


The academic leadership framework: A guide for systematic assessment and improvement of academic administrative work

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Abstract

Universities, particularly those in the United States, administer their operations through a multitude of disparate, siloed initiatives and processes. Approaches toward academic administrative leadership deserve a more concentrated focus. We propose a simple framework to provide a structure for the evaluation and improvement of administrative processes within a university. Based on an analysis of the literature on academic administration, and input from participants in academic leadership programs at Ohio State University, the proposed framework seeks to create a structure to harmonize administrative work across the university, afford consistency while allowing for unit-specific adjustments, and offer a basis for defining and measuring ongoing improvement. The framework is organized in six domains of competence, with their respective competencies, which enables administrators to talk about their work using a common language. The framework is contrasted with other approaches to the evaluation of academic administrative work and some general conclusions about it uses are drawn.

KEYWORDS

academic administrative work, academic leadership framework, academic management, domains of competence, higher education

1 | INTRODUCTION

Over the centuries, universities have developed as organizations from informal groups of teachers and students, through academies and studium generale, to the complex institutions of higher education of today (Fogel & Malson-Huddle, 2012; Glodin & Katz, 1999). In addition to their core functions of research, teaching and service, universities now must address complex financial, societal and compliance requirements (Dill, 1996; Fogel & Malson-Huddle, 2012; Gavazzi & Gee, 2018; Ruben et al., 2017b). Other

large organizations, like companies, schools, and the military, have acknowledged the need for systematic management and leadership training to be successful. Universities meanwhile are faced with the challenge of balancing such organizational needs with the freedom of academic work, which forms the cornerstone in the pursuit of the generation, teaching, and application of knowledge.

Recently, groups such as the American Association of University Professors have developed guidance for the definition and extent of academic freedom, rules of shared governance and for recruitment and evaluation of faculty

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and their work (AAUP, 2015). In a practical sense, American Universities have developed a general structure which describes the work of faculty in categories of research (research, scholarship and creative expression), service (faculty administrative and clinical service, and outreach) and teaching (undergraduate, graduate and professional students). This structure provides the basis for the formal and informal metrics commonly used to develop position descriptions, work assignments, and annual reviews for faculty. These developments are based on the insight that structure is essential to academic freedom and individualized excellence. Every academic discipline thrives because it operates on an accepted framework for proof and argument, for advancing successfully; indeed, structure is implicit in the concept of a “discipline.” The existence of such structures supporting each discipline simplifies collaborations between and among disciplines, providing a common grammar that eases translation of ideas and facilitates collaboration and innovation.

As the outcomes of research and clinical service are perceived to be more easily measurable than teaching outcomes, recent efforts have led to more objective evidence-based teaching and competency-based curricula which determine domains of competency and define specific competencies (values, attitude, knowledge and skills) which are measured based on pre-determined outcome measures (Molgaard et al., 2018). For administrative work however, no such framework has evolved, putatively because of the complexity of administrative work, and differences in tasks and responsibilities between administrative positions and institutions of higher education. In order to characterize academic institutions and their administration, and to provide guidance to academic administrators, scholars in the field have taken different approaches.

One such approach is to describe the higher education landscape at the macro level (Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Ruben et al., 2017b), and to focus on important topics like the work with governing bodies (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018), financial viability, the contribution of university research to economic development, and the charge of public education to name a few (Fogel & Malson-Huddle, 2012). These analyses may then be used to define leadership competencies for academic administrators. Another approach has been to define separate but overlapping cultures within academia (collegial, managerial, developmental, advocacy, virtual and tangible culture), which are to be recognized by academic leaders and to be interacted with accordingly (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008).

Others have tried to utilize approaches derived from business management. Ruben and Gigliotti have characterized the similarities and dissimilarities in functioning between companies and universities. Based on the particular academic institutional context they defined vertical

(academia-specific) and horizontal (general) leadership capabilities for academic leaders (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2017). They further refined this work and developed theoretical and practical foundations for academic leadership development programs (Ruben et al., 2018). Similarly, Gmelch and Buller (2015b) applied the 7S Model (Waterman et al., 1980) to universities. This approach to organizational effectiveness and change requires that a number of factors internal to an organization (e.g., strategy, structure, systems, shared values, skills, style and staff) are aligned and mutually reinforcing; and was used as a basis for a leadership training program at Iowa State University from 2000 to 2004 (Gmelch, 2013).

There are a number of well written and thoughtful books on academic administration available which provide an assessment of issues of higher education, personal skills and assessments, and management and leadership competencies (Buller, 2012; Eddy & Kirby, 2020; Fernandez & Fernandez, 2014; Fitch & van Brunt, 2016; Gigliotti, 2019; Gmelch & Miskin, 2004; Lanik, 2018; Lucas, 1994; Ruben, 2016; Ruben et al., 2017b; Sidel, 2019). Based on their personal experience and observations, some authors have offered advice and written reference books for specific academic positions, such as Department Chair (Buller, 2012), Dean (Buller, 2007; Justice, 2019; McDaniel, 2019), Provost (Buller, 2015; Martin & Samels, 2015), and President (Trachtenberg et al., 2018). Others have attempted to define useful leadership competencies for academic administrators irrespective of a specific position (Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Buller, 2012; Eddy & Kirby, 2020; Fernandez & Fernandez, 2014; Fitch & van Brunt, 2016; Gigliotti, 2019; Gmelch & Miskin, 2004; Lanik, 2018; Lucas, 1994; Ruben, 2016; Ruben et al., 2017b; Sidel, 2019).

To develop academic leadership capacity systematically, McDaniel (2002) developed the Higher Education Leadership Competency Model in consultation with University Presidents and former American Council on Education Fellows. A set of competencies from highly effective senior leaders in higher education was grouped into leadership context, content, processes and communication competencies, as a tool for self-assessment and setting learning goals. In the same manner, based on about 100 academic and professional articles about the topic of leadership, Ruben (Ruben, 2006, 2019; Ruben et al., 2017b), developed the leadership competencies scorecard which groups leadership competencies into five major competency themes (analytic, personal, communication, organizational and positional competency), which were divided further into 35 individual leadership competencies. It has successfully been used in self-assessment, coaching, leadership training and leadership research, and been implemented in leadership training programs by the Center for Organizational Leadership at Rutgers University.

In addition to the above, several other academic leadership programs have been developed on the national and institutional level (Gmelch & Buller, 2015a; Ruben et al., 2017a). The programs differ in length, curricula, and the status of the participants (students, staff, faculty, and/or administrators). Given these scholarly and institutional efforts to develop best practices, guidance and training for academic administrators, it is somewhat surprising that no general agreed upon framework for the assessment of academic administrative work exists similar to the simple framework to assess faculty work (research, teaching, service). Such a framework would provide organizational structure which would reduce conflict by enabling an institution to build common zones of responsibility - between a leader and their unit, between the leader and their superior, between the leader and their university partners (e.g., support functions such as human relations or finance). Such potential for conflicts, and the time and stress they cause, impede both the operational side of the university as well as academic freedom and individualized excellence of faculty.

2 | THE NEED FOR A GENERALLY APPLICABLE FRAMEWORK

The lack of a general framework for administrative work affects not only the operational side of the university, but also the academic enterprise. This absence also comprises a problem for selection and training of academic administrators and the overall development of the institutional structure of universities. Currently, academic administrators are often selected for personal qualities and for their familiarity with the institution, and not for their training in, or display of, proven administrative qualities. The analysis performed by Amanda H. Goodall (Goodall, 2009) provides a justification for this view, as she argues that research universities with leaders who have been successful in research, and are intimately familiar with the academic enterprise, perform better than universities without such leadership. However, this analysis omitted the evaluation of administrative competencies of the respective research leaders, and it is unquestionable that academic administrative positions at the departmental, college and university levels have become increasingly complex due to the extension of administrative duties over time.

As an example, a Dean's position today requires extensive fund raising, and attention to issues of diversity and inclusion, health and wellness, and following specific rules in respect to sexual and research misconduct. A number of training programs and resources exist with insight into "big picture" issues in higher education, and the management and leadership competencies necessary to lead uni-

versities (Eddy & Kirby, 2020; Fitch & van Brunt, 2016; Gigliotti, 2019; Ruben et al., 2017b). However, in spite (or perhaps because of) this wealth of information, it is difficult for the individual administrator to decide which tasks to tackle without a generally applicable framework.

The lack of a framework for assessing and improving academic administration also becomes apparent in the face of the sometimes-voiced criticism about the increase in administrative compared to faculty positions (Chandler & Clark, 2001; Ginsberg, 2011). If no framework exists which describes, at least in general terms, the tasks, expectations, and modes of evaluation of administrative work, then the discussion will remain very subjective (Anonymous, 2015). The lack of a framework also becomes apparent in academic leadership training, as frequently the training related to supposed leadership qualities is not based on a curriculum, but on personal experience, or is left to an individual as part of their personal development plans. Currently, the turnover in academic leadership positions is high (McGlynn, 2018). In consequence, personalized training without organizational context prevents administrative work from being executed in a consistently measured and sustainable manner.

To develop a generally applicable framework for academic leadership, which includes administrative duties, we were guided by the behavioral model of leadership (Northouse, 2019) which postulates two dimensions for administrative work: organizational tasks and people-related tasks. We used the approach of a competency-based curriculum to further develop and specify the domains of competence of academic leadership, incorporating surveys of academic leaders and a number of applied texts from the academic leadership literature. With this framework, capabilities can be defined and measured, and in turn improve overall institutional capabilities. Without a consistent framework, an institution's President, Provost, and Board of Trustees, will evaluate academic leadership anecdotally, and with disparate (and possibly conflicting) objectives. A common framework enables institutional leadership to identify what needs to be improved among its leaders (including which capacities are missing), and optimize the institution's ability to address complex challenges. This framework is also a self-actualizing model: it is dependent on the intrinsic motivation of each individual leader to improve, by giving a capacity for an institution to build common pathways for each individual leader to follow, tools to use, and measurements to reflect progress.

The resulting academic leadership framework supports university administrators as it:

- Fosters a university culture that advances ethical values, leadership development, and learning as a necessary requirement for effective administrative work;

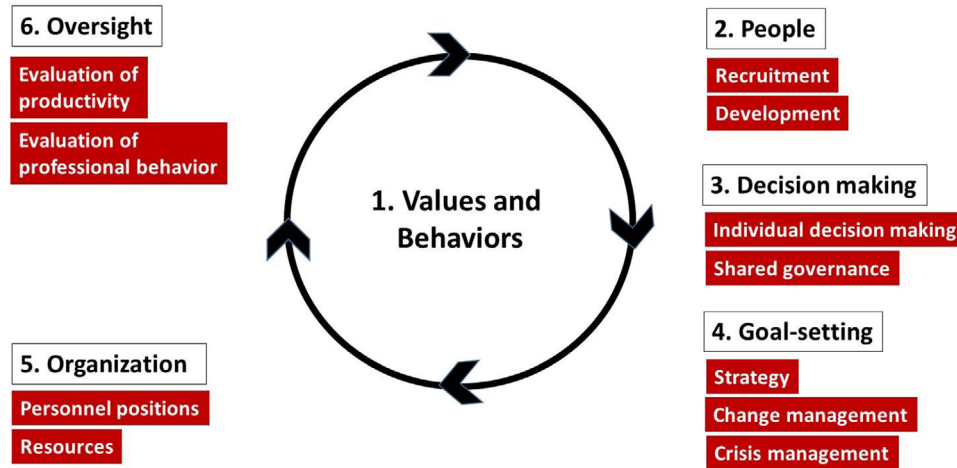


EXHIBIT 1 The academic leadership framework

- Allows for an adaptable and flexible framework providing guidance to various disciplines and administrative positions;
- Pro-actively solves problems by consistent review and revision of administrative processes, and improves the overall culture of the institution;
- Provides a common language to talk about leadership in the context of administrative work; and
- Provides a source of best practices and assistance for staff and faculty with leadership ambitions.

3 | METHODS

In order to develop a framework for academic leadership, we utilized the behavioral model of leadership, which is based on the leader's organizational and people-related tasks (Blake & Mouton, 1985; Kahn, 1956; Northouse, 2019; Shartle, 1979). In order to provide more specificity and detail to the overall tasks of the academic administrator, we adopted models developed in the general management literature (Drucker, 2001, 2004; Malik, 2016). Subsequently, we used the approach of a competency-based curriculum (Molgaard et al., 2018) to further develop the domains of competence and specific competencies of academic leadership. The proposed framework defines and treats separately the broadly distinguishable "domains" of leadership competence, from the individual "competencies" that collectively compose each domain. In other words, a "competency" is an observable ability of an administrative professional related to a specific activity that integrates knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes. When integrated, these competencies coalesce into broad distinguishable "domains" of competence. Taken together, these domains of competencies aggregate into a general descriptive framework for academic leadership (Exhibit 1).

The academic leadership framework is organized in six domains of competence with their respective competencies. These domains can be defined as follows:

- Values and behaviors (the foundation of the leadership framework lies in the institution's promotion of ethical values and professional attitude as well as personal and skills development by its administrators).
- Developing people (the systematic development of people focuses on the recruitment and development of faculty and staff).
- Decision making (the knowledge of decision-making models and processes as well as the participation of faculty and staff is essential for the ability to reach well-reasoned comprehensive decisions).
- Goal-setting (strategic planning, change and crisis management appropriate for every administrative level and function serve to guide administrative work including resource allocation).
- Organization (reviewing and revising the organizational structure of the units and their processes results in an agile and adaptable university).
- Oversight (providing oversight for people is crucial to ensure performance in terms of productivity and professional behavior).

To evaluate whether these domains of competence appropriately capture the most important competencies required for academic administration, we extracted competencies (values, attitude, skills, and knowledge) from the literature about academic administration (Buller, 2012; Eddy & Kirby, 2020; Fernandez & Fernandez, 2014; Fitch & van Brunt, 2016; Gmelch & Miskin, 2004; Lanik, 2018; Lucas, 1994; Sidel, 2019), and grouped them under the respective domains of competence. As the academic leadership framework is intended to provide guidance for

the practicing academic administrator, we used surveys of Academic Chairs, Deans, Chancellors and Presidents concerning the competencies they actually used in their daily work, or which they deemed important in academic leadership training (Cipriano & Riccardi, 2018; De Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009; Fernandez et al., 2015; Lloyd et al., 2020).

We also incorporated input provided by participants in academic leadership programs and Department Chairs at Ohio State University. These participants were asked to provide the five to ten most important competencies (values, attitude, skills, and knowledge) for a Chair to possess, or to be incorporated into an academic leadership training program. This anonymous survey was administered using a Qualtrics survey. The participants included university administrators (Dean, Associate Dean, Chair, Center Director), and faculty with leadership potential, that belonged to the following groups: Food Systems Leadership Institute (2 cohorts, 77 participants), Leadership Academy of the American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges (2 cohorts, 80 participants), Leadership Program of the Big Ten Alliance (1 cohort, 80 participants) and Department Chairs at Ohio State University (half of the Department Chairs, randomly chosen 54 participants). After removal of 41 inactive email addresses, the response rate was 59 (23.6%) out of 250 participants, with a total of 590 competencies.

4 | RESULTS

Our literature analysis demonstrates that not all authors mention all the competencies for all domains (**See table 1, supporting information**). However, all competencies mentioned can be grouped under the proposed domains and, in aggregate, all of the domains were populated with competencies. Similarly, the list of competencies required for Chairs by participants in academic leadership programs and Department Chairs at Ohio State University provided competencies for all domains of leadership, and all competencies listed could be classified under the Domains of Competence of the Academic Leadership Framework, thus providing confirmation of the validity and comprehensiveness of the framework (**See table 2, supporting information**). Subsequently, all six domains of competence were further clarified by posing four questions for each domain:

1. What would the optimized state for this domain be?
2. What examples of existing practice could be improved and extended to achieve this optimized state?
3. What are typical challenges for the implementation?
4. What could the next steps be?

4.1 | Domain 1 of competence: Values and behaviors

- **Optimized state:** There is general agreement amongst administrators about which ethical values and professional attitudes govern administrative work, and how these are communicated for use as operating principles. The adherence to professed values and professional attitudes is evaluated through an annual reverse analysis. Administrators understand the need for personal and professional (administrative) development to be effective in their roles. Administrators use the academic leadership framework to assess their administrative work, and determine the need for personal development and development of workplace skills. Resources are available to support administrative learning and development opportunities in order to integrate the individual effort into the institutional framework and requirements. Organizational values and professional attitude as well as personal and skills development are discussed during annual reviews.
- **Examples of current practice:** Most institutions develop lists of values for their strategic plans. However, the application of these values is not consistent across the institution and contradictory attitudes often exist within one institution. Similarly, there is often no general agreement about the qualifications necessary for an effective administrator. This makes the recruitment into administrative positions subjective, and the development of future administrators difficult. Typically, institutions train their academic leaders through external or internal training opportunities. However, without a unifying curriculum or framework, it is difficult to decide which leadership development opportunities should be utilized and how to estimate cost-benefit.
- **Typical challenges:** For administrative positions in academia, experience in the respective discipline, seniority, and likability, are often perceived as sufficient qualifications. Although it is generally accepted that developing skills and gaining experience in a specific discipline is crucial for becoming faculty, and for faculty success, there is a lack of understanding of the need for personal and professional (administrative) development. Sometimes, no resources (e.g., time or funds) are available to support professional development of administrators. Another challenge is the misalignment between personal values and attitudes, and organizational values and professional attitudes. Typically, this happens when values and attitudes are not translated into operating principles. Often the tool of reverse analysis is not used to analyze whether the administrative actions taken are consistent with the professed values and attitudes.

- **Possible next steps:** The values statements of the different units within the university should be aligned with university values, and these values should be incorporated into decision-making across the university. This includes a discussion about the role of individual versus university goals. The Academic Leadership Framework could be used to specify unit-specific goals, assess administrative work and use this as a basis for annual reviews. Administrators could use the academic leadership framework to determine the need for personal development and of workplace skills related to the different domains. On the organizational level, the Academic Leadership Framework provides recommendations for leadership training programs and development of faculty with leadership interest.

4.2 | Domain 2 of competence: People – recruitment and development

- **Optimized state:** The development of people is viewed as an administrative responsibility, and an ongoing structured process, with identification of specific training and other development opportunities, analysis of work activities, and annual review of career expectations and personal development plans. A succession plan for various positions is aligned with prospective candidates. For recruitment, a staffing plan for positions is developed. For searches, a pool of potential applicants is developed and a structured written approach for recruitment is followed including written position descriptions, expectations and behavioral interviewing. The administrator is knowledgeable about different mentoring techniques and a written mentoring policy is followed.
- **Examples of current practice:** Most universities provide guidelines for faculty searches and request or expect implicit bias training of search committee members. Sometimes, the implementation is aided by a centralized approach to implement a consistent set of guidance across the university. Most universities encourage best practices in mentoring and it is left to the individual units (e.g., departments) to develop their specific approaches. Mentoring is informed by the culture of the unit, not best practices, and is focused on junior faculty. Therefore, the development of mid- to late career faculty is sporadic.
- **Typical challenges:** The recruitment of faculty is often performed on a case-by-case basis without a structured process. That leads to a small candidate pool with few candidates and default selection of majority candidates. Mentoring is often not seen as a communal task of the unit, but as an ad hoc process with the majority

of the responsibility placed on the mentee. Sometimes it is exclusively focused on the individual needs of the mentee without integration of the mentee into the larger organizational context. Similarly, professional development of faculty is seen as an individual responsibility. Most often, no resources are provided to support specific training and other development opportunities. Leadership training is often unfocussed and the lack of succession plans lead to demotivation of participants.

- **Possible next steps:** For recruitment, hiring should be aligned with a staffing plan and a strategic plan. A position description and a pool of candidates has to be developed. A structured approach to recruitment and hiring for the unit is codified in writing, with additional guidance for opportunity hires. Participants in the hiring are trained in behavioral interviewing techniques and respective questions are being developed for each search. Administrators should be knowledgeable about different mentoring techniques (e.g., one-on-one, use of peer groups and mentoring committees) and develop mentoring plans for different career stages. A mentoring document has to be in place describing the mentoring process. Expectations for both mentors and mentees have to be defined for mentoring of all types of junior people (e.g., graduate students, postdocs, assistant professors) to be recorded in writing, and to be implemented.

4.3 | Domain 3 of competence: Decision-making

- **Optimized state:** Administrators have knowledge of and use decision-making tools and models. It is understood who makes what kind of decisions and who provides feedback/input and which role faculty governance plays in decision making. Alternate scenarios are developed as thought experiments and in preparation of potentially changing situations or crisis.
- **Examples of current practice:** Both central university administrations and faculty senates have structured processes in place to evaluate whether a decision needs to be made, about the inclusion of values and the strategic plan in the decision-making process and the incorporation of feedback from defined stakeholder groups/university committees. At the college and departmental level, the respective unit documents detail some decision-making processes. For a number of important areas, however, the decision-making process is typically not defined and decisions are often made ad hoc under perceived pressure (e.g., time, finances) without thorough evaluation and assessment of strategic planning and long-term effects.

Decision-making is often undervalued as an administrative competency.

- **Typical challenges:** Administrators are not trained in decision making matrices and processes (e.g., critical thinking tools), and therefore rely on their personal experience. Ethical values and strategic direction of the unit often do not influence decisions. This can lead to ad hoc decisions which provide only short-term solutions. Often, the fear of decision-making leads to delays of necessary decisions. The absence of an understood process for input and feedback de-legitimizes the decision-making process and results in decisions which are seen as overreaching or lack authority in implementation. Often, shared governance processes are not well defined and are perceived to interfere with time-sensitive decisions.
- **Possible next steps:** Administrators acquire knowledge of different decision-making models and methods and apply them systematically to major decisions. They assess and define decision making processes within their unit (e.g., when is a decision to be made, who decides what and who provides input) in writing. Scenarios are developed and used as models for future decisions. Shared governance for the unit is defined and utilized in decision making.

4.4 | Domain 4 of competence: Goal-setting

- **Optimized state:** At the unit level, administrators organize strategic planning and the development of action plans based on available resources including feedback from appropriate stakeholders. This results in annual themes and goals with clearly designated responsibilities and time lines for implementation. The strategic plan and its implementation are reviewed and revised annually. Change management strategies are employed to analyze the culture of the unit and address necessary changes. Crisis communication strategies are developed and applied. Crisis contingencies are anticipated and countermeasures are developed.
- **Examples of current practice:** At the University level, strategic planning, change management and crisis management are utilized for long-term goals and decision making. At the College level, strategic planning is typically performed every few years. Often, strategic plans are not aligned with available resources, and participants in strategic planning are often not responsible for implementation. Strategic plans are often used to justify rather than to make decisions, and often lack in implementation with regular review and revision. At the department level, strategic planning is usually not done

as it is seen as a college/university task. In addition, typically no annual plans—strategic “doing”—with formalized goals or action plans are developed.

- **Typical challenges:** A common challenge for strategic planning is that the strategic plan is developed by people who are not responsible for implementation. The strategic plan is not based on available resources and therefore implementation impossible. The responsibility for action planning and implementation is not assigned during the planning process and the plan is not revised and evaluated at least annually. These procedural errors render the strategic plan useless as an administrative tool. As this happens often, faculty and staff meet proposed changes based on strategic planning with low expectations and resistance. During the strategic planning process, such potential resistance is not anticipated and potential communication and follow up strategy are not developed. In spite of the fact that crisis situations have occurred regularly over the last 20 years alone (e.g., 9/11, 2007–2008 financial crisis, coronavirus pandemic), crisis situations are seen as unpredictable, rare and to be dealt with by higher administrative levels. This perception leads to a lack of preparation in terms of crisis communication, potential countermeasures and the ability to use the crisis for new opportunities.
- **Possible next steps:** The intent of the strategic plan should be to develop a realistic scenario for the development of the unit for a specified time frame. In consequence, strategic planning is based on available resources and reviewed and revised annually. The planning team has to consist of administrators responsible for implementation and has to develop mechanisms to receive stakeholder input and feedback. For implementation of strategic planning and change management, an assessment of the organizational culture and its subgroups is performed. Based on the analysis, steps are taken to address the contribution or detrimental effect of the organizational culture to the implementation of strategic actions. Administrators are knowledgeable in the basics of crisis communication, and make contingency plans for financial hardship, furloughs etc. during crisis scenarios.

4.5 | Domain 5 of competence: Organization of the unit and processes

- **Optimized state:** The administrator regularly reviews organizational processes with the aim of supporting the strategic plan and performs after-action reviews. The budget is used as a planning tool and resource allocation (e.g., finances, people and buildings) is aligned with the tasks and the organizational structure of the

unit. Reverse analysis of alignment of resource allocation with strategic direction of the unit is performed and alternate financial scenarios are developed. Revenue streams (e.g., fund raising, grants, patents and contracts, clinical income) are evaluated for their respective contributions to the overall budget and how they could potentially be increased. A facility and space utilization plan informs a priority list of renovations/new buildings. Administrative procedures are in place which define positions and workload for employees. An analysis of job alignment and workload (e.g., accumulation of multiple functions, extension of existing tasks) is performed. A succession plan is in place (see developing people).

- **Examples of current practice:** Some universities require regular external reviews of their departments (e.g., every 10 years). Colleges and departments have to develop and regularly update “Patterns of Administration” documents which address a number of organizational structures and processes. In addition, some universities and colleges have developed formal metrics documents for faculty research and teaching, and position descriptions for administrators. Financial planning and budgeting are often guided by existing structures and expenses. The exploration of additional funding sources (e.g., fundraising) is typically dependent on the personal interest of administrators. Some colleges have developed policies for space utilization and space and renovation plans. Successions in administrative positions are typically decided ad hoc.
- **Typical challenges:** Often administrators underestimate the contribution of structure, process and organizational management to the prevention of interpersonal conflict and resource allocation. They are sometimes unduly concerned that rules and regulations will restrict their freedom of decision making. Similarly, the definition of the roles and responsibilities of administrators and faculty is seen as infraction on academic and professional freedom. Often, the budget (plan) is not used as a tool for unit development due to the notion that planning is not possible in a resource-constrained environment and increasing revenue streams is time and labor intensive. For the same reason, facility renovations and space are not actively managed.
- **Possible next steps:** For every administrative position a position description and succession plan should be developed. The workload—i.e., the multiple functions—of individual administrators has to be assessed regularly. Administrators should regularly review the operation and performance of the unit, e.g., during review of the strategic plan. Are expectations and strategic planning aligned with the operations and staffing within the unit? Is a staffing plan in place (e.g., adequate personnel, areas

of new hiring)? Are people aligned with their supposed role in the unit? Is the workload adequate? A reverse financial analysis will demonstrate whether expenditures are consistent with programmatic priorities. The budget is used as a planning tool for the development of the unit and revenue streams (e.g., fund raising, grants, contracts, patents and licenses, clinical income) be evaluated for their respective contributions to the overall budget and how they could potentially be increased. A renovation plan, space utilization plan and policy have to be aligned with the strategic plan.

4.6 | Domain 6 of competence: Oversight – productivity and professional behavior

- **Optimized state:** A structured process setting clear expectations and timelines for performance equating to productivity and professional behavior is in place for faculty, staff, and graduate students. Unit guidelines, documents (e.g., promotion and tenure documents, graduate student handbooks etc.), HR procedures, and support structures are in place to codify expectations and address issues of non-compliance. The expectations about productivity and acceptable professional behavior are clearly communicated and deviances are addressed early on orally and in writing by the administrator and leadership team. Supervisors—with and without administrative positions—are being trained in these management procedures.
- **Examples of current practice:** Typically, universities have extensive documentation in place to regulate their procedures and processes. Often, documentation at the college and department level is less well organized with a lot of processes not addressed. Some colleges and departments have developed position descriptions and metrics documents for teaching and research, emeritus faculty policies or codes of conduct. These documents are often solitary documents and familiarity with these documents and translation into the college context depends on individual administrators. Typically, HR professionals are trained in HR procedures whereas administrators are not.
- **Typical challenges:** Faculty who move into administrative roles often lack skills in conducting difficult conversations with faculty and employees and in developing documentation to address problems in behavior and productivity. This lack of knowledge of procedures is typically not improved through coaching; sometimes insufficient support from HR, the administrative superior or administrative peers further undermine the role of the administrator. These administrators are not trained to analyze and close gaps in procedures and

documentation and instead handle issues ad hoc as they arise. In some units, cultural issues in respect to accountability interfere with administrative work. For the evaluation of productivity, there is the assumption that faculty work does not carry duties and responsibilities. This attitude is strengthened by the lack of defined written expectations and concerns that addressing workload issues might endanger functioning of unit. Often a lack of documented expectations combined with a lack of skill to address problems with employees and general conflict avoidance leads to a lack of accountability.

- **Possible next steps:** An administrator should state the expectations of every faculty position clearly and provide feedback on performance. They should ensure that the workload is aligned with the position description and expectations for the position. Deviations from the expected performance has to be addressed orally and subsequently in writing. Annual review documents have to address productivity and professional behavior. Administrators need to be trained in HR procedures. Cultural norms in respect to accountability and potential gaps in college procedures and documents for the assessment of productivity and professional behavior have to be analyzed and addressed. It is important that the administrative team agrees on performance standards and possible sanctions. To provide a framework for performance evaluation it is useful to develop in addition to promotion and tenure documents additional ones like metrics documents for research and teaching, emeritus faculty policy, position descriptions for administrators, and codes of conduct with written expectations for professional behavior.

4.7 | Interdependency of domains

Obviously, these competencies are interconnected and require development of adjacent skills. It will depend on the specific administrative position and the tool kit of the administrator which competencies are prioritized. If necessary, development opportunities will need to be selected for the required training (e.g., books, mentoring, seminars and workshops, or external opportunities such as leadership academies) in various disciplines. However, underlying the acquisition of competencies and their integration are four core learning and application skills:

- **Metacognition:** Curiosity and reflection are essential for (self) reflection and the ability to separate strengths and weaknesses.
- **Habit formation:** Conversion of insights gained by metacognition into repeatable behaviors, which become

unconscious as they are incorporated into daily work as habits.

- **Flex:** The ability to choose among competencies and deploy the right ability for the right situation.
- **Result orientation:** The ability to define and focus on a specific outcome, and not be distracted by “shiny objects.”

These skills are not domain-specific competencies in their own right but are learning/selection skills to enable the administrator to acquire and connect competencies efficiently. More significantly, the existence and improvement of these skills is essential to enable the administrator to incorporate and improve the six domains dynamically in ongoing development efforts.

5 | ANALYSIS

The core function of universities is the generation, teaching, and dissemination of knowledge. In contrast to traditional efficiency-oriented systems, like companies or the military, and in spite of their complexity, universities have been described as adaptive systems (Rouse, 2016) which maintain the traditional components of academia, such as self-organization, agility and personal commitment, and thus fall between a hierarchy and heterarchy. The management structure of US universities includes the board of trustees, and various administrators at the university, college and departmental level (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018; Glodin & Katz, 1999). This administrative structure is typically different from the academic culture (Ruben, 2016) and administration is sometimes viewed critically by faculty (Ginsberg, 2011; Hockett & Howland, 2020).

Whereas there is a general framework to evaluate faculty work in the areas of research, service and teaching, there are no generally agreed upon criteria for the evaluation of administrative work. Administrators underestimate the contribution of structure and process to the success of initiatives, and therefore underestimate the importance of a framework for academic leadership. Instead, academic administrators are typically recruited from the faculty pool, and it is generally assumed that expertise in an academic field equals effective administrative skills – often without the requirement of any formal training (Goodall, 2009; Jackson, 2019).

This has several consequences: first, administrative work may focus on individual activities rather than the whole range of administrative tasks, and result in incompetent and ineffective leadership. Second, the evaluation of administrative work focuses on personal qualities rather than overall administrative performance, and is therefore not fair towards individuals. Third, due to the lack of

agreed upon criteria systematic leadership development is not possible.

The Academic Leadership Framework provides a structure for evaluation and improvement of administrative processes within the university. It enables, for example, Chairs of Music, English and Surgery to talk about their work with a common language, acknowledging at the same time unit-specific differences. It is based on orientation towards people (domain 2: developing people and domain 6: providing oversight), tasks (domain 4: goal setting and domain 5: organization) and the leaders themselves and their interaction with the university (domain 1: values and behavior and domain 3: decision making).

We have aggregated competencies from the academic leadership literature administration (Buller, 2012; Eddy & Kirby, 2020; Fernandez & Fernandez, 2014; Fitch & van Brunt, 2016; Gmelch & Miskin, 2004; Lanik, 2018; Lucas, 1994; Sidel, 2019), and surveys (Cipriano & Riccardi, 2018; De Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009; Fernandez et al., 2015; Lloyd et al., 2020), about the competencies required by academic administrators, and found them to be all contained within the six domains of competence. This is also true for topics which often come up in leadership training such as diversity, emotional intelligence, or communication.

It is important to distinguish between the knowledge about certain areas (e.g., diversity and inclusion, research, teaching) from the Academic Leadership Framework which provides guidance of how to manage the respective units effectively using knowledge and skills - of which emotional intelligence and communication skills are examples. It is also helpful to break communication skills down into parts such as writing an effective email, having a conversation with faculty about problematic behaviors or consistent methods of communicating a strategic plan and its implementation. All of these skills are part of competencies within the various domains of competence.

Obviously, filling the domains of competence with management and leadership competencies, which both are critical for effective academic administration, will depend on the position of the administrator (e.g., Chair, Dean or Provost). It is likely that a Chair will emphasize the people-oriented domains 2 and 6 more than a Provost, who might focus on organization-oriented domains 4 and 5. The Academic Leadership Framework supports the administrator to assess all domains of competence and choose the most useful content based on the position, people- and organization-specific circumstances of the unit as well as the personality of the administrator.

An example of the application of the Academic Leadership Framework at different levels of the university is the implementation of a diversity and inclusion program which is focused on the support and equitable treatment

of minorities. To effectively address this complex issue, the academic leadership framework allows for a breakdown into manageable parts in the various domains. The principles of diversity and inclusion and implicit bias training as skills training are addressed in the “Values and Behaviors” domain. Planning of measures to address diversity and inclusion at the respective administrative level and the resulting action plans are addressed in the domain “Goal-setting,” structural inequities in “Organization (of unit and processes),” problematic behavior by unit members under “Oversight,” and support in career and personal development of minorities in “People (development)”. Thus, a large university program is broken down into systematic review and implementation of its various parts. At the same time diversity and inclusion is integrated into the overall management of the unit. As an example, to be effective, mentoring of minorities needs to be embedded into the effort of the larger mentoring program of the unit. In the same way, introducing measures to ensure a fair participation of minorities in the recruitment process ensures an increase in the overall quality of candidates for faculty and staff positions. In this way, the academic leadership framework allows for a comprehensive, iterative and integrated approach to programs, policy items and administrative work.

A number of sophisticated organizational models exist to assess and develop organizations e.g., McKinsey’s 7S Model (Gmelch & Buller, 2015b; Waterman et al., 1980), or system based Human Resources development (Jacobs, 2014). These frameworks for organizational effectiveness require that a number of factors internal to an organization (e.g., strategy, structure, systems, shared values, skills, style and staff) are aligned and mutually reinforcing in order for the framework to succeed, which makes implementation challenging. Even less-complex programs like total quality management, empowerment or reengineering are often met with obstacles (Beer & Eisenstat, 1996; Hedge & Pulakos, 2002).

In contrast, the Academic Leadership Framework provides a simple tool for an assessment of administrative academic function which can easily be implemented without favoring specific content. Significantly, it is scalable, and can be applied at the institutional or the unit level, or by individual administrators. The Academic Leadership Framework is neutral on how much management versus leadership should be included in administrative work. It can be combined with different leadership theories (e.g., adaptive (Heifetz et al., 2009), transformational (Bryman, 1992), servant (Greenleave, 1977)) or styles (democratic, authoritarian, laissez-faire (Golman, 2000; Northouse, 2021)). It does not require a certain management structure (centralized versus decentralized) and includes both the operational as well as the academic

side of the university. In addition, it includes both leaders and followers which are crucial to the functioning of the university (Bennis, 2007; Chu, 2018; Crossman & Crossman, 2011).

The Excellence for Higher Education (EHE) Guide (Ruben, 2007, 2016; Ruben et al., 2017b; Ruben & Gigliotti, 2019) is an organizational model specifically developed for higher education. This model combines the approaches to assessment, planning and improvement of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Program with a set of principles used by the US higher education accrediting associations (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2019). The EHE guide attempts to integrate the assessment, planning, and improvement throughout the institution. It can be used as a source of standards for institutional or departmental self-assessment or external peer-review and can be applied to units such as colleges, departments or programs. To complete the assessment, data are collected within the categories leadership, purposes and plans of the unit, beneficiaries and constituencies, program and services, faculty/staff and workplace, assessment and information use, and outcomes and achievements (Ruben, 2016).

The integration of these assessment results into the organization seeks to reinforce a philosophy of continuous improvement and a broader vision of excellence. In addition to this very comprehensive and structured approach, other strategic planning tools and processes of different complexities have been developed (e.g., (Perlmutter, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c)). These methods all have in common that they eventually aim at organizational change. Depending on the specificity and complexity of these tools, an informative analysis of a given administrative structure can be obtained. However, these assessments and change initiatives require a dedicated effort which is often seen as an additional independent project unrelated to the day-to-day work of the institution.

In comparison, the Academic Leadership Framework is not intrinsically change oriented and promises a simple implementation because a number of documents and procedures suggested within the different domains of competence are already in place in most institutions. Thus, an assessment based on the framework helps to fill in gaps and addresses issues like transforming strategic planning into strategic doing. It allows for the comparative evaluation of administrative units over time, towards each other and for action planning. It provides a framework to determine the distribution of resources and authority between different academic units and hierarchies (Chu, 2018). However, it is not the case that institutions currently have no structure or framework for academic leadership; rather, such frameworks exist, but are informal, inconsistent, and inadequately articulated and socialized.

The absence of an articulated framework on which there is consensus does not exist in a vacuum in which a common framework can be implemented easily. Instead, should an institution choose to adopt a common framework for academic leadership along the proposed lines, it must first obtain consensus that leadership frameworks currently exist but are not properly articulated or consistent; that is, implementation requires consensus on a “problem statement” as a first step, to include both macro leadership culture (overall as an institution) and micro leadership cultures (within each college and department). Once consensus exists on the ways disparate approaches towards academic leadership impede the institution and its individual leaders, developing a plan toward adopting a common framework becomes simplified.

6 | CONCLUSIONS

Universities are increasingly complex systems requiring leadership training as an essential component for effective administration. The Academic Leadership Framework postulates domains of competence with competencies, similar to modern curriculum development. It is simple to use the framework as the basis for a leadership curriculum to develop instruments such as sub-competencies, learning outcomes and assessments. This can be done by developing an in-house leadership training program, or utilizing external training opportunities for aspiring academic leaders based on identified needs. A number of leadership trainings focus on the self-development of leaders and suggest selected tools and theories to become a leader. The framework helps individuals to assess their overall development needs not just in personal development, but also in skill development and concept acquisition, and focuses on effective administrative work as interaction between leader, followers and organizational environment.

The framework, with its domains of competence, is a construct similar to the one used to discuss faculty work. It provides a framework to talk about administrative work and is neutral to many aspects of the leadership discussion. It does not prescribe what leadership theory to follow, what management style to use or how to balance management and leadership. It simply provides a framework and common language for academic administration, and can be adapted according to unit-specific needs and circumstances. It could be used to evaluate and improve administrative work, and for annual reviews and leadership training. As universities in America and elsewhere currently address issues within all of these domains, implementation is simple and provides a more systematic approach. Using a common framework for faculty work has been helpful for the development of the university,

and the academic leadership framework promises to be a similarly useful tool on the administrative side.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Both authors contributed to the development of the framework and the writing of the manuscript. The workload was distributed 70% (Stefan Niewiesk) and 30% (Gates Garrity-Rokous).

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

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