Leadership in Foreign Language Departments:
It's Not Just Language

Geraldine Blattner
Florida Atlantic University, USA

Justin P. White
Florida Atlantic University, USA

INTRODUCTION

Leadership in the FL department is a complex issue that has been identified and discussed in various studies from a variety of perspectives (Crookes, 1997; Freeman & Freeman, 1994; James, 1997; Paesani & Allen, 2012). As posited by The American Association of University Supervisors and Coordinators (AAUSC) (http://www.aausc.org/), the general fear that FL departments face revolves around the fact that these academic units are easy targets for elimination from the overall make-up of the university due to their typical small size when compared to other academic departments. Paesani and Allen (2012) explained that enrollment in advanced FL courses in higher education is often dangerously low, which underscores the need for leaders of FL programs to demonstrate their relevance and intellectual connection to the larger university mission. Given this pressure from the university's administrative governing bodies, it is especially important that the language training students experience is expertly informed in both its design and execution.

Generally speaking, there tends to be a focus on what qualities and behaviors make good leaders, which, is important, however, there is one other essential element which is their training in how to lead and manage programs in the best direction. For individuals and scholars, this is an ongoing quest that has motivated initiatives worldwide to address this complex multidimensional process (Jackson & Uhl-Bien, 2011; Mumford, 2006 among others). As Northouse (2015) explains: "some researchers conceptualize leadership as a trait of a behavior, whereas others view leadership from an information-processing perspective (p. 1)." The scope of this article is not to focus of the individual ability to have special characteristics or qualities that make them leaders, but rather to explain how leadership in a FL department is a phenomenon that resides in the context of the interactions between leaders and followers and to make leadership available to everyone (Northouse, p. 8). In this sense of the leadership definition, FL departments are similar to other academic units, however, the complexity of the structure and the different areas of focus (linguistic and literary) of FL programs has been the center of attention of several studies by scholars who have attempted to highlight common issues that could improve leadership and therefore the effectiveness of these programs.

Decades ago in a reflective paper on the structure of FL departments, Crookes (1997) highlighted that the Chair and other leaders of academic programs cannot only focus on the quality of instructors and instruction, but rather on serving the interest of the organization as a whole, as classic bureaucrats (p. 69) as well as dealing with the financial pressure exerted by college and university administrators. In

fact, Garret (2009) posits that budgetary stress has made a new trend appear in FL departments: many departments have contracted non-experts in the field of SLA as LPDs for non-tenure track faculty positions for their language program leadership which in turn has several consequences, including the weakening of the leadership position by potentially increased turn over, the lack of field specific knowledge for training and curricular design, and subsequently less informed decision making regarding curricular and personnel issues. Brady and Singh-Corcoran (2012) reiterated that the trend of hiring non-tenure track faculty poses a supplementary challenging layer precisely for these reasons. Therefore, the goals of the present chapter aim to demonstrate the current state of leadership in FL departments, the challenges that leadership in FL departments face, and how leadership in FL programs could be improved or enhanced while respecting the range of fields, objectives, and goals of the many constituencies involved in such departments.

Common Leadership Structure

As with many academic departments, the FL department often has an administrative structure that, at this highest position, includes a Department Chair, who is, according to Northouse's (2015) taxonomy, an assigned leader appointed by the Dean of a college. James (1997) noted that there has been a dramatic shift in terms of who assumes this role in FL department. She explains that decades ago, this honor was reserved to the most published faculty in a particular department as this individual was perceived as the best scholar leading and motivating colleagues to also be high-achieving scholars and potential future administrators. In other words, these characteristics were viewed as required qualities or trait, as described by Northouse (2015), to become the leader in a FL department. Since James published her reflective essay on leadership in FL departments, some aspects of the chairship have remained unchanged, however others have significantly evolved. The typical management of a FL department involves planning and organizing as well as staffing. These traditional administrative burdens of many higher education departments have dramatically augmented, in part due to increased student enrollment and also because Chairs have been tasked with additional responsibilities related to advising, accrediting, assessment, and scheduling. This is an intricate set of tasks especially when coupled with attempting to satisfy faculty, students, and to maintain a pedagogically sound approach to FL teaching. In fact, Katz and Watzinger-Tharp (2005) explained that in smaller FL departments it is commonplace for the Chair of the department to be responsible for the design and delivery of the basic language program curriculum in addition to all of the aforementioned.

Like other academic units, often there is a supporting administrative substructure that includes a secondary position, generally referred to as the Assistant Chair or Associate Chair. The Assistant Chair or Associate Chair is at the service to the Chair and within this administrative structure, most department-level tasks are handled. Also, depending on the size of the University, similarly to other academic departments, there may be a tenure-line faculty member who handles graduate-level studies and a tenure-line professor who handles undergraduate-level studies. Advisors or other support positions that assist in programming tasks such as schedules and course lists in major/minor tracks may also be in place. It is important to note that none of these positions (i.e., Chair, Assistant Chair, Director of Graduate studies, Director of Undergraduate studies, Advisor) are directly (or indirectly) linked to their fields of research specialization and these positions can be taken on by any faculty member with the adequate administrative skills, regardless of their areas of focused inquiry. In other words, their assignment in these leadership positions is not in any way linked to their particular area of research or academic expertise, unlike the relationship between language program direction and SLA. Worthwhile

Related Content

Antecedent Variable of Job Satisfaction and Family Satisfaction and Its Effect on the Intention to Quit
M. Al Musadieq (2019). *International Journal of Applied Management Theory and Research (pp. 42-59).*
www.irma-international.org/article/antecedent-variable-of-job-satisfaction-and-family-satisfaction-and-its-effect-on-the-intention-to-quit/232712

Transforming Technology Adoption: How Social Media Communication Can Break Barriers in Public Organizations
Munir Ahmad, Asmat Aliand Hassan Nawaz (2024). *Perspectives on Innovation and Technology Transfer in Managing Public Organizations (pp. 249-267).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/transforming-technology-adoption/337997

Sustainable Sources of Reducing HR Costs in the Pandemic Time: E-Recruitment and Nonfinancial Compensation – A Mathematical and Accounting-Based Approach
Nicoleta Valentina Florea, Constantin Aurelian Ionescu, Marinela Daniela Manea, Mariana Zamfir, Mihaela Denisa Comanand Sorina Geanina Stanescu (2022). *Perspectives of Management Accounting for Sustainable Business Practices (pp. 115-146).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/sustainable-sources-of-reducing-hr-costs-in-the-pandemic-time/311728

Understanding the Dependence Structure Between the Futures and Spot Prices of Wheat in Egypt
Osama Ahmedand Fadi Abdelradi (2019). *International Journal of Food and Beverage Manufacturing and Business Models (pp. 20-37).*
www.irma-international.org/article/understanding-the-dependence-structure-between-the-futures-and-spot-prices-of-wheat-in-egypt/223929

Exploring the Mediating and Moderating Role of Services Marketing Strategy and Safety and Security Measures in the Tourism Industry
Rania B. Mostafaand Lamiaa I. Hefny (2018). *Operations and Service Management: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 905-932).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/exploring-the-mediating-and-moderating-role-of-services-marketing-strategy-and-safety-and-security-measures-in-the-tourism-industry/192514