

## Role of Administrators

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This module offers a model (Figure 1) to depict the qualities, behaviors, processes and roles of a quality administrator. It is a modification of the model on the inside cover of this book that provides a pictorial image of a quality faculty member. Like that model, administrators function within a culture that holds a given set of values, and like faculty, administrators in academic settings strive for empowerment of students, employees, and the institution. A set of five roles describes the sub-sets of roles (leader, mentor, manager, decider and builder) assumed by administrators in order to effectively perform their responsibilities. The five roles are interdependent and synergistic as they impact one another and gain in value as proficiency develops in one of the other roles. This module identifies the ramifications of absence of skills in one of the roles as part of the repertoire of administrators.

### Values Define the Culture

Though some values are unique to given institutions based on heritage and mission, i.e., public versus private, community college vs. research university, serving a given ethnic population, etc., there are a set of values common throughout academia today. These include learning, trust, individual worth, integrity, accountability, diversity, self-assessment, humility, risk-taking, listening, valuing others, authenticity, evidence, data driven decision making, and consistency/predictability. While this list is not meant to be all-inclusive, it offers the mix of values found. They are represented in the background of the model just as the culture offers the background for work and interactions.

### Processes Make Values Become Reality

These values are acted upon through some key processes (as shown in the outer ring of the model). The outer circle identifies what we consider to be eight of the most critical processes, i.e., financial management, resource development, strategic planning, building human capacity, assessment, team building, coaching, and promoting or external relations. These processes aligned with the values expressed are part of what we refer to as an enriched learning environment that is inherent in the desired culture.

### Common Essence of Institutions

Though vision and mission statements vary from institution to institution, central to their reason for being is empowerment of those who come to the institution for its services (students), those who make the reason for the institution come to life (employees), and the vitality and worth of the institution itself (reflected in the inner circle). Empowerment is grounded in learning, growth, and the freedom to take responsibility.

### Five Key Roles of Administrators

The means of getting from the values and processes to empowerment is via the five roles identified, i.e., leaders cultivate institutional development, mentors facilitate employee development, managers ensure institutional integrity, deciders provide alignment, and builders expand the capacity of the students, the employees and the organization thus bringing us full circle to a new stage of development. Though differing job descriptions within the administrative structure will emphasize some roles more than others based on the responsibilities, all administrators are expected to have a level of proficiency in each of the distinct roles.

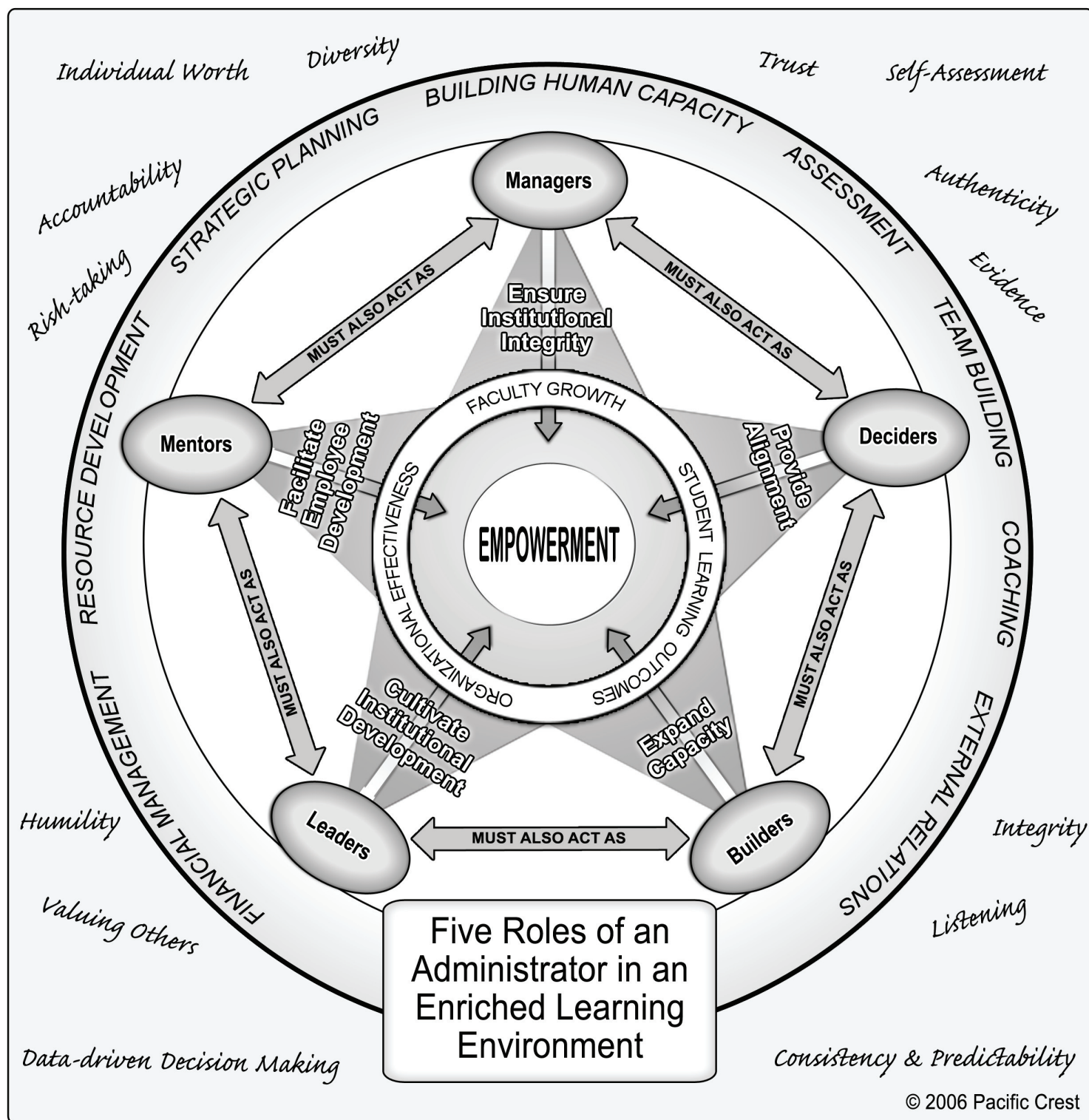
#### Leaders cultivate Institutional Development

Administrators are expected to set the direction for the institution as a whole or for their department as they align their work with that of the institution. In order to develop a vision that is grounded in that which can be projected about the future, this role requires strong skills in environmental scanning, listening to critical stakeholders, anticipating future conditions, and providing a mental model (Senge, 1994) that others find compelling. Kouzes and Posner describe this role as one with a kinesthetic feel as people are asked to move from one state of being to another to a new order. Skilled leaders empower others and encourage their movement in a desired and common direction to achieve agreed upon purposes. Stephen Covey calls on leaders to be pathfinders and to model that which they proclaim; trust in leaders is achieved when there is consistency of demonstrating both confidence in one's ability and decisions and competence shown through actions.

#### Mentors Facilitate Employee Development

In knowledge and talent rich organizations, a key role of administrators is to mobilize individual commitment of other employees via a mentoring relationship that requires a

Figure 1



mindset of servant-leader. According to Greenleaf, servant leadership implies that leaders primarily lead by serving others—employees, customers, and the community. Such service is realized through mentoring relationships that require good listening, honesty, empathy, and encouragement while challenging performance. Mentors set high standards of performance and provide ongoing assessment that leads to professional and personal growth of the mentee. Mentors provide a strong perspective, are professionally accessible to share relevant experiences and is willing to take significant risks to support the right type of advocacy for the mentee (*Overview of Mentoring, Personal Development Methodology, and Becoming a Self-Grower*).

### **Managers Ensure Institutional Integrity**

In keeping with the description offered by Warren Bennis, administrators strive to do things right themselves and assure that those responsible to them do so as well. Skills are applied to those things that require controls. Stephen Covey identifies three categories of things needing control: money (costs, information and time), structure (systems, processes, and inventory), and physical resources (facilities and tools). Application of these skills in an effective and efficient manner leads to an institution's integrity as there is evidence of functioning responsibly.

### **Deciders Provide Alignment**

Good administrators have a solid understanding of Harry Truman's sage words, "The buck stops here." In an increasingly complex environment, often fraught with competing stakeholder priorities, and usually compounded by limited resources, the ability to make sound decisions is crucial. If the course has been set through the visioning process and strategic planning, it is essential that decisions are made that result in alignment with priorities. George Weathersby identifies the need to make decisions that allocate scarce resources against an organization's objectives, the set priorities, and design work to achieve results. Administrators gain credibility and trust when they insist on good data for making decisions and are able to consistently demonstrate fairness in how decisions are made. Very skilled administrators who have honed this role are able to make the tough decisions (that may not be popular) but are respected for the strength demonstrated in making the decision while using strong analytical skills and assuring honesty and fairness.

### **Builders Expand Capacity**

The two skill sets most important to building both human and organizational capacity are those that pertain to ability to be a good team member, and having the expertise and

generosity of spirit to serve as consultant. Clearly most work cannot be done alone. Team membership has routinely come to be seen as one of the core competencies for college graduates as it is expected in most workplaces today as it leads to higher productivity, critical thinking, problem solving, social interaction, self esteem, etc. (*Cooperative Learning*). Proponents of Total Quality Management have repeatedly shown the benefits of teaming in the world of work. Ability to be a team member as well as to lead a team is critical for administrators if they are to model that which they claim to value in others. There are times when the role is not that of team member, but is instead that of expert consultant to the team. A firm understanding of the processes, behaviors, and tools associated with successful transformational change are critical to the tool set of a quality administrator if organizational capacity is to be expanded and realized (*Successful Institutional Change—The Human Dimension*).

### **Balance of Mastery and Ability to Move Between Roles**

Table 1 depicts the outcomes that can be anticipated when one of the roles is markedly deficient. Bolman and Deal offer four domains to leadership that are very similar to the five presented here for administrators. They argue that all leaders will have skills and abilities which are characteristic of one or two dimensions and may be exceptional in those; however, the more dynamic and effective leaders move among the four domains and tap into those behaviors and perspectives with some ease as the situations demand. Building this balance and supporting acquisition of the desired skills are the cornerstones of professional development for administrators. The consequences are too extreme when deficiencies in any of the areas are not addressed.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

One of the challenges historically existing within higher education is the chasm that can exist between administrators and faculty members. By way of very similar models, this module has attempted to convey the commonality of purpose of both groups. The five roles identified for quality administrators require very different skill sets and abilities. Most administrators will not automatically have proficiency in all five roles. However, because of requirements to move readily from one to another, having a good understanding of each role is critical as administrators engage in self assessment, develop their own growth plans, and as teams are formed that can work collaboratively and optimally.

Table 1

Role	Leader	Mentor	Manager	Decider	Builder	
Skills and Behaviors	Analyzes Interprets Visions Sets Direction Persuades Communicates	Welcomes New Information/Ideas Grows Continuously Listens Practices Honesty Keeps Confidences Displays Strength Problem Solves Assesses Keeps High Standards Takes Risks	Applies Resources Strategically: Money, Structure, and Physical Space  Holds Self and Others Accountable for Work	Aligns with Priorities Makes Data-based Decisions Analyzes Assesses Improves Quality Demonstrates Credibility, Honesty, Fairness, Courage, & Persistence	Works as Team Player Demonstrates Competence & Generosity Thinks about Systems Generates New Resources Leverages Existing Resources Forms External and Internal Partnerships	
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	EMPOWERMENT
	<del>Leader</del>	✓	✓	✓	✓	Insufficient Followership
	✓	<del>Mentor</del>	✓	✓	✓	Underdeveloped Staff for Achieving Goals
	✓	✓	<del>Manager</del>	✓	✓	Unrealized Goals Because Resources are not Provided or Managed
	✓	✓	✓	<del>Decider</del>	✓	Culture of Mistrust or Cynicism Because of Misaligned Decisions
	✓	✓	✓	✓	<del>Builder</del>	Weak or Failed Implementation; Lost Opportunity
						Resulting Condition

## References

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