

Preface

The Leader's Choice

The capacity of the modern university to respond to change has remained an elusive enigma. Contemporary critics contend that universities are inclined to either examine new problems in old ways or examine old problems in new ways. When faced with the need to publicly acknowledge the transformational forces facing society and their potential effects on the academy, universities often respond with passive resistance to proposed change.

Remarkably, these status quo preservation strategies served the academy well when the winds of change challenged the mainstream academic values of the twentieth century. As Clark Kerr, president emeritus of the University of California, observed, “Universities have a unique capacity for riding off in all directions and still staying in the same place.” Yet global markets, unprecedented competition, rapid advances in communications technology, exponential access to information, increasingly selective consumers (i.e., students with more educational choices), changing faculty roles, and a society demanding college graduates with real-world work skills are all combining to inexorably redefine the higher education landscape.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for the university in the Knowledge Age is determining how to balance its historic traditions and heritage with these powerful societal forces. This choice is not an “either accept change or resist it” proposition; rather, it is a call for vision that integrates the best of the old with the best of the new. We, the authors of this book, believe that vision must come from inside the university, at the department and college levels. We also maintain that finding effective solutions for the future university can be achieved only by looking at “new things in new ways.”

Empowering Deans and Chairpersons

Many deans and department chairpersons believe they have little capacity for facilitating change because their faculties expect them to preserve the status quo. They underestimate their roles as leaders and change agents because they inherently understand the limitations of the system they serve. Conversely, many deans and chairpersons overestimate their capacity to change their colleges or departments. Some believe that because they do in fact have extensive experience in and knowledge of the academic unit, they are better positioned to lead change in response to internal and external pressures.

This book asserts that, despite these inevitable challenges to promoting change, every dean and chairperson can facilitate and lead dynamic change within his or her unit. We examine the following questions related to organizational culture and its relationship to change in the modern university college or department:

- What external forces are placing pressure on the university to change?
- What are the normative values and organizational characteristics of the academy, and how do they either impede or facilitate change?
- What will these values look like in the twenty-first-century university?
- What role(s) do deans and chairpersons play in managing organizational culture and facilitating change?

The Leadership, Technology, and Culture Dimensions of Organizational Change

Leadership, technology, and academic culture are interconnected dimensions of managing organizational change. They do not exist in a vacuum. The central theme of this book is that deans and chairpersons must manage all three of these dimensions concurrently if they are to create systemic change in their organizations.

As a leader, you cannot rely solely on your leadership abilities without also examining how your leadership manifests itself and influences the normative culture of the organization. Being a leader who is well versed in today's communication technologies is increasingly important, but you must also understand how technological innovation is influenced and perceived from both the leadership and cultural dimensions. And relying solely on a symbiotic strategy of leadership and culture will only result in ensuring that the organization fails to integrate technology into the mainstream teaching, research, and service missions of the academic unit. Competitor peer institutions will applaud your efforts – because while you're not moving anywhere, they'll be moving forward and creating new opportunities for their students and faculty.

You must manage leadership, technology, and academic culture together if you want to create successful change.

An Overview

This book provides a rich range of theoretical perspectives on leadership, technology, and academic culture and their interconnections for managing organizational change.

Chapters 1-4 are devoted to giving deans and chairpersons a sound working knowledge of current leadership, management, and cultural theoretical perspectives applied to change. Chapters 5-11 draw upon the rich and diverse experiences of practicing deans and chairpersons representing different academic colleges, departments, and institutions. These chapters were developed through extensive written and oral interviews with the contributing authors. They are presented in a reader-friendly style that allows the

contributors to convey and reflect on their experiences as deans and chairpersons in practical ways.

In sum, Chapters 1-4 set the stage for you to immerse yourself in the current literature, research, and theory on leadership, technology, and academic culture related to organizational change. Chapters 5-11 translate the theoretical into the practical, giving you the opportunity to see how the real-life experiences of deans and chairpersons are connected to the theories and research described in the first four chapters.

In Chapter 12, we summarize the leadership characteristics gleaned from the practitioner chapters and identify the primary connections between practice and theory. We then conclude with our observations about academic leadership in the future.

Toward a New Era of Academic Leadership

Many critics of contemporary higher education believe we are facing an unprecedented void in innovative and inspirational academic leadership. This perspective has some support among politicians, the public, and within our own institutions. As we search for the new leaders in this era of change, we know we must find visionary leaders not only at the top of the institution but within its core as well. We have many challenges facing our institutions. Our new leaders must think about new things in new ways. These leaders must find ways to merge historic traditions with new ideas and, in the process, lead us toward a new era for the teaching and learning institution. Deans and chairpersons seldom get the glory and the press; but they and their units are the heart and soul of the modern college and university.

We often think of leadership coming from the top or from the grassroots level. It is our thesis in writing this book that the most important leadership in the academy emanates from the center – from the academic units in which faculty teach, conduct research, and contribute invaluable service to their students, their peers, the institution, and the public. This book will give you and your fellow deans and chairpersons new ideas and strategies for managing your/their organizations in the twenty-first century.

The challenges are outweighed only by the opportunities. We hope you find *Bridging the Gap* to be of great value in your exploration and reflection.

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