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Career and Instructional Consulting With Higher Education Faculty

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A person is not a static unchanging predictable sort of being. Throughout life, a person is continually learning, growing, experiencing and changing. Where one chooses to focus attention and invest a good deal of energy in learning and growing, be it family or career or relationships, varies with each individual. The choice depends on a number of variables, such as values, life events, influence of significant others, and luck. Higher education faculty are no exception. Each person experiences needs and concerns which change throughout an academic career.

Progression through one's career and the typical kinds of needs and concerns experienced by most has been the topic of numerous research efforts and thoughtful pieces in the literature of adult development and of higher education. Research indicates that there are transitions that people have to manage throughout their lives (Erikson, 1950; Neugarten, 1968; Sheehy, 1974; Sarason, 1977; Vaillant, 1977; Gould, 1978; Levinson, 1978; Schein, 1978; Bridges, 1980; Brill and Hays, 1981; Schlossberg, 1984). Some of these traditions are developmental and some are situational. Either of these types of transitions may command a great deal of attention or may fit more easily into the flow of everyday life. Examples of developmental transitions include addressing issues like aging parents and teenage children or viewing

time as number of years left as opposed to number of years spent. Situational transitions might involve being denied tenure or getting divorced. A somewhat less pervasive example of a developmental transition might be viewing oneself as a mentor; while a less monumental situational transition might be teaching a new course or working with a different chairperson.

Consultants can help faculty get some perspective on these transitions and also suggest how to nurture their careers. It is important to help the faculty member create a self-nurturing process. This involves taking responsibility for their own needs. Yet, more information is needed as well as ideas or strategies for effectively dealing with these transitions. This is where consultants can play a role. Self-knowledge grows slowly. We intend to describe a process that facilitates a faculty member's ability to examine their professional roles and career and to successfully manage transitions.

The authors have particular interest in these issues because both work as consultants to faculty in higher education. One is a career consultant and the other is an instructional consultant. Both work with faculty on an individual, voluntary basis initiated by the faculty member. In their several years of experience, of reading the literature on adult development, and of conducting research on faculty career needs, some observations about similarities and patterns have emerged.

Three assumptions underlying the ideas presented here are that consultants can help faculty (1) successfully manage the career issues they are dealing with, (2) experience more satisfaction out of their careers, and (3) contribute in a meaningful way throughout their academic life.

The purpose of this article, therefore, is two-fold: (1) to describe needs and concerns of higher education faculty that cluster around career issues and (2) to suggest a common process appropriate for career and instructional consultants to use when they are interacting with faculty who are dealing with these issues.

Career Mindsets

There are four major clusters of needs and concerns that represent

the typical kinds of issues that any one faculty member may be experiencing. We chose to call these clusters "career mindsets" because they seem to be the organizing frameworks within which faculty operate. We decided not to use terms like "stages" or "phases" because they imply a fixed progression from one state to the next. However, we have a concern that the word "mindset" might convey a static, unchanging condition. This is not an accurate representation of what occurs in the real world either. What is intended by the words "career mindset" is to suggest that faculty form a basis or organizing framework from which they function, that they may experience as few as one or as many as four different mindsets as they progress through an academic career, that faculty do not necessarily experience these mindsets in a particular sequence, and that several factors contribute to the development of a particular mindset—more than just age or academic rank which has sometimes been suggested in the literature.

FIGURE 1

Characteristics	Career Mindset			
	<i>Beginning</i>	<i>Investing</i>	<i>Maintaining</i>	<i>Finishing</i>
Behavior	Concrete-oriented	Active, Energetic, High protection	Pace themselves	Reminiscent, Indifferent
Attitudes	Open to new ideas, Willingness to try, Need confidence, Need a non-threatening environment	Willingness to devote extra time and effort	Often bored, Demoralized, Unresponsive to new ideas	Anxiety about transitions
Teaching	Need models, specific suggestions, Forming a style and philosophy	May change teaching in fundamental ways	Set in teaching philosophy and style	Detached from students

The four "career mindsets" that are possible for faculty in higher education to experience are: "Beginning", "Investing", "Maintaining", and "Finishing." In Figure 1, characteristics of each of these career mindsets are listed. "Beginning" is a mindset that faculty experience when they are starting something new that calls for initiation of a new role or a retooling or redefinition of an existing role. This may include faculty new to the institution, faculty new to higher education or faculty who have completely changed roles or assignments within the same institution. Often, faculty in this mindset are looking for clarification of role expectations. They express the need for support and for feedback on their performance. Their overall goal is to mesh personal images with institutional reality.

"Investing" is a mindset faculty experience when they are heavily involved in their work and clearly focused on a particular direction or set of goals to accomplish. They can be easily identified because they are often sought out as experts; they are active, energetic, busy and heavily scheduled; they accomplish a lot, may look tired and stressed, and are concerned about how to realize their full potential. They are likely to make changes in their teaching, and are willing to put in extra time and effort to get the job done. They may take a terrific job offer, inside or outside of academia, if something solid develops.

"Maintaining" is a career mindset that includes faculty who want to keep the status quo. Typically, they have been on the job for fifteen or more years and have decided to pace themselves, rather than burn themselves out on the job. They may be bored with using the same instructional strategies and teaching the same courses. They are often demoralized with no sense of options or alternatives. They are not likely to put in extra time and are not likely to be excited or challenged about "new ideas" because "they've been there before."

"Finishing" is a career mindset that is experienced by faculty who are about to end their academic life. This may be due to upcoming retirement, or being terminated, or finishing one role before taking on another. Faculty who are near retirement and *have no specific plans* can experience some sadness and anxiety. They may feel detached from students and often are concerned about hanging on to an association with the university and colleagues. Faculty who are terminated and are *unsure about the future* have a heightened concern about their

transition to a new life. They may feel a loss of identity and possibly bitterness toward the university.

Factors Contributing to Career Mindsets

How do faculty develop these mindsets? What factors contribute to these frameworks or orientations to work? It is important to consider a number of things in any situation that contribute to a particular mindset. Each situation is unique and the consultant and client need to consider how several factors interact to create this particular mindset. For example, a number of years teaching may be one factor but should not provide the basis or organizing framework for the consultant to make decisions or suggest strategies. A number of factors should be investigated and considered in order to develop as true a picture as possible of the uniqueness of any one individual. Factors influencing the development of any one particular mindset can be divided into three categories: demographic, institutional, and personal. Examples of factors in each of these categories are suggested in Figure 2.

The consultant needs to discover which of these factors is contributing to the situation the faculty member describes and to what degree these factors are affecting the faculty member. A process for accomplishing this goal is described next.

FIGURE 2 Factors Influencing Career Mindsets		
Demographic	Institutional	Personal
Age Sex Race	Socialization Process Role Expectations Extrinsic Reward System Linear Approach to Advancement	Career Expectations Previous Experience Intrinsic Reward System Life Events

Role of the Consultant

As instructional and career consultants, we have utilized a basic process or model to help faculty assess their own situations and to take ownership of their growth. The model can be portrayed as follows:

1. *Assessing the Situation.* In the initial phase of assessing the situation, the consultant asks questions, promotes self-analysis and looks for cues. Some possible questions that can be asked and their intent are tabled as follows:

TABLE 1	
Question	Intent
Describe your situation—either instructionally, or with your career.	Self-assessment, looking for verbal and non-verbal clues.
What do you want to do? How is it different from what you're doing now?	Identify discrepancies
What do you see as your options?	Assessment of latitude, of present flexibility

This questioning pattern allows assessment by the consultant concerning how focused the person is and how strongly the client feels about particular issues. The consultant needs to pay attention to cues indicating openness to consideration of various possibilities. Sometimes faculty members are quite articulate about what isn't right but often the situation is vague or stated in fragments.

2. *Diagnose the Need.* One of the roles of the consultant is to keep ownership of the need with the faculty member. For the process to be effective the faculty member needs to see the situation as his or hers so that decisions can be made that the faculty member will act upon. Throughout this phase and other phases the consultant needs to effectively use interpersonal interventions such as active listening, questioning, paraphrasing and perception checks.

Quite often the need is defined as immediate (e.g., improve student ratings or find a job after not getting tenure). However, a number of faculty take a much broader view and express the desire to examine the whole teaching process or look at the total career picture. The two approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive because a family member examining the immediate need may find this will develop into a more comprehensive analysis.

3. Choosing Strategies. Although the process for the instructional and career consultants has been the same to this point, there is a distinct difference in the content of the issues the clients are dealing with. The strategies consultants might suggest are quite specific to either the instructional or career area. The following table provides examples of different strategies used by instructional and career consultants.

<p style="text-align: center;">TABLE 2 Strategies for Consultants</p>	
Instructional	Career
Videotaping/audiotaping classroom episodes	Career testing—interest and aptitude inventories
Observing classroom teaching	Informational interviewing
Gathering Student Learning Data	Self-assessment of skills
Analyzing syllabi, course materials, tests	Organizing support groups

Choosing strategies to address the identified need requires a repertoire of alternatives on which the consultant can draw. Differences in learning styles and other personal learning considerations often mean some faculty clients may have difficulty adopting particular methods and the consultant needs to offer alternatives. If the consultant has had enough experience he or she may be able to determine what will work from seeing a range of patterns and their commonalities. Someone with less experience may have to use more trial and error. During this phase the consultant will often use the following interventions: encouraging risk-taking; confronting; pro-

viding and receiving accurate, appropriate feedback; and providing concrete suggestions.

4. *Considering Alternatives.* After various strategies have been used to collect the information, the next phase is to examine what alternatives can be generated out of the new information. This can range from considering different instructional methods in the case of instructional development to seeking a different career in the case of career development. During this phase the faculty member may need help in developing additional skills to make these alternatives work. The consultant will also need to provide support and encouragement. The first few steps in the novel situation may feel awkward to the faculty member but with support and practice, implementation can be accomplished.

After testing out and refining the alternatives, the consultant and client need to assess whether the diagnosis was correct and the need met. If the situation has not been resolved then the consulting cycle needs to be activated again with another diagnosis, collecting of needed data and movement toward consideration of appropriate options.

This process allows the client to be a moving force in his or her own growth, for the goals and methods to be out where both the consultant and client can understand them, and for negotiation of what needs to be done. We find that both instructional and career consultants can use this process even though the content of the consultant's work is quite different.

A Final Word

The career mindsets are meant to be descriptive and not normative. They are intended to "narrow the field" but not create inflexible boxes—professional judgments are still needed. A good consultant starts with the client and works from there. Too often it appears that consultants look for a "fail-safe system" and fit the client to the system. If there is an effective consultant-client relationship, the client will be able to express if he or she is being "pigeonholed" and not viewed as an individual. A consultant cannot be so invested in consulting methods that concern for the client is lost.

Success with a client will happen if there is an open relationship in which the problem area can be mutually defined, appropriate strategies are chosen and there is client-consultant dialogue about what was determined. There is always a strong element of consultant judgment in finding appropriate strategies and for determining how much the client will assimilate at any particular point in the relationship.

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