

Courageously Intentional: The Need for Higher Education Institutions to Intentionally Develop Mid- Managers

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Employee development is a critical component of institutional progress and growth (Bryan et. al, 2009). One way to provide development for managers is through formal leadership development programs. There are two intended outcomes of these types of programs: one, advance and further develop leadership skills in participants and two, strengthen participants' knowledge in fundamental leadership areas. Leadership development programs are centered on andragogy and social learning. Both theories provide an understanding of best practices for engaging adult learners and are important in implementing and developing training programs (Catalfamo, 2010; Black & Earnest, 2009).

Keywords: Training, Manager, Development

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective leadership is directly correlated to the long-term health of post-secondary institutions. Understanding leadership development in the context of higher education is imperative to sustainability and advancement of colleges and universities (Catalfamo, 2010). In corporate, or the “business world,” intentional leadership training and development is a focus for management positions. Individuals are not promoted into managerial positions without proper cultivation (Laipple & Morris, 2015). General leadership characteristics cited for effective managers are problem-solving, coaching, and communication (Ackerman et. al., 2015).

There is limited research in the area of higher education leadership development. Few administrators receive formal training and there is no comprehensive way to assess the outcomes. The average rate for administrator burn out is 6 years (Laipple & Morris, 2015). In order to recruit and retain quality leaders, institutions should rethink the leadership pipeline and be intentional about leadership development (Alfred et. al., 2002). The unique and complex role of the middle manager requires willfully designed development to enhance their professional advancement. Established training and development programs are critical to organizations, and specifically, leadership advancement. Training and development is

defined as, “a process of systematically developing work-related knowledge and expertise for the purpose of improving performance (Swanson & Holton, 2009, p.456).” The end result of training is increased knowledge and performance in order to assist individuals work more effectively and, in turn, enhance the organization. Additionally, proper training and development ensures that competent employees are recruited and retained. Learning knowledge and skills to advance the organization is another outcome of the training process (Swanson & Holton, 2009; Noe, 2017).

Individuals in leadership and management positions require an elaborate skillset and high-level thinking. Managers are responsible for employee and team performance, employee development and learning, resource planning, coordinating activities, decision making, developing trust, and promoting work to constituents (Noe, 2017). In order to effectively navigate those responsibilities, effective training is necessary. Leadership development programs are a means of providing adequate management training (Black & Earnest, 2009).

For training to be effective, best practices should focus on adult learning strategies. Andragogy and social learning are two theories that guide and inform training and development. Specifically, leadership development programs. Developed by Malcolm Knowles, andragogy utilizes a problem-solving approach to learning. Knowles theorized that adults learn best through relevant learning experiences that are interactive and when they are intrinsically motivated. Motivating factors include professional advancement, fulfilling expectations for oneself, and improving one’s ability to serve the community (Catalfamo, 2010; Black & Earnest, 2009).

Training and development, however, not only supports the individual in their role, but also has large scale impact for businesses. Two goals of human resource training and development are individual and organizational learning and performance. When employees gain knowledge and skills to successfully perform their job, it increases human capital (Holton & Swanson, 2009; Noe, 2017). Human capital is defined as, “the knowledge, advanced skills, system understanding and creativity, and motivation to deliver high quality services (Noe, 2017, p.1).” The higher education landscape is constantly evolving with increased focus on student success, retention, graduation and competitive academic programming. Responding to the constant advancements and needs of the higher education landscape requires innovative, competent, empowering, and forward -thinking leaders.

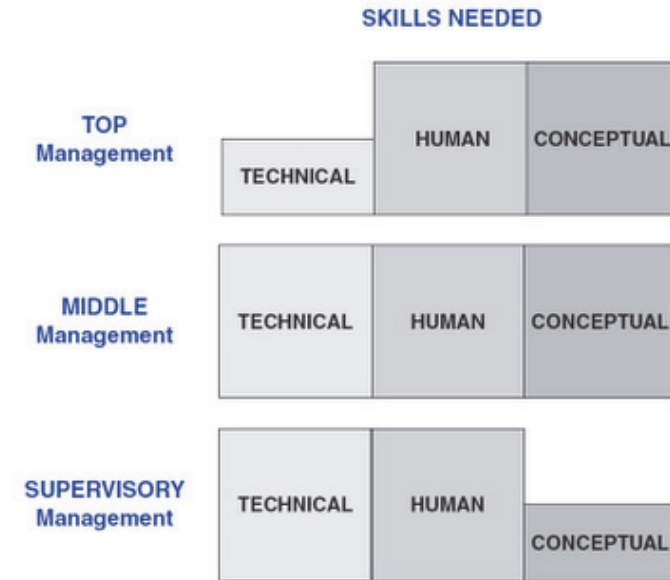
A criticism of professional development for mid-level student affairs administrators is the lack of adult learning theories, learning models, or adequate processes to effectively training and develop individuals. Keim and Sermersheim reviewed literature on the skill importance for mid-level student affairs managers and some of the primary skill areas that respondents would like more development in were personnel management, fiscal management, and leadership skills. Respondents preferred to receive development through a combination of conferences, workshops, and discussion with colleges (2005).

Because the complexity of the mid-manager role and the profile of the mid-manager has evolved over time, training these leaders is even more crucial than before. According to Keim and Sermersheim (2005), some current characteristics of mid-managers are more women hold these positions than men, many have graduate degrees (master’s and doctoral) than in previous decades, and are averaging 10 years in the field. Bryan et. al. (2009) referred to middle managers in higher education as “...anonymous leaders and unheralded heroes (p.244).” Middle managers have the great challenge of interpreting institutional vision from senior leaders and motivation direct reports without much formal authority. Navigating such ambiguous terrain requires quality training (Bryan et. al, 2009).

In Robert Katz’s work entitled, “Skills of an Effective Communicator,” he identified three skills areas relevant for managers and supervisors: technical, human, and conceptual (Asame & Wakrim, 2018; Northouse, 2018). Katz emphasized that these areas are able to be developed in leaders to enhance their leadership style. Technical skills are related to specialized competencies in a particular area. For example, knowing specific company software. Human skills involve the ability to be a “people person” and homing in on working effectively with various members of the organization (peers, managers, and subordinates). Conceptual skills are related to transforming ideas or concepts into practice. For example-taking a company’s goals and objectives and making them tangible for others to understand and implement

(Northouse, 2018). Per Northouse, Figure 1 below illustrates that middle managers need to have equal proficiency in all three areas in order to be effective (2018).

**FIGURE 1
MANAGEMENT SKILLS NECESSARY AT VARIOUS LEVELS OF AN ORGANIZATION**



(Noe, 2017)

As Figure A further demonstrates, the role of the mid-manager is complex and requires great intentionality and a diversity of skillset to navigate successfully. Mid-level managers along with their institutions must be reflective and purposively deliberate in providing adequate training and development. A task that is courageous for both managers and institutions.

THE FUTURE

Implementing quality leadership development can be a complex and tedious process, one that takes intentionality and courage on the part of the institution. In the academy, targeted leadership development programs are few and far between (Braun et. al., 2009). Additionally, leadership development in higher education is rarely researched and under-developed (Braun et. al., 2009). This type of intentionality requires a paradigm shift in culture and unmitigated courage of institutions of higher education and mid-level administrators alike. Many colleges and universities are developing programs to enhance leadership skills of faculty and administrators (Daniels, et. al., 2012). However, in order to this, it requires institutions to seek out guidance on properly, effectively, and efficiently designing programs (Daniels, et. a., 2012). One challenge in this process is that is requires institutions to identify appropriate leadership within the context of their campuses, a task that’s both courageous and introspective (Ashbury, et. al, 2015).

In addition, leadership development requires a monetary investment in the process-something that not all institutions can afford depending on the fiscal climate. A thorough understanding of the rationale behind such development opportunities. Ashbury, et. al provide a concise and reasonable explanation: “the steadfast commitment to professional development ensures that an institution is forward-thinking, committed to its team, and recognizes how professional development benefits the most important individual-the student (2015, p.2).” Secondly, mid-level administrators in student affairs, themselves, must be courageous in seeking and participating in institutional training and development opportunities

that will likely disrupt the status quo and cause them to embrace and implement significant changes in support of student success and organizational stability.

CONCLUSION

While formal training and development is lacking for mid-management student affairs administrators, there are the opportunities for institutions of higher education to be courageously intentional in developing mid-level managers/leaders. Due to the wide array of responsibilities, and lack of formal authority, mid-managers seek development in a number of sectors including, personnel and fiscal management and leadership skills (Keim and Sermersheim, 2005). Development can happen in a variety of formats including formal training institutes, conferences, or mentorship opportunities. Identifying areas where managers feel they need development, and providing scalable training, will improve the manager in their role, and thus, contribute to the institution's overall health and longevity. Proper leadership development programs require that institutions proactively self-examine their role in the quality development of their middle-managers. This standard of development requires intuitions to reflect and think critically about how development looks on their campuses and ways in which to incorporate quality leadership development for staff to better serve students.

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