Briefing Notes:
Strategies for New Leaders to Engage Faculty and Committees in University Settings

When a new leader comes into an academic setting, he or she faces joining the administrative hierarchy (the state/executive) and relating to the professional culture (the church/legislative) (Gilmore, Hirschhorn and Kelly, 1999). This is both an external and inner-world relationship, as the leader has most likely come from the faculty side and has deep identifications with the faculty culture. (Gilmore, 2002). There are three modes of failure:

1. Going native into the administrative culture and being viewed by faculty as having "gone over to the dark side"

2. Never leaving the faculty culture and hence not really adding value from the levers available in a formal role to advance the mission

3. Being ambivalent and remaining stuck in between the two cultures rather than taking up an integrating role

In this briefing note, we explore the strategies for engaging the faculty from the administrative role. What happens too often is excessive deference (or contempt) of the faculty culture leads to unproductive disengagement. On the faculty side, the governance rules and traditions place substantial constraints on changing these processes, even when their own leadership is motivated to do so. The terrain (often contested) for these kinds of changes occurs where the top-down legal authority of an administrative hierarchy meets the bottom-up authority of a professional, self-managing body.

The settings for working through these relationships are in one-on-one meetings, the faculty governance apparatus (full meetings, committees, etc.), working groups that have been created for specific purposes and the organizational meetings of the leader with the heads of units or divisions within the school.

Culture is pervasive across these settings and in all the participants to varying degrees. Heads of a unit can identify with 'administration' in one meeting and in another setting react like rank and file faculty. Schein (1987) powerfully summarizes some of the more and less frequent behaviors of faculty in collegial settings.

Typical Academic Behaviors	
More Frequent	*Less Frequent*
Early interruptions with questions of clarification	Inquiry
Rhetorical questions with listener's rival theory thinly hidden	Perception testing
Challenges to what the presenter had done	Intensive listening
Skepticism about presenter's interpretations	Respect and support
Arguments among members	Linking and integrating
Mini lectures	
Advice	
Competitive dynamics	

He argues that these often work against learning from one another. These valences are particularly problematic when the focus is on the institution, its strategy and its adaptive challenges when the development of shared points of view are necessary to move forward on key appointments, capital decisions, space allocations, etc.

Below are some of the dilemmas and some suggested strategies.

Dilemmas	Strategies
Over-focus on issues of interest to them, under-attend to wider agendas: Universities are highly specialized, with the forces for integration weaker than differentiation. People are hyper-vigilant to their narrow interests, but often missing-in-action on broader community issues.	■ Regardless of why people are coming to see you, always think about how you might be able to piggy back on this meeting some of your broader agendas. ■ Embed their particular interests in a wider institutional agenda (e.g., have a faculty member who is interested in ethics take up that issue with a visiting committee). ■ Educate people as to the links, the fragility of the common ground they share, via transparency of financial interdependences, intellectual links, etc. ■ Convene/host meetings of people across problematic boundaries to help them discover shared interests.

Dilemmas	Strategies
Paranoiagenic beliefs that the administration knows, but is not telling: Faculty are prone to believe that there is a real story behind the official version. Many faculty members want the protection of leaders but without any demands on them.	■ Communicate through multiple modes: e-mail, in meetings, through the leadership structure. Redundancy and multiple modes are key. ■ Enact transparency in as many ways as possible: overall capital and operating budgets, where issues are being worked and what are the next steps, what are some of the key constraints that the university sets, etc. ■ Use specific decisions to educate people when you have their attention versus expecting people to have read routine mailings of policy.
Splitting between individual and group relationships, and between administrative and faculty bodies: Often a leader will have good interpersonal relationships one on one with faculty members, but in group settings there is a dysfunctional mistrust. Often there is a 'parallel play' in which there are all the bodies within faculty governance and separate teams within the administrative hierarchy.	■ Look for occasions to create more overlap, by pulling in particular faculty members for key meetings of the administrative team and supporting faculty meetings with administrative roles. ■ Especially for faculty who are active in governance, think about each one's particular passions and interests and career aspirations and identify the range of ways that the leader can harness those interests. Too frequently we go from an issue we are concerned with to who would be the right faculty to put on that issue rather than come from the faculty member's passions. ■ Put people in external roles where they have to represent the institution, perhaps setting up internships, managing an external relationship, taking up an important role during an oversight site visit, etc. ■ Pull from individuals' learnings, external activities and networks, e.g., presenting at a conference, being on another institution's visiting committee, etc. the valuable insights for the department. It might be key to recruit people's insight about a foundation's interests, etc. ■ Even when there is an authorized group, such as a faculty senate or advisory group, think of them as a network of individual advisors as well. ■ Use authentic group processes. Many experience administrative group life as overly scripted. By engaging groups in a vigorous, transparent way, people will value the use of their time. Capture and vitalize 'dead forums' and do not collude with the split of real work in one-on-one's and group work as camouflage.

Dilemmas	Strategies
Weak traditions of representation: For many professionals if they were not in a discussion, they were not represented, even when they have both elected 'representatives' as well as formal leaders of their units or divisions. Those in representative roles often fail to differentiate when they are giving their own opinions versus their sense of their constituents' opinions, or fail to say how they have gleaned their views from their constituents.	■ Be clear and keep restating to those in representative roles the expectation that they both are bringing the views of their constituents to the boundary and carrying back decisions, questions, information from their involvement. ■ Actively inquire what processes they have used to get their constituents views and what and how they are planning to take back to them. ■ Support representatives in filling their role thoughtfully by excellent, fast notes on deliberations that they can easily add their own framing comments and forward to their constituents. Paradoxically, rapid notes to the full community often undercut the unit leader or representative's role if there is no differentiation of what issues should come from which roles in the organization. ■ Actively inquire and help them think about the degree to which they feel authorized to represent their constituents. Help them develop a shared language, e.g., fully empowered to make a decision without checking back, delegated within explicit guidelines to commit to a decision, or simply as an informational conduit. ■ Use physical space to enact group boundaries, for example when the leadership of a task force is consulting with a faculty group, the leader and members should be invited to sit together in a differentiated way so people can see them as a team because the ideas are linked to who produced them.
Lack of advance thinking on critical issues: Meeting research (Oppenheim, 1991) suggests that the advanced thinking about an issue on a circulated agenda, if one is not presenting it, is minimal. Often there are no agendas circulated in advance, or the labels do not communicate the scope of the issue or what is wanted from its being on the meeting's agenda.	■ When there is a large agenda, differentiate and publicly name people whom you want to kick off the conversation on different issues, so each item has some active worriers prior to the meeting. ■ Use the academic culture of individual thinking by inviting an expert faculty member to prepare a white paper on a topic or frame up the issues. Or this could take the format of a panel or colloquium for significant strategic issues. ■ Use silence to give people time to arrive fully at the meeting and collect their thoughts on a well-framed question. ■ Use small groups or have people turn to colleagues sitting with them for five – 10 minutes of conversation on a key topic. E.M. Forster said, "How do I know what I think, until I hear what I say." By having parallel conversations one can significantly increase the depth and breath of participation.

Dilemmas	Strategies
Poorly staffed, weak infrastructure: Often the resources (secretarial, analytic, project management, technical, etc.) are skewed towards those in formal administrative roles and professional groups need to staff themselves. This is particularly significant in faculty bodies such as search committees or faculty governance committees often have inadequate support and need to rely on the administration.	■ Give them resources or deploy some of your resources to support them with rapid note taking, reminders, project management, etc. ■ Respect and support their official leadership in their forums versus only working with the 'real' or 'informal' leaders. ■ Create group e-mail lists to make communication among the group in between meetings easy. ■ Consider a web page as a common filing cabinet for the group's work. ■ Model flexibility in pooling resources that in academic cultures are often small and attached to a faculty member or to a unit and can't easily flex when one is overloaded and another under deployed.
Poor norms of beginning on time and ending on time.	■ Begin on time consistently. ■ Do not, regardless of the status of a late member, recap the discussion that they missed as it rewards being late. ■ Minimize presentations that cover materials circulated in advance so people are engaged right away in significant issues.
Excessive ratio of informing to using the information: This is a bigger problem in larger meetings where members can feel PowerPointed to death.	■ Put informational items and non controversial items in a 'consent agenda' circulated in advance, with the ground rule that at the meeting, anyone can request it get pulled out, but failing that, the scarce time can be focused on the issues where active discussion is needed. ■ Indicate for each agenda item, what is the role of the group, and within what overall decision process. For example, is the group approving, consulting, responsible for developing the options and recommendations, or simply being informed? Who is responsible for the staffing of an issue in advance? Who will be responsible for followup and how will that person or group keep communicating with the wider constituency?

Dilemmas	Strategies
Defensive participation: Many come to meetings more to prevent bad things from happening rather than advance the mission and key initiatives of the organization.	■ Begin key discussions with a few minutes of silence where everyone is invited to collect their affirmative ideas on the topic. This helps people not just counterpunch, it also enriches the range of ideas for any conversation. ■ Explicitly pull different people into the conversation to speak to the issue. ■ Charge individuals with coming to the meeting with some ideas to kick off the discussion. ■ Explicitly invite people to think on both sides of a controversy: how would it succeed and how might it fail, with everyone participating on both sides.
Erratic participation: People miss meetings without letting anyone know, pull the whole group back to get caught up at the next meeting, leave early, arrive late, etc.	■ At the beginning of a meeting, differentiate those who are responsibly absent (they have indicated that they will not be there) from those who simply have not shown up. ■ At the end of the meeting, invite a volunteer to fill in absent members so that they will be up to speed at the next meeting, as well as feel their absence was noted and their presence and thinking is valued. ■ Give people active and differentiated assignments publicly in the advance materials so that they know they will have an active role at the meeting and be visible if they miss the meeting. ■ Good notes that keep all members current on the progress. ■ Phone or email people who were missing and ask them for some comments on a specific issue of concern to them, or note that you experienced the absence of their thinking.

In sum, the culture of academia is strong and changes slowly. It is not likely to be amenable to big changes, but rather requires a persistent, developmental strategy of taking advantage of and actively creating many opportunities to thicken the productive collaboration between faculty and administration.

Bibliography

Gilmore, Thomas N. "Dilemmas of Physicians in Administrative Roles: Dealing with the Managerial Other Within." Negotiating Difference: Psychoanalytic Explorations of Working with the 'Other' in Organizations. Melbourne, Australia: ISPSO, June 20 – 22, 2002. pp. 1 – 17.

Gilmore, Thomas N., Larry Hirschhorn, and Michael Kelly. "Challenges of Leading and Planning in Higher Education." Philadelphia: CFAR, Working Paper. 1999.

Oppenheim, Lynn. "Mastering the Meeting." *CEO Magazine*, June, 1991.

Schein, Edgar H. *The Clinical Perspective in Fieldwork*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1987.

For more information on this or related materials, contact CFAR at center@cfar.com or 215-320-3200, or visit our website at http://www.cfar.com.