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## Review of "Building Academic Leadership Capacity: A Guide to Best Practices"

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In *Building Academic Leadership Capacity: A Guide to Best Practices*, Gmelch and Buller address leadership development in higher education. The book, based on original research, serves as a guide to begin or improve programs focusing on preparing academic leaders in higher education. Both authors bring extensive backgrounds as academic leaders and researchers of higher education administrative leadership making them apposite writers on the topic.

Gmelch is a practitioner having served in academic roles such as dean, department chair, faculty, and director along with being an eminent academic leader researcher. As a scholar, Gmelch has over 200 articles and 27 books and monographs and numerous scholarly papers in national and international journals. He has directed national and international studies on department chairs and academic deans. His well-defined scholarly path is the ideal route to authoring this book.

Gmelch's route is abundantly filled with books and articles about academic leadership – deanship, directors, and department chairs – and coping with stress in the academy. In addition to serving on the editorial board of several journals, including *The Department Chair*, *International Journal of Leadership and Change*, *Academic Leadership* and the *Center for Academic Leadership Newsletter*, Gmelch is the recipient of many honors and awards.

Buller brings more than thirty years of experience in higher education administration at both public and private institutions and is recognized as a classicist, scholar of Wagnerian music drama, and expert in academic administration. He is the author of nine books on higher education administration – from the professoriate to academic change leadership – and has written more than 200 articles, essays, and reviews ranging from ancient literature to modern organizational leadership. Co-authoring this book was a natural next-step for Buller.

In their book, Gmelch and Buller adopt the stance that a career-long development program is imperative for academic leaders. Rather than training individuals to be academic leaders, they vouch for developing and growing academic leaders comprehensively. They critique methods frequently used – training academic leaders by administrators without a training background –

and how academic leadership positions are often attained. For example, individuals performing well in teaching, service, and scholarship are often tagged for leadership positions with the assumption that outstanding performance in these three areas translates into good leadership. Career-long leadership development represents a safe stance for Gmelch and Buller, albeit unrealistic for institutions to freely adopt the same

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stance given the short tenure of individuals assuming academic leadership positions (Resneck-Pierce, 2011).

The bulk of this book is based on lessons learned from a pilot program titled the *Academic Leadership Forum* (ALF) originally designed to develop academic leaders. These lessons are presented as a 7-S model that borrows from corporate concepts. The model relates to practice and provides a blueprint for others wanting to create in-house programs to develop academic leaders. The 7-S model includes seven core components divided into two subsets: three hard S's—strategy, structure, and systems and four soft S's—staff, skills style, and shared values. The ALF operated four years, simultaneously running a workshop, learning laboratory, mentoring environment, and support group. The goal of the program was aiding other academic units, institutions, and university systems as they developed in-house academic leadership programs. The ALF program operated from 2000-2004 and resulted in many useful lessons that could be considered dated. The authors do not address whether continued data is collected and analyzed from programs based on the ALF model. Such knowledge could provide fundamental information for institutions as they consider using the ALF model.

Gmelch and Buller explained strategies used for the ALF were based on existing research that suggested three components: (a) conceptual understanding; (b) regular practice; and (c) formal process of reflection. A *conceptual understanding* denotes the unique roles and responsibilities associated with academic leadership. In other words, what knowledge do administrators need in order to effectively perform their jobs? *Regular practice* of the skills necessary to be an effective leader, particularly in how to work successfully with diverse stakeholders, such as faculty, staff, students, other administrators, and external constituencies is necessary. Learning knowledge needed for development requires practice and follow-up. A *formal process of reflection* recognizes that leaders learn from their mistakes, base their decisions on solid core values, act with integrity and transparency, and continue to grow as dedicated professionals. A formal process of reflection also acknowledges leadership development is an inner journey. Therefore, developing leaders are urged to continually reflect on what they are trying to do, why they made a decision, to what degree did their actions lead to the desired results, and how they might respond differently in the future. These three simple, yet deceptively complex strategies represent real ingenuity for leadership development programs in institutions, so it is no surprise the authors found “these three ingredients recur frequently in highly effective initiatives” (p. 12). Chapters in the book are dedicated to unpacking the concepts and readers are given several examples of current operating programs using the concepts presented.

Throughout their book, Gmelch and Buller maintain academic leaders require a combination of task orientation, people orientation, and building on what administrators already know, as imperative to successfully lead institutions. Task orientation addresses leaders understanding what their goals are given where they work and the position they hold. People orientation refers to how leaders treat their stakeholders. Building upon knowledge of administrators and not replacing current knowledge is the third factor.

Gmelch and Buller suggest starting by clarifying strategies an academic leadership development program will use. The first consideration focuses on how leadership will be defined for purposes of the program and, more specifically, defining academic leadership, which will guide opportunities and services the program offers. Other considerations involve determining what a successful academic leadership development program looks like and how the institution will benefit from the program.

The authors recommend the following twelve elements when designing a leadership development program. Use cohort groups because they involve relations with others and can act as a built-in support group. Keep mindful that leadership development is an ongoing process, continual, pro-

gressive, and sequential development. Allow cohort members to create and deliver their own learning opportunities, make use of them and your own institutional experts because they already understand the culture and context. Practice patience! Developing leaders equates to changing culture and requires a supportive higher administrative culture. Capitalize on small wins and build upon the triumphs as program ensues. Mind the context of the institution, culture, mission, and environment. Build in time and space for reflection – self reflection, time to share with peers – along with structure to share with colleagues. Pay attention to needs of cohort members such as moral, ethical, and (often times) spiritual dimensions. Remain cognizant about importance of leaders getting outside of their context to gain a broader perspective and vision. Consider incentives for developing leaders to stay long enough to make a difference and enact change. Remain attentive to the idea that a program is built around a single, well-delineated model of leadership development – clarity about what leadership is, how academic leadership differs from leadership demonstrated in other organizational settings.

Likewise, addressing other factors such as learning outcomes expected of individuals completing the program, what will change as a result of the program, along with best and worst case scenarios is recommended. Gmelch and Buller reemphasize the value of clarifying how the three components underlying strategy – conceptual understanding, skills, and reflective practice – will be met.

Decisions about program structure, operating procedures, and basic principles of organization in the program need to be made. Structural choices include whether the initiative is a program or center, if it will house its own staff, whether it will report to another unit or be independent, and how funding sources will be approached. Gmelch and Buller stress the importance of someone shepherding the program to provide guidance and ensure alignment of program leadership with the program initiative. Of significance is confirming the program is backed by a core group of individuals from the institution possessing influence and respect in order to build a broad base of support. Once support from key constituents is clear, a comprehensive detailed plan for the initiative needs to be in place, including the leadership structure. Confirmation needs to be made regarding individuals and offices across the institution serving as primary resources to help the program. Finally, structural considerations necessitate including a plan for sustaining the initiative. The authors provide a comprehensive inventory for these structural considerations.

Using a systems approach to designing the initiative is recommended, specifically integrating systems involving the distinctive culture of the institution. Decisions must be made regarding clarification of staffing, who is providing content expertise and insight and who is receiving program benefits to ensure the program aligns with the institutional goals. Gmelch and Buller's tackling of what skills it takes to be an academic administrator reinforces a necessity of program focus. Essentially, tasks different academic leaders perform determine what skills to teach in a program so responsibilities can be successfully accomplished. Once tasks and skills are aligned, the most effective teaching methods can be determined.

Program style is recognized as the most indescribable in the 7-S model. Style often evolves over time and tends to incorporate six different factors. How an institution actually carries out its mission and vision along with its culture influences the style of a program. Focus of the program, how participants will interact, selected program activities and learning outcomes all depict style of a program. Shared values refer to alignment of participant and leadership development program values. Gmelch and Buller take into consideration the difficulties of aligning knowledge and skills to a developing leader's core values. Encouragement is interwoven in the 7-S model to provide opportunities at a personal level to engage participants in practices leading to deep self-knowledge. Likewise, designing a leadership development program should include careful analysis of an institution's values. It is important these values are clearly identified so participants can reflect on how well their own values align.

I would like to see Gmelch and Buller address different approaches to take that could lead to successful initiatives. Additionally, if institutions are unable to offer a comprehensive integrated program, Gmelch and Buller do not address what is most important in an initiative or a paired-down model to give institutions a starting place.

Regardless, this book is highly recommended for anyone designing, revamping, or assessing an academic leadership development program: a go-to resource not likely to collect dust on any shelf. It makes an important contribution to programs by comprehensively covering key elements contributing to healthy academic leadership development. Each chapter is loaded with guidelines, quintessential references, supporting research, and classic organizational, leadership, and academic based literature. Chapters in the book can be read and understood independently making it easy to skip around based on improvement needs or development of a program.

## References

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## Biography



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