and procedures along with tenure and promotion materials. Most information was accessible in an online LMS system along with overviews of the resources. Given the brief assigned meeting time, little to no faculty engagement occurred between the new professors and the committee facilitators. New faculty questions were often addressed via email and follow up discussion, between sessions, was not occurring.

Shared Leadership

Prior to the early 1990's, Sullivan notes the primary focus of new faculty development placed emphasis on advancement of subject matter and mastery of one's own teaching (as cited by Camblin & Stenger , 2000, p.3). With the changing landscape of college during the Vietnam War, declining enrollment, altered work expectations and rising costs of tuition created a paradigm shift in new faculty development. According to Schuster (1990) faculty development moved from survival within one's discipline to a broader, communal approach. University administration began to emphasize a new focus on personal, professional and organizational growth. Faculty development programs which were once centered on member's field of study acknowledged the importance of "... faculty wellness and institutional quality of life and opportunities for personal growth and career renewal" (Hageseth and Atkins 1988; North 1991 as cited in Hubbard and Atkins 1995, p. 120).

With growth comes change and for new faculty at the researcher's institution, this change was manifested through a university wide vision of Shared Leadership. O'Toole, Galbraith, & Lawler (2002) offer that leadership is not only defined as individual, but is also an institutional trait; complex at times, Shared Leadership enables institutions to divide responsibility and match individual strengths to the initiatives and mission of a community. "Shared leadership is facilitated by an overall team environment that consists of three dimensions: shared purpose, social support, and voice" (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007 p. 1222).

This ideology of Shared Leadership was first introduced upon the procurement of a new dean in 2010. The Dean defined his perception of leadership as a desire to move away from the traditional top down model of decision making or "a team property whereby leadership is distributed among team members rather than focused on a single designated leader" (Carson et al., 2007, p.1217). Pearce (2007) offers the following analysis, "As organizations have steadily progressed into the knowledge economy we can no longer rely on simple notions of top-down, command-and-control leadership, based on the idea that workers are merely interchangeable drones" (p. 355).

This process did not come easily in the beginning. Senior faculty questioned the motivation and expressed concern that without a specific "chain of command" important tasks and faculty welfare could be undermined. O'Toole et al. (as cited by Kocolowski, 2010) believed that resistance stems "from thousands of years of cultural conditioning" (p. 64) and further offer, "We are dealing with a near-universal myth: in the popular mind, leadership is always singular" (p. 64). However, with a continued effort to create committees that were cross disciplinary and cross departmental, university employees were introduced to the Shared

Leadership framework and individuals were encouraged to share leadership within their own professional departments. The following are examples of programs that evolved.

1. *Community Conversations*: a series of open meetings where support staff and faculty participated in purposeful brainstorming sessions to address the future vision and development of the university.
2. *Onboard*: A program designed for all new support staff; new faculty were also included but not required to attend. This program focused on fostering a deeper knowledge of the institution's mission and religious identity.
3. *Strategic Planning Survey*: a survey provided for each employee to contribute ideas, thoughts, and perspectives toward shared work. From this, Task Force "think tanks" were created to address campus concerns and offer strategic planning to the board.

As this new formula for collaboration began to permeate each area of the university, a common dialog of best practices for Shared Leadership began to manifest itself in committee assignments and departmental initiatives. The researcher proposes that for Shared Leadership to work there must be buy in. Individuals need to be affirmed that their perspectives and ideas are being taken seriously and that each employee has a part to play in the advancement of the defined goals. New perspectives are acknowledged and leaders can utilize their individual strengths (Miles & Watkins, 2007); thus allowing for decisions making to be fluid and reciprocal (Bligh, Pearce, and Kohles, 2006).

Social Cohesion

The vetting of and hiring process for a new faculty member can be an arduous endeavor. Therefore, the ability to attract and retain new faculty requires a purposeful plan of action. New faculty need to be acclimated early in hopes of creating a positive Social Cohesion experience. According to Dr. Heyneman (2002), "School culture refers to the rituals embedded in social relationships, ceremonies and traditions that attach members to the school and its mission, and to the norms and beliefs that guide the actions of members" (p. 89). One significant contributing factor to positive Social Cohesion is the acceptance of and new faculty member's ability to embrace and contribute to the culture. This assimilation is often referred to as social contracts. Social contracts are the values and metaphysical/ philosophical assumptions of a collective society (Pirili& Pifpirili , 2015, p.253). Heyneman (2002) proposes that people will overall adhere to social contracts under certain conditions. If they do not consider themselves as cultural "strangers" or do possess an understanding of each other as people; then where norms and expectations govern social contracts are embraced."

Forrest and Kearns (2001) offer the following table to define the domains of Social Cohesion.

Table 1. The Domains of Social Cohesion

Domains	Descriptions
Common values and a civic culture	Common aims and objectives; common moral principles and codes of behavior; support for political institutions and participation in politics.
Social order and social control	Absence of general conflict and threats to the existing order; absence of incivility; effective informal social control; tolerance; respect for difference; intergroup cooperation.
Social solidarity and reductions in wealth disparity	Harmonious economic and social development and common standards; redistribution of public finances and of opportunities; equal access to services and welfare benefits; ready acknowledgement of social obligations and willingness to assist others.
Social networks and social capital	High degree of social interaction within communities and families; civic engagement and associational activity; easy resolution of collective action problems.
Place attachment and identity	Strong attachment to place; intertwining of personal and place identity.

Methodology and research Questions

This qualitative case study uses an action research design with descriptive pattern coding techniques (Saldana, 2009) applied to the data. Berg (2007) defines action research as “a method of research in which creating a positive social change is the predominant force driving the investigator and the research” (p. 224). Yukl (2006) suggests (as cited in Kocolowski, 2010, p.24) that “important decisions about what we do and how to do it are made through the use of an interactive process involving many different people who influence each other.”

Research Question 1 (RQ1#)

Does new faculty have a clear understanding of the university policies?

Research Question 2 (RQ2#)

Does new faculty feel they belong to a cohort and perceive the university as a community?

Research Question 3 (RQ3 #)

Would purposeful activities that create a cohort atmosphere foster Shared Leadership and collaboration between departments?

Participants

Table 1.

New Faculty	Department
Participant 1 (Male)	Philosophy Department
Participant 2 (Male)	Nursing Department
Participant 3 (Male)	Political Science Department
Participant 4 (Male)	Engineering Department
Participant 5 (Male)	Biology
Participant 6 (Male)	Theology
Participant 6 (Female)	Psychology
Participant 6 (Female)	Education
Participant 7 (Female)	World Languages

Survey Results

The results of the survey can be seen in Table 2 accompanied by new faculty extended responses. Six of the seven new faculty participated in the survey conducted after the spring semester.

Table 2.

Survey Question	Social Cohesion Domains	New faculty Feedback
<p>What meeting topics did you find most beneficial? Do you have suggestions for this year?</p>	<p>Common Values and Civic Culture</p>	<p>“The specific topics that were the most beneficial were faculty rating, IDEAs, development funds, etc. I suggest including a session on teaching strategies (methods and effectiveness) and let this end with a discussion among the committee members of what has worked well for them.”</p> <p>“All of them were beneficial but I did feel that I learned a lot from the meeting regarding advising and scheduling.”</p>
<p>Did you feel your questions were answered in a timely manner? Did you feel our meetings built a sense of community that will serve your needs in</p>	<p>Social Networks and Social Capital</p>	<p>“Absolutely. And the lunches really helped the sense of community.”</p> <p>“yes - the sense of community was the best part of this committee.”</p>

<p>the future?</p>		
<p>One goal of the committee was to create opportunities to meet others on campus that you may not have contact with your first year. Do you have suggestions of other ways to foster professional collaboration?</p>	<p>Place Attachment and Identity</p>	<p>“I came in in the Spring term, but I would have liked to meet more older faculty at various socials.”</p> <p>“ I definitely think you achieved this goal. Maybe one other thing to add is a chance for each new person (or even second year when you have had more of a chance to get adjusted) present on their research and writing (maybe a 10-minute summary of what you've done & are working on now.”</p> <p>“ Perhaps pair up the new faculty with a mentor teacher or a go to person he or she can ask questions of throughout the year although that seemed to be the purpose of the committee so maybe that isn't necessary.”</p>

Discussion and Findings

Results of the study support the importance of placing value into fostering shared experiences for new hires. New faculty expressed the following positive outcomes from participating in the pilot program: (1) participants stated their perception of transitioning into the university’s community and their own departments was less stressful, (2) participants communicated that the new policies were defined and that their questions were welcomed and , (3) participants acknowledged they were provided opportunities to establish relationships with support staff and faculty outside their discipline; thus fostering their Social Cohesion and participation in unspoken *social contracts*. Topics presented during the first year were as follows: advising, Student Success Council, purpose of the Core and implications for transfer students, Academic Council Request form (ACRF), yearly evaluations, promotion and tenure, the process of offering summer courses and accessing professional development funds.

Each informational session was offered the last Monday of the month with a luncheon, provided on Wednesday, of the same week. Questions in regards to the Monday’s topic were welcomed along with short presentations delivered by invited guests from the many campus departments. Wednesday speakers were chosen based on exposure of the new faculty to their department’s campus resource or connections to the Monday topic. New professors were exposed to the library support staff and resources for faculty and students, Career Services and the program’s offered to students on

campus, the Assessment and Accreditation process and how new faculty may contribute within their department and the interpretation of their own evaluation data for tenure and promotion , bookstore support staff and submitting textbook orders, summer course creation and the online procedures for offering courses, technology support , student life, registrar and support staff , study abroad and senior faculty mentoring .

Through the process of redefining the committee structure and the intentional acclimation of new faculty as an active part of the university community, the researcher proposes Shared Leadership was introduced and encouraged. For example, within the first year of the pilot, Education and Engineering faculty collaborated to create a cross curricular STEM exposition for local private and public schools.

Within the survey questions, it is noted that new faculty desired to be afforded the opportunity to associate with senior faculty at more University sponsored events. As a part of the Shared Leadership theory, a committee of support staff and faculty was formed to address the concerns. From this committee’s survey, the traditional opening semester meeting was changed to a subsequent date and venue on campus. Faculty were encouraged to invite their families; thus enabling new faculty with young children to attend. Senior faculty had noted on the survey they would appreciate the opportunity to bring their spouses which was also honored. The revision of this networking opportunity embraced the Shared Leadership model of institutional *wellness of life* and the Social Cohesion domain of *social networks* and *place attachment and identity*.

The Shared Leadership model was also an ongoing catalyst for the finalization of a Core curriculum. This institutional initiative required departmental cross curricular committees and challenged all departments to articulate how their pedagogical and assessment practices would fulfill the mission of the University’s “Core” . Adoption of the Core curriculum has fostered the Shared Leadership model by placing less emphasis on one department over another. Decisions in regards to student graduation pathways became rooted in a shared experience and departments began collaborating to enable transfer students and freshmen a unified education within their chosen disciplines. This example of Shared Leadership has taken the top down approach of decision making and spread the decisions amongst committees; thus fostering the Social Cohesion domains of *common culture* and *civic culture*.

Though in the early stages, learning organizations and the purposeful use of shared governance through Shared Leadership is working. The researcher is encouraged with the progress professors reported in their second year. The new faculty noted they felt confident with the tenure and promotion track, understood how many departments offered support and

service to the overall well-being and education of students and the felt they were valued for their work and opinions.

Long-term for future research, the researcher questions what would occur if the Dean were to leave. Would the structure of Shared Leadership continue or would the traditional “top down” process of leadership be reinstated with new administration? In addition, how would the Social Cohesion of the campus be affected?

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