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# Planning for Improvement: Leadership Development among University Administrators

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## Abstract

Information on the professional development of university administrators is relatively sparse, yet effective leadership and management are essential to sustaining high quality environments for faculty, staff, and students. This chapter discusses the use of professional development plans and multi-source feedback among higher education administrators. Results from a large national study of university deans and department chairs are presented and practical strategies for improving leadership development and fostering positive organizational change are illustrated through case examples. Given the high cost of failed leadership, greater attention to the preparation, support, and evaluation of individuals serving in administrative leadership roles is likely to provide dividends to all involved.

**Keywords:** leadership, organizational change, professional development, higher education, administration

## 1. Introduction

Few empirical studies have been conducted on the preparedness of university administrators (e.g., department chairs, directors, deans) or the strategies they use to improve their leadership skills. What is known is that few academic administrators have received any formal leadership training prior to commencing the leadership and ongoing systematic leadership development efforts are scarce [1–5]. In a recent study of chairs of departments of psychology [6], over half reported their institution provided no formal training for the role and only slightly more than one-fourth of chairs received more than a semester of mentorship.

This state of affairs in higher education stands in stark contrast to the investment in leadership development initiatives in private sector settings [7, 8]. Leadership and management success is no less critical to the success of a university than it is to a major corporation.

The range of responsibilities of department chairs is often vast, encompassing financial management, mentoring, hiring and supervision of faculty and staff, mediating conflicts, courting donors, managing building space, classrooms, and laboratories, developing entrepreneurial revenue, course scheduling, and strategic planning to name a few. Yet department chairs are drawn from faculty—individuals who trained (and excelled) in their specific academic fields—not business executives or human resource officers. Imagine a mathematician or geologist suddenly

thrust in an administrative leadership role: is it any wonder so many struggle with the transition? Now imagine those serving with a poorly prepared leader—and the effects on productivity and morale.

Research has shown that academic administrators who had completed undergraduate or graduate coursework in business administration, human resources/leadership, industrial-organizational psychology, or behavioral psychology reported feeling more prepared for their subsequent leadership role and experienced higher levels of job satisfaction [4]. Of course, it is unreasonable to expect all new leaders to have completed such coursework. There are successful and satisfied leaders without such educational backgrounds (and vice versa). The point here is that inclusion of principles from such domains in leadership development efforts with deans and department chairs is beneficial—and much less risky than leaving proficiency up to chance.

Satisfaction with one's job is a key predictor of job turnover. Turnover can be quite disruptive and costly to an organization [9, 10]. Conducting a search for a new leader takes time away from the unit's core activities. Progress on departmental or institutional efforts often is stalled until well after the new leader is in place and acclimated. Approximately 20% of department chairs leave their position each year [4, 5, 11]. Some are selected to move upward in university administration; others come to the end of a planned term of appointment and return to the faculty or retire. A not insignificant number of academic leaders will abandon or be forced out of administration prematurely due to performance problems. For this latter group, insufficient preparation, high stress, and low job satisfaction are primary contributors to leadership derailment [12–14]. Issues of satisfaction and turnover go beyond the leader. Leader behaviors also influence turnover among employees [15–17]. Faculty turnover and intent to leave the university have been found to be predicted by the social skills, empathy, and situational awareness of their department chairs. Losing good faculty as a consequence of poor leadership is bad business with its concomitant cost of replacement, deleterious effects on students, and potential hit to research and academic rankings.

In addition to the provision of leadership development sessions, coaching, and mentoring, another improvement strategy higher education may borrow from contemporary corporate culture is the more extensive use of multi-source feedback for leaders. Though student ratings of instructors are routine in universities, frequent feedback is much less likely to be provided for department chairs, deans, or provosts. Multi-source feedback, also known as 360° feedback, includes soliciting performance ratings from subordinates, peers, and supervisors, as well as self-ratings. A critical component of the feedback review is examining areas of congruence and incongruence. Noting ways in which perceptions of others differs from one's perception of self can be an important developmental tool, fostering better social awareness and promoting positive change [18]. An intriguing finding from previous work [13] was that deans whose self-ratings were incongruous with ratings received from their department chairs perceived themselves to be much higher on leadership skills than deans who saw themselves more consistently with the way they were seen by chairs. Such incongruence may be reflective of poor self-appraisal and lower emotional intelligence—characteristics that likely interfere with receiving and acting on constructive feedback and increase the likelihood of leader derailment.

Human capital is the core of any educational institution. Unfortunately, a minority of academic administrators report feeling enthusiastic and good at their job every day [4]. Rather than expecting that academic administrators will merely sink or swim on their own, universities would do well to invest in leadership development. Anecdotal comments regarding such initiatives at various institutions as well as the recent report of a leadership development framework underway at

Rutgers University [19] are heartening, but far too many people in leadership roles remain unserved. Later in this chapter strategies individuals may practice on their own to further improve their leadership performance are discussed.

Data reported here are drawn from a larger longitudinal study of academic administrators. In the first year of the study information was collected from a national sample of academic administrators on the level of preparation for, and experience of, their administrative roles and identified differences among department chairs and college deans on a number of leadership and management variables [4, 20]. In the second year, the relationship among leadership skills, organizational cultures, and job satisfaction [13] was explored. The subset of data discussed in this chapter focuses on strategies used by administrators to improve their leadership and management skills. The overarching goal of this series of studies is to inform practical efforts toward the better preparation and support of academic leaders, which in turn will have positive benefits for their faculty, students, and staff. Following the presentation of empirical results, practical strategies for implementing feedback and improvement plans are discussed.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Participants

Participants were 1142 academic leaders (716 department chairs/heads, 56 directors, 232 associate deans, 117 deans, and 21 associate provosts; 721 men, 421 women) surveyed from the Carnegie ranked U.S. public research institutions; 895 of these participants also had participated in the first year of the investigation and 247 were new participants for year two. Racial-ethnic composition was 89.5% white/European-American, 3.6% Asian, 2.9% Hispanic, 2% African-American, 0.6% American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 1.4% multiracial.

### 2.2 Measures

The full survey consisted of 105 items. The first section included demographics (gender, age, etc.), background questions on administrative positions held (e.g., role, years of service) and strategies used to develop or improve leadership skills. Detailed results on job satisfaction and preparedness for the administrative role are reported elsewhere [4, 13, 20]. In this chapter, we focus on a subset of items related to planning for improvement. Key variables here included:

*Feedback and development plans.* Six yes/no items inquired whether participants received formal annual evaluation of their leadership and administrative performance, made use of development plans (for themselves and their direct reports), solicited regular feedback, or made use of 360° feedback methods.

*Areas for improvement.* Four open-ended items asked participants to indicate (a) in which area they had improved over the past year, (b) what behaviors they wished to start doing over the next year to improve in leadership and management, (c) what behaviors they wished to stop doing over the next year, and (d) what strategies they used to inspire others.

Additional measures included:

*Preparation for administrative role.* Using a 5-point Likert-type scale participants rated the extent to which they felt prepared in 10 areas of responsibility prior to beginning their current administrative position (e.g., managing staff members, handling the financial budget). Higher scores represent greater perceptions of preparedness.



*Leadership skills.* Participants provided self-ratings for 15 specific behavioral categories (e.g., setting clear expectations, providing helpful feedback). These items were drawn from extensive literature review and have been used extensively in a consulting context across a broad range of management and leadership development interventions. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Higher scores represent greater skill endorsement.

*Burnout.* Job burnout was measured through the 16 items of the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS) [21]. The MBI-GS includes three scales: Exhaustion, Cynicism, and Professional Efficacy. The MBI has been extensively validated and is the most widely used measure of burnout. Lower scores are preferable for Exhaustion and Cynicism; higher scores are better for Professional Efficacy.

*Job satisfaction.* Six items, rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, addressed satisfaction with administrative role (e.g., feeling happy and fulfilled, high degree of autonomy, adequate compensation). Higher scores represent greater satisfaction.

### 2.3 Procedure

Email addresses were obtained from university websites for all department chairs and deans of Colleges of Arts and Sciences in all public research universities ranked by the Carnegie Foundation. Potential participants were sent an email message describing the study and inviting their voluntary participation through SurveyMonkey, an online survey management tool. A single automated reminder was sent if no response had occurred within 14 days. Participant representation was obtained from all 145 U.S. Carnegie ranked public research institutions.

Individuals who had participated in year one of the study were asked to indicate whether they had changed administrative positions within the past 12 months and provide background information related to the new position. Participants who indicated that they had retired within the past year were presented with an abbreviated set of items. When a participant indicated they were no longer serving in the same position as they had been in year one, the person who replaced them in that position was identified from the university website and new chairs/deans were sent an invitation to join the study in year two.

### 3. Results

Mean age of participants was 56.5 years (range 39–74). Mean number of years in current position was 4.74 (SD 4.31, range 1–35). The majority (83.7%) remained in the same administrative role they held in the previous year; 8.1% had started a new administrative position within the past 12 months (with 93.1% of those within the same institution), and 8.1% no longer served in any administrative capacity. Of those who reported they no longer served in an administrative capacity, the reasons cited were: wishing to return to a faculty position full time (56.3%), retirement (11.3%), involuntary-not renewed (11.3%), end of term with no option for renewal (8.5%), and other-personal leaves, etc. (12.7%).

Those who had left administration by year two reported being less well prepared, less skilled, and more distressed on the initial survey than those who remained in an administrative role in year two ( $F = 5.56; p < 0.01$ ). For those continuing to serve in a leadership role, burnout increased—and job satisfaction decreased—from year one to year two for 73.9% of participants.

The most commonly reported strategy for improving leadership skills was to seek advice from senior colleagues (endorsed by 91% of participants), followed by reading about leadership and administration (68%). Approximately half the

sample had participated in related seminars at their home institution and 41% had taken workshops through professional organizations. Few (4%) had sought the services of a paid professional consultant. Perhaps disconcertingly, over 3% reported that they had not participated in any form of leadership development activities.

The majority of participants (72.9%) received an annual evaluation of their leadership/administrative performance. However, only a minority reported having a development plan or goals document (35.1%) or use of 360° feedback methods (13.1%). These rates did not vary by gender, but deans were more likely to receive a 360° evaluation (25%) than associate deans (15.6%), or chairs (10.9%);  $X^2 = 13.656$   $df = 2$   $p < 0.001$ .

Open-ended responses to the question of which area they had demonstrated the most improvement in over the past year were coded into the following categories (percent endorsement follows in parentheses): time management (27.4%), perspective/stress management (23.8%), leading/managing (22.9%), managing conflict (12.7%), financial aspects (4.7%), research productivity (1.5%), and “other” (2.6%). Sadly, 4.4% reported that they had not improved in any area or had actually regressed. Areas of improvement did not vary by gender. However, those who said they improved most in leading/managing reported the highest job satisfaction scores and burnout was highest among those who said they either had not improved in any area or had regressed.

Open-ended responses to the question of what participants would start doing over the next year to improve in leadership and management were coded into the following categories (percent endorsement follows in parentheses): time management (15.4%), professional development activities such as workshops (12.6%), better self-care (11.5%), delegate more of the work (9.4%), planning ahead (8.3%), emotion regulation (6.4%), allocate more time for thinking (5.2%), improve listening and communication (4.7%), seek feedback (3.7%), and spend more time mentoring faculty (3.5%). Woefully, 15.1% reported they were unsure what they could start doing to improve, or would do nothing at all, and 2.2% said the best thing they could do was quit the administrative position.

Open-ended responses to the question of what participants would stop doing over the next year in order to improve were coded into the following categories (percent endorsement follows in parentheses): affect-related (e.g., stop getting upset/angry; 27.5%), getting overextended (13.2%), procrastinating, (12.5%), putting out fires (7.9%), electronic time sinks (e.g., email, surfing online, etc.; 5.7%), doing what should be delegated (4.4%), having too many meetings (3.7%), and health-related behaviors (2.6%). However, the second most frequently reported response category was that they were unsure or there was nothing they could stop doing in order to improve their performance (19.7%). A significant gender difference was noted with more women providing affect-related responses than men (32.6% vs. 24%),  $X^2 = 21.518$   $df = 10$ ,  $p < 0.05$ .

Open-ended responses to the question of how participants worked to inspire others were coded into the following categories (percent endorsement in parentheses): by example (56.1%), encouraging/praising (22.1%), vision/high goals (5.0%), being present (3.9%), communicating rules/expectations (3.9%), creating opportunities/playing to their strengths (3.1%), humor (1.1%), tangible rewards (0.6%)—and 4.2% of participants said that they do not inspire others (with some adding that they did not believe it was their job to do so). Gender differences were noted on strategies for inspiring others with men more likely to report using tangible rewards than women (60.3% vs. 49.4%) and women more likely than men to report creating opportunities/playing to their strengths (29.9% vs. 18.5%). Inspirational strategies did not differ by administrative role type,  $X^2 = 16.21$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p < 0.05$ .

## 4. Discussion

This study provides descriptive data on leadership development strategies employed by academic administrators, use of development plans and multi-source feedback, and targets for improvement as well as predictive associations among preparation for leadership, burnout and turnover rates, and job satisfaction across a 1 year interval. Our sample is representative of leaders within U.S. research institutions and thus may not be entirely applicable to all organizational settings. Though we assert that findings from leadership research conducted in corporate settings are largely transferable to academic institutions, there may be unique features of higher education systems that merit specific focus. Our findings also may be limited by the self-report nature of the survey. The research discussed here is part of a larger multi-year investigation of academic leadership. Additional results from year one and year two of the longitudinal study are reported elsewhere [4, 13, 20]. Notably leadership skill was predicted by administrative preparedness, self-awareness, and self-regulation and job satisfaction was predicted by leadership skill and the working culture of the organization.

A minority of participants reported use of formal performance feedback mechanisms. Among higher education administrators it is not uncommon for evaluative feedback to be solicited only during a perfunctory 5-year review. This is in contrast to the private sector in which the use of multi-source feedback surveys is more widespread. Further, leaders who wish to have more positive impact would do well to shift from merely providing feedback to requesting feedback.

The top three areas for which participants reported they had most improved over the past year were time management, stress management and leading/managing. It is promising that individuals are reporting progress in these areas and they provide a roadmap for others seeking to improve. Improvement in leading/managing is a bright spot in the findings particularly given the reported higher rate of job satisfaction for those who have seen improvement in this area. Ideally, organizations and teams can put strategies into practice that increase the chances of improvement in leading/managing. In the absence of organizations taking the lead on implementation of such strategies, individuals or subgroups of individuals can take action now using quick, practical strategies to improve leading and managing. Building these changes into a daily or weekly operating rhythm can also help ensure these changes are sustained.

Improvements in stress management can be leveraged to address primary areas reported under the “stop doing” targets for change (affect related, being overextended, and putting out fires). Using a growth mindset [22, 23] can encourage wider adoption of change strategies that have an impact on the leadership capabilities of administrators and their teams. Given the relatively high rate of participants who were unsure what to start doing in order to improve—or who reported that they planned to do nothing—shifts toward a growth mindset may lead to positive change. The research on growth mindset also offers a point of view on the need for planning for continuous improvement.

The finding that more than half of all respondents inspire others “by example” perpetuates the challenges of leading in administrative roles. If the most frequently reported strategy for inspiring others is to do so by example, let us look at the quality of the actions that are observed. Administrators are self-reporting challenges of the job and leading others. If those inspiring “by example” are doing so with less than effective leadership models, potentially ineffective actions are being perpetuated.

Results of prior research [20] demonstrated that deans who engaged in inspirational motivation had chairs who were higher in leadership skills and professional efficacy. Conversely, chairs reporting higher levels of burnout had deans who



engaged in passive leadership styles. Such effects are likely transactional; part cause and part selection. Unengaged leaders have a ripple effect across the individuals they supervise—and the faculty and students with whom they come in contact in turn. One means by which such effects perpetuate is through processes of self-regulation.

Self-awareness is a necessary component of effective self-regulation [24]. Self-awareness entails not only recognizing one's affective states, but how they fit within a chain of behavioral antecedents and consequences [25]. Such skills have been found to more prevalent among transformational leaders [26]. Self-regulation involves establishing internal standards of performance, evaluating discrepancies between those standards and outcomes, and formulating steps for resolving such discrepancies in order to meet one's goals [27].

## **5. Practical strategies for improvement**

The findings from our empirical work lead to a number of practical suggestions. A paramount implication is that we must better prepare academic administrators for the challenges of the role. Improvements must be implemented at organizational and individual levels.

### **5.1 Organizational, system, or process changes**

#### *5.1.1 Developmental plans linked to performance evaluation*

Personal change plans are an approach that supports deliberate personal change related to performance reviews and in response to formal (360°) or informal feedback from others. A few elements of developmental plans include: What will you commit to improve or change? What actions will you take to get there? How will you apply this change to your daily routine? What results do you hope to see in a specified time period? Making progress with these personal commitments requires making it part of a practice and requires scheduling behaviors and actions as part of a daily or weekly routine.

The following are sample actions from developmental plans where leaders have reported progress over a 6-month period.

- Reflect for 30 minutes each Monday to ensure I am more proactive, deliberate and strategic.
- Use coaching questions to discuss accomplishments and success stories at the start of my 1:1 s with direct reports.
- Schedule 15 minutes each day to look back and reflect on yesterday and look ahead, predict and prepare for a good day today
- Build resilience among my team by helping them prepare, regulate and reflect during 1:1 s and team meetings

#### *5.1.2 Multi-rater feedback*

Formal multi-rater feedback on leading and managing offers a way to provide information on the leader capabilities, areas of strength, and opportunities for improvement. This works well when the information is gathered, shared,



understood, and acted upon. Ensuring those who provided candid feedback feel heard is also important. How this feedback is acted upon is important. Three steps guide effective use of multi-rater feedback. (1) Understand the feedback and name it. (2) Identify 1–2 areas to improve. (3) Take action and create new habits.

Some of the best action plans have these characteristics. Focus on 1–2 behaviors with persistence, demonstrate them daily or weekly to increase the probability they will become habit. Ensure you can see it work. Keep it simple. Build in a plan to follow up and follow through with persistence.

### *5.1.3 Formal role description*

Include inspiring, coaching and developing others as part of the job description both on paper and in practice. Also make it a regular practice to encourage all leaders to have an area to improve upon. This helps to shift the focus away from developmental plans being about fixing a problem toward an approach where all leaders strive to get better and improve.

## **5.2 Team or group changes**

The research on psychological safety and Google’s Project Aristotle offer recommendations that teams or groups can put into practice now to have impact on team effectiveness, stress management, burnout and retention [28]. Google conducted studies to identify commonalities among the most successful project teams within its organization. The best teams ensured there is psychological safety within the team. Psychological safety refers to the extent an individual believes they can engage in interpersonal risk taking [29, 30]. In work environments with high psychological safety individuals feel they can share their ideas and that team members will be supportive. It is important that each member of a team contribute to group discussion and that group members listen without engaging in personal criticism.

## **5.3 Individual changes**

Given that organizations will not invest immediately in some of the strategies listed above, individual strategies can be implemented on your own. Below are a few examples of individuals’ strategies.

### *5.3.1 Regulating self and others*

This includes using bottom up, top down and relational strategies to manage stress and emotion. In bottom up regulation, the strategies signal “safety” to the brain. Examples include taking a walk, managing breathing, relaxing in a quiet place. In top down regulation, the strategies shift thinking to decrease stress. Examples include reframing stressors, visualizing positive outcomes, having advanced plans for high stress situations, or practicing mindfulness. In relational regulation, the strategies use positive interactions with others to regulate. Examples include demonstrating empathy, actively listening, practicing expressing appreciation, and quick positive conversations with people you trust. All of these strategies can be used to regulate self and importantly help regulate others in your work place whether it is a peer, direct reports or other leaders. Effectively managing stress and emotion can ensure both the administrators and his or her team is regulated and capable of tapping into their best thinking and decision making.

### 5.3.2 Resilience building

Recent research on resilience building among adults offers some guidance that can help with leading/managing others, stress management, reactivity, burnout, and feelings of being overwhelmed [31]. Resilience is defined as how we respond to challenges and stressful experiences. Resilience includes a swift and thorough recovery, sustainability of purpose in the face of adversity, and learning from adversity.

Recommended actions that can be used to include:

1. Prepare and identify how to make things happen. Focus on anticipating unexpected problems and build capacity for flexible responding rather than merely preventing problems. Awareness of prediction influences the outcome of interactions. Predict and make good outcomes happen.
2. Use top down, bottom up and relational techniques to regulate self and others. Relate by using brief positive interactions build connectedness and protection. Reframe threats as challenges and opportunities. Amp up positive emotion to keep negative emotion in check.
3. Reflect by looking back on actions that helped during challenging situations. Get good at noticing and reinforcing incremental change. Reflect on what makes it more predictable and controllable. Talk about the purpose—value, vision, mission—of what you are trying to accomplish.

### 5.4 Case example: highlighting important interactions

Erica was the chair of a department that was struggling to meet their goals in student engagement and retention. She was interested in “activating” her faculty and staff with very focused, value-added work. Her goal was to encourage her department members to take a more proactive approach to their days and weeks and ensure they could make improvements incrementally. She knew that many people on her team were anxious about all the work they had to do and how overwhelmed they felt with all the input coming into their physical and electronic mailboxes. She did something very simple that made a huge difference:

Erica started each Monday by asking a few people in her department with the following question to describe their three most important interactions of the week with students, colleagues, or community members. Once she figured out the most important interactions, she asked them what they planned to do in the interactions and what their contingency plans were in case the initial approach did not work.

Finally, she asked them to follow up with her after one of the three most important interactions to let her know what happened. She walked away from the Monday touch point knowing what was important to each person she spoke to for that week and with their commitment to follow up with her later in the week. She checked in informally on Friday for a brief progress check to see how the week went.

Erica used this brief (15 minutes or less) Monday stand up interaction to highlight the three most important interactions of the week and planned multiple check-ins during the week. By using this approach with members of her department, Erica created a less transactional and reactive team and one that was able to incrementally improve their proactive thinking and execution. Within a year of implementing this change in her Weekly Operating Rhythm, Erica’s department was on track to becoming one of the best in the College on target metrics of engagement.

Most importantly, through this approach, she was able to help her faculty and staff plan good days and have improved interactions with students and colleagues across the University and broader community. The focus on the big three interactions also helped her team identify what was important. Erica believed that her department would be successful if each person was able to improve three important interactions each week and the results supported her approach. In the end, small daily and weekly changes added up to important results.

### **5.5 Case example: multi-rater feedback**

Geoffrey was in his first year as department chair. When the dean would ask how things were going in the department he would say “Great! Everything is going really well and we are making lots of progress.” However, over the course of the year, several faculty members complained to the dean that they did not think things were going well at all. Other administrators across campus also remarked that they were concerned that Geoffrey did not seem to be doing well in his new role as chair and questioned whether he should remain in the role. Toward the end of the year a decision was made to solicit feedback from members of Geoffrey’s department through an online survey. The survey included ratings of Geoffrey’s skills in 30 specific areas (e.g., setting clear expectations, being fair and objective, working to achieve consensus, communication of policies and procedures, etc.) as well as open-ended comments. Geoffrey also completed a self-rating. Results of the feedback process revealed significant discrepancies across multiple areas. Through discussion of the results it became apparent that Geoffrey thought things had been going well because he perceived the department was making swift progress on developing a new curriculum. What Geoffrey had been oblivious to was that the faculty were feeling disengaged from the process. Their perception was that Geoffrey was ramming through changes without allowing sufficient opportunity for their input. This was hard for Geoffrey to hear. He thought getting the curriculum changes in place so quickly was evidence that he was performing well in his administrative role. Through reflection on the feedback results and really listening to what his faculty valued, Geoffrey was finally able to see how his well-intended efforts had gone awry. Without the feedback process, Geoffrey was at high risk for being removed as chair. Instead, he committed himself to paying better attention to his faculty and asking for frequent informal feedback. Geoffrey’s willingness to address his desire to improve with his faculty went a long way toward rebuilding trust. Results of a 360° evaluation conducted at the end of his second year as chair demonstrated how appreciative his faculty were of his openness to change. The department was now hitting its objective targets while also maintaining a more positive working culture.

### **5.6 Case example: accelerating change through performance coaching**

Jackson is a Dean of a College with 600 faculty and staff members. Just prior to his appointment, the College had participated in a culture survey that measured employee engagement. The survey results for the College were well below the University’s average.

Jackson was appointed to lead the College at the same time a new head of Human Resources was hired. Together they teamed up to improve results in a sustainable way. That meant improving productivity while improving the culture. The focus was on helping to hold all leaders and influencers accountable for driving results in a positive way. It also meant dealing with poor performers objectively, quickly and persistently. Jackson is a numbers guy who also had a vision for the College that included getting good results and doing so the right way through a connected coaching culture.

Jackson and his Human Resources partner developed an implementation plan using real time performance coaching as one of their key tools to create positive change. They experienced incremental change over the course of the first few months. It was slow and steady. Jackson believed it was a solid foundation that he and his team could maintain. They made the kind of progress most teams make: some leaders were making the tools part of their day-to-day routines, some leaders were having some success with the tools, and some were barely complying with the minimum requirements. The initial roll out included pockets of success and more than a handful of good examples, but not widespread cascading and adoption.

And then something happened. Jackson and his team saw acceleration in the rate of change, with improvements in both culture and productivity. Let us explore what happened with Jackson, his department chairs, office managers, and staff supervisors. What they did offers lessons for other groups who want to see this kind of change stick.

#### *5.6.1 How they got started*

Jackson and his team of leaders made commitments using a real time coaching approach. Each leader (the dean, 3 associate deans, 16 department chairs, 21 office managers, and 47 supervisors) served as a “coach” to each of their supervisees and agreed to hold five 3-minute coaching conversations each day. These conversations were focused on what was working to help regulate and connect with the agents. The conversations could be held with at level and across reporting relationships. The leaders would ask questions and show that they did not just approach employees when things were not working or when there were problems. The questions were intended to have a positive impact on faculty and staff and to build positive relationships within the College.

They also agreed to share their best examples each week during group coaching sessions. Each group of managers would meet with their team of supervisors, who shared what they were trying to accomplish, what happened during the conversation, and what they did to have a helpful interaction. They also gave each other feedback on what they liked and offered suggestions to improve their conversations and coaching. The primary goal of the sessions was to reflect and learn specific tips from each other that could be spread across teams and the center.

Jackson and his team saw some incremental progress using these tools in the way described above. Leaders were approaching their faculty and staff not just when there were problems but when things were working. Leaders were starting to be viewed as helping and as able to drive change in a positive way. But Jackson was not satisfied with the rate of change. He was interested in accelerating the rate of change and in spreading the process and impact across more leaders and more employees.

#### *5.6.2 What they did to make it work*

1. *Daily operating rhythm.* Chairs, office managers, and supervisors were struggling with the commitment to five 3-minute meetings per day. Not because they did not want to or they did not think it was important, but simply because they were not including it in their daily schedules. Eventually, they simply blocked off two 15-minute segments or one 30-minute segment each day and conducted as many 3-minute coaching conversations they could during these segments. The goal here was to see an increase in repetition and to make coaching part of their daily operating rhythm. They also did something to fit this into their typical days: they added these segments to the front end or back end of other meetings they had when they had to travel to other parts of the facility. It was on their schedule, but it wasn't on their peoples' schedules.



2. *"You know the drill."* Jackson made a commitment, like his chairs and office managers, to spend 30 minutes out among his staff each day. Keep in mind that he works in a culture where there are meetings and conference calls booked all day. He'd approach supervisors when they were walking across campus or in their offices. At first, he'd ask them a simple question like "what's your best coaching interaction you've had today?" After a few weeks, he changed it to: "you know the drill." Initially people responded with "what do you mean?" He'd then say something like "I've been coming around asking the same sort of question for a few weeks now. What have I been asking about?" The supervisor or manager would say something like "my best example from today or this week?" and then Jackson would sit back and hear their best recent example. After a period of time, he'd just walk up to them and they'd begin sharing their best example without being prompted by a question or by "you know the drill."
3. *Good results plus specific behaviors.* Jackson's team got good at conversations that connect the behavior (the how) to best achievement or outcome from that day or week. It wasn't just about being positive or saying "good job" to someone. The conversations were simple: asking individuals to identify a good outcome and to describe how they did that. Being specific helped here: "how did you manage to handle that student situation quickly and ensure you provided good service?" This was a significant breakthrough for the supervisors who started to see their balanced results improve. Most of their agents knew how to answer this question because they figured out how to do something productively, with good quality and good impact on the students and faculty they served.
4. Two essential benefits here were: (a) that coaches started to gather very specific tips that could be shared immediately with others who are struggling to find out how to do something well and (b) this line of questioning helped all employees improve their self-management and self-direction, which increased their individual accountability for making something happen on their own.
5. *Practical real time coaching.* Chairs and office managers agreed to be on the floor at least 30 minutes per day. They asked their supervisors to be on the floor for longer periods of time coaching, developing and influencing other staff in positive ways. They wanted supervisors to help. Real time coaching was put in place as an all-hands-on-deck period of time when all leaders were out on the floor for a 60- to 90-minute period each week. The goal here was for coaches to demonstrate mostly positive coaching during this time period. This also provided time for office managers and chairs to see the coaching in action. When they first started this process, there was concern for others watching these real time interactions. Initially, individuals were nervous and were reluctant to show what was really happening. After a few weeks of this approach and daily commitments by supervisors to coach more often on the floor (especially asking about what was working), supervisors started to say "Watch us all you want. This is what we do every day. The conversations are mostly positive, so what would be the downside to have someone watch us in action."
6. *Embedding the approach into naturally occurring meetings.* Departmental leaders also made efforts to build the positive examples into other naturally occurring meetings. They would also reference an occasional real time coaching example in other meetings to share best practices.

Individual	Organizational
Emotion-regulation	Articulated role descriptions
Reframing threats as positive challenges	Development plans linked to performance evaluations
Use of short positive conversations	Multi-rater feedback

**Table 1.**  
*Major identified areas for improvement at individual and organizational levels.*

5.6.3 Now what

The point of this story is to provide you with an example of how one group figured out how to accelerate change and how they spread real time performance coaching across hundreds of employees. The majority of staff in this College can describe to others what their results are on any given day, week or month, and importantly they are able to describe what they are doing to handle customer or coaching interactions well. The key here is that this team stressed accountability for each employee, at every level. In particular, individuals here are more self-directed as the leadership focused on regulating and connecting as part of their coaching culture (Table 1).

6. Conclusion

This chapter presents data from a longitudinal study of a large national sample of academic administrators in U.S. public research universities. The overarching objective of the investigation is to gain a better understanding of the preparation and experiences of leaders in academic settings in effort to facilitate strategies for positive change. This phase of the project identified improvement strategies used by deans and department chairs including but not limited to seeking advice from senior colleagues, reading about leadership and administration, participating in seminars and workshops, and use of paid leadership consultants. Further, the deans and department chairs perceived that the necessary targets for change included time management, professional development, better self-care, delegation, planning ahead, emotion regulation, allocating more time for thinking, improving listening and communication, seeking feedback, and spending more time mentoring faculty. Effective leadership is critical to the success of the higher education enterprise. Case examples are included to illustrate the importance of soliciting feedback and developing regular coaching plans.

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