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**Managerial Approaches in Academic Departments:  
Options for Agricultural Economics**

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## Managerial Approaches in Academic Departments: Options for Agricultural Economics

*"... the Professional Bureaucracy is a highly democratic structure ... not only do the professionals control their own work, but they also seek collective control of the administrative decisions that affect them ... full time administrators who wish to have any power at all in these structures must be certified members of the profession and preferably be elected by the professional operators, or at least appointed with their blessing." [Mintzberg, 1983].*

The organization of an academic unit such as a department of agricultural economics has a significant impact on the productivity and morale of faculty, staff and students. Although alternative organizational and managerial structures for businesses is of considerable concern within the contemporary management literature, very little has been written with regard to how these structures might apply to a department of agricultural economics.

The aim of this essay is to identify organizational and managerial paradigms<sup>1</sup> within the management literature, and then adapt and apply them to an academic department, using, as the case example, a department of agricultural economics. Despite the paucity of literature dealing specifically with academic organization, we believe that there is much to be learned from the literature dealing with managerial organization that could be adapted to the academic setting in which an agricultural economics department operates. Furthermore, it is our belief that an understanding of the managerial organization literature will help to better understand the behavior of faculty and non-faculty employees within academic units.

There have been only a few recent attempts by administrators or faculty in colleges of agriculture to discuss the management of academic organizations. Many administrators of academic departments would probably argue that they spend so much time administering their departments that they have little time to write about what it is they do. This is perhaps unfortunate in that ideas which work in one department that might be adapted to other departments are lost. To the extent that administrators of academic departments have written, efforts have been primarily directed toward the philosophy of administration, but not toward an understanding of academic organizations.

Middlebrook and Trail suggest a threefold role for a department chair, which they define as *academic, leadership, and administrative*.<sup>2</sup> Their central argument is that department chairs are often not well trained in performing administrative functions such as planning, budgeting, staffing and maintaining records. Middlebrook and Trail perhaps oversimplify the role of a department chair at most institutions, particularly academic departments in colleges of agriculture. We wonder where the administrative role ends and the academic (or) leadership role(s) begin(s) in matters such as staffing, but Middlebrook and Trail never make this clear.

Beattie is one agricultural economics administrator who published his ideas related specifically to the management of agricultural economics departments. Beattie was primarily concerned with giving advice to administrators of agricultural economics departments-- what to do and not to do. These rules comprise "ten commandments" for administrators of academic departments. In large measure, we agree with the commandments suggested by Beattie, and we believe that they may be useful to administrators of academic departments. Beattie's rules do not, however, constitute a paradigm for understanding the organization of academic units.

Connor discusses his philosophical position with respect to values that an administrator of a department of agricultural economics should possess. He places considerable emphasis on stressing the equal importance of teaching, research (basic and applied) and extension functions of a department. He clearly states what he believes are the activities by faculty members which administrators should highly value. Once again, we are in agreement with the essence of the Connor position on academics, but as was true in the Beattie paper, the Connor position paper is not an effort to model an academic organization.

Ball comes closest in modeling how an academic organization such as a department of agricultural economics might operate. He sees the administrator's role at the departmental level and above as service-oriented and subordinate to the needs of faculty and students. He envisions Universities as inverted pyramids, placing students at the top of the pyramid, and chief administrators at the bottom, and develops flow diagrams in support of his concept of a university structure. While Ball's ideas are certainly unique and worthy of discussion, Ball makes few, if any linkages to the contemporary managerial organization literature.

While we are in agreement with much (perhaps most) of what has been said about the philosophy of academic administration, our goal for this paper is somewhat different than the goals of other writers who have dealt with issues relating to academic administration. It would be a simple matter to write

yet another paper delineating our philosophy of administration in a Land Grant setting. However, in this paper we intend to limit the prescriptions outlining our values with respect to the philosophy of administration in a Land Grant University, and how department chairs *should* behave if they are to be well-liked by their faculty.

Instead, we have pursued a review of the contemporary literature in managerial organization. The cited literature in many respects represents the very foundation upon which contemporary thought in managerial organization in business is based. We have identified paradigms in this literature we believe are worthy of consideration by agricultural economists. We have not found an ideal administrative organization for an academic department. Rather, we believe that some of these paradigms from the contemporary management literature are useful in understanding alternative ways in which a department of agricultural economics might be organized. Our contribution is to illustrate how these paradigms might be adapted and applied within an agricultural economics department, using the concepts and terminology from the managerial organization literature.

### Roles for the Manager

What does the manager of an organization, public or private, *do*? There is no simple answer to this question. Farm management courses taught in agricultural economics have traditionally viewed the manager as the one who makes decisions with the explicit goal of maximizing profits, but there is no simple concept analogous to profits in an organization within the public sector. General management courses frequently argue that the role of a manager is to *plan, organize, coordinate* and *control*. Farm management texts often use similar vague terminology. According to Mintzberg (1975, 1979), these so-called functions of management "... tell little about how managers, including academic administrators, actually spend their time."<sup>3</sup> At best, these are vague objectives of management.

Mintzberg proposes as an alternative a list of specific roles of any manager within an organization. These are categorized into three *interpersonal roles* including figurehead, leader, or liaison; three *informational roles* including monitor, disseminator, or spokesman; and four *decision roles* involving entrepreneurship, disturbance handling, resource allocation, and negotiation. With the possible exception of entrepreneurship, these roles are equally applicable to an academic administrator.

Quinn distinguishes between six different types of organizations and then classifies most academic organizations as *professional bureaucracies*. Most academic departments have organizational structures unlike businesses that operate with a clearly defined chain-of-command and reporting responsibilities. Although the organization of a business is usually like a pyramid (with the chief administrator at the top, and workers controlled by the administrators at the bottom), academic administrators often describe the structure of their organizations as "inverse pyramids" much as Ball does, with the faculty at the top and the administrators serving the needs of--actually working for--the faculty.

Although faculty sometimes like to believe that they, not the administrators, control the activities of a department (consistent with Ball's inverted-pyramid vision of a University), administrators are not powerless. Academic administrators, by making promotion and tenure decisions (albeit often with the advice of faculty promotion and tenure committees) and influencing salaries, often can exert greater top-down control over the research, teaching and extension agenda and other activities of faculty, staff and students than they might care to admit.

But attempts to redirect faculty activities by academic administrators almost invariably involve highly sensitive issues dealing with matters such as approbation by peers, career goals and academic freedom. Otherwise sane and rational faculty become emotional when the issue of administrative control over how faculty spend their time is debated. To illustrate the sensitivity of the issue of administrative control over faculty, consider the outcry by faculty at Land Grant Universities (Beattie and Watts; Farrell; Smith; McDowell; Debertin and Infanger) in response to Schuh's call for greater control by academic administrators over the research and extension agenda pursued within Colleges of Agriculture.

### Evaluation of Organizational Goals: Academics versus Businesses

Clearly, there is greater emphasis in the managerial organization literature on the development of workable paradigms within a business setting than in public sector organization. For example, an issue of concern might be how to maintain a business environment that provides incentives for employee creativity while maintaining control and restricting activities of employees within the business to efforts that will generate profit for the firm. The primary goal of any for-profit business is clear: profit for the owner, or in the case of a publicly-held corporation, the shareholders. In most businesses, the value of the activities of the employees of a for-profit business can be largely evaluated on the basis to which each activity contributes to the profitability of

the firm. While there may be some concern within the business over secondary goals, such as environmental issues, even these concerns are often cast with the context of how, say, an improved image with regard to environmental issues might contribute to a positive public perception of the firm and ultimately lead to greater profit.

It goes without saying that academic organizations have quite different goals than profit-maximizing businesses. There is no direct analogy to the concept of academic freedom within a business firm. Furthermore, academic administrators sometimes appear to behave as if they have been successful in developing clear-cut measuring sticks analogous to profit (i.e. counts of refereed journal articles; evaluations of the quality of journals which faculty members publish and the like) but these measures are often imprecise (i.e. what constitutes a journal article) and by no means play the role that profit plays in a business firm.

There is often disagreement when attempts are made to define even the general goals of an academic unit such as a department or a college within a university. Many academic administrators, particularly above the departmental level, like to think in terms of the success of the organization at engaging in activities viewed as valuable by those who are responsible for the funding of the University. In Land Grant Universities, these include elected politicians such as state legislators and governors and those who influence the politicians. At the federal level, the key players are senators and representatives who are on the committees responsible for federal funds for agricultural research and extension.

Not surprisingly, many academic administrators value most those activities by faculty that will help them achieve political support for increased funding. These activities are not limited only to applied research and extension efforts aimed at practical problem-solving but can also include basic research (particularly if the administrator is able to convince the politicians that the basic research effort has enhanced the "image" and "national reputation" of the University).

A goal statement for a department of agricultural economics, in the best tradition of a service-oriented, clientele-concerned, Land Grant university might discuss the so-called *social contract* between the Land Grant university and the public. Included are value-laden phrases such as *to be of service to clientele groups, to solve important economic problems facing farmers and rural communities in (insert name of state), academic scholarship* and the like. Given the number, diversity, and disagreement about goals of academic departments, (particularly academic departments within *mission-oriented* colleges and schools of agriculture) it is not surprising that managerial



organization literature as applied to academic organizations is less complete than that which applies to a profit-maximizing business firm.

Furthermore, even if there is agreement on general goals to be pursued by a department, faculty members themselves often do not agree with regard to what the outputs of an academic department ought to be nor the measuring stick for outputs in order to achieve the desired goals. It is not surprising that there is also considerable disagreement among administrators about desired goals, outputs, and measuring sticks.

For example, if one general agreed-upon goal is academic scholarship, the output is a research publication, then the proposed measuring sticks for outputs are often couched in value-laden terms, which are difficult to develop a precise definition--such as the number of *quality* research articles published in the *good* journals.

If the agreed-upon goal is education of undergraduates, the output is classroom hours, but the measuring stick is *good* teaching often measured by a combination of formal student evaluations (the results of which are reported on some numeric scale that administrators like to believe that, by making numeric, is now somehow "value-free") or other more informal means.

Similarly, in extension programs the desired goal might be service to clientele in meeting their needs and solving their problems; the output might be contact hours with the clientele group; but the measuring stick might be a qualitative evaluation of the extent to which the extension program conducted by the employee is regarded as *innovative* [nowadays sometimes translated in agricultural economics to mean "takes advantage of new electronic technology for information dissemination], or by the extent to which the clientele leadership conveys favorable remarks about the work of the extension employee to the academic administrator.

Clearly, an academic department is unlike a profit-maximizing business firm with respect to general goals, specific outputs and evaluation criteria. However, we believe that there is much that academic administrators can learn from the managerial organization literature, and the paradigms developed for the business world can still provide a useful starting point for developing organizational paradigms within academics.

### The 7-S Framework

The 7-S framework, developed by Waterman, Peters and Phillips (WPP), is an organizational paradigm that has received a great deal of attention within

the management organization literature. WPP contend that a complete view of any organization<sup>4</sup> is far more than the boxes and arrows tracing reporting lines and overall responsibilities of employees. The 7-S Framework is their attempt to go beyond the usual organizational chart in describing interactions among variables which determine the success or failure of the organization. This paradigm (or "framework for organization change," as they sometimes label it) suggests that a complete view of any organization consists of an interaction of seven factors-- *Structure, Strategy, Systems, Style, Staff, Skills* and *Subordinate goals*.

This paradigm, as illustrated in Figure 1, embodies three important ideas: First, each of the seven S-factors influence change within an organization. Second, the S-factors governing change are intertwined, such that it is very difficult to alter one S-factor without affecting other S-factors in some way.<sup>5</sup> Thus, it is difficult to discuss one of the S-factors within the context of the organization of an agricultural economics department independent of its linkages to other S-factors. Third, the shape of the paradigm is significant, as it has no starting (or ending) point or implied hierarchy. There is no easy way to identify a single driving-force S-factor for effecting all changes, or even effecting particular changes at particular times.

## Structure

The Waterman, Peters and Phillips' (WPP) concept of an organizational *Structure* is applicable both in a business and an academic setting. WPP suggest that structure depicts the essence of the intended, ideal organization. They tell the story of a Belgian surrealist who painted a series of pipes titled *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*: this is not a pipe, "the picture of a thing is not a thing." In the same way, the structure is not the organization. Still, when an organization such as an academic department is reorganized, it is restructured. Furthermore, although it might not be possible to develop an structure for an agricultural economics department that would be ideal in all states and in all economic and political settings, some structures in an academic setting are clearly more feasible than others. Clearly, the ideal structure for an agricultural economics department is not a pyramid, headed by a leader who tells faculty which research topics to pursue and how to go about their specific teaching tasks.

But if the ideal structure of an academic organization is not a pyramid, is then the ideal structure, as Ball suggests, the inverted pyramid? An inverted pyramid might suggest a structure in which every decision is made on the basis of a vote of the faculty, and the departmental policies and procedures are only those supported by the majority of the faculty. In such an organization, the

administrator's only role is to call the faculty together to vote when issues requiring a decision arise, and then implement the policy supported by the simple majority.

In contrast with the WPP 7-S framework, Pfeffer views an organization *primarily* as a *political* entity. He refers to an administrative structure in which everyone has an equal voice in every decision as an *unsegmented decision structure*, whereas, the traditional pyramid is called a *top-down decision structure*. We contend, however, that an optimal structure for an academic organization such as an agricultural economics department lies somewhere between the two extremes proposed by Pfeffer.

Faculty might like to think that they operate (or would like to operate) within an unsegmented decision structure. Within such a decision structure, the role of the administrator is merely to count votes when an important issue needs to be decided. Otherwise the administrator serves faculty members by doing necessary work that faculty members would find uninteresting. Academic administrators in an unsegmented decision structure play a role subordinate to the faculty and cater to their needs, much as Ball envisions as optimal.

Yet, we believe that many attempts at organizing a department consistent with principles embodied in democratic idealism--in which faculty members frequently vote on issues to be decided and every faculty member is given an equal vote-- will fall under their own weight. This is because faculty do not necessarily always agree that every individual should have an equal say on every issue. Furthermore, some employees are more important to the success of an academic department than other employees. Clearly, on many issues, staff other than faculty would not participate. For example, only faculty generally would vote on matters of promotion and tenure. If only certain employees influence each decision, then, again using Pfeffer's terminology, the administrative structure is *partially unsegmented*.

Nearly every university, through regulation and unwritten rules, attempts to give tenured faculty more say on major issues than untenured faculty. One of the privileges accorded a tenured full professor in most universities is the right to have influence over important departmental policies that goes beyond that accorded to an untenured faculty member, or even a tenured faculty member at a lower academic rank. In agricultural economics departments, it would be surprising if a senior professor who was an AAEA fellow did not have more to say about departmental policies than an untenured assistant professor. To the extent that academic rank and peer recognition

determine the extent to which a faculty member is able to influence departmental policy, Pfeffer would label this a *hierarchical decision structure*.

Pfeffer also defines a *top-down decision structure* as one in which there is a clear leader and chain of command. This structure occasionally works in a business setting, but seldom survives for long in academic departments. A few agricultural economics departments are primarily hierarchical in structure, with the most senior full professors (those with "national reputations") making the major decisions. A few departments nearly fulfill the elements of democratic idealism embodied in an unsegmented decision structure. But most departments fall somewhere between the hierarchical structure and the unsegmented structures. Political decisionmaking paradigms, such as those proposed by Pfeffer, may dominate when declining state and federal funding intensifies competition for funds among universities, or even among academic departments within universities.

### Strategy and its Formation

Chandler (1962) was among the first to point out that structure follows strategy, more precisely that a strategy of diversity forces a decentralized structure. Corporate businesses pay close attention to the linkages between strategy and structure. Strategy for a corporate business is defined by WPP to mean those actions that a company plans in response to or anticipation of changes in its external environment-- its customers, its competitors.

The *process* of strategy formation in a university setting, particularly within agricultural economics departments, has until recently received only limited attention. But agricultural economists frequently engage in strategy formation. WPP might categorize debate over the role of the Land Grant university and concern for a *mission-oriented raison d'être* as strategy formation in an academic setting.

Hardy, Langley, Mintzberg, and Rose (HLMR) suggest that both the self interests of individual employees and the common interests of all employees within an organization play a roles in strategy formulation. Figure 2 depicts our adaptation to a department of agricultural economics of strategy formulation as envisioned by HLMR.

An agricultural economics department (and most other academic departments within colleges of agriculture) are influenced by two major forces. *Socioeconomic trends* within the particular state frequently provide the overall focus of a department's program. Socioeconomic trends important in shaping

agricultural economics programs include issues related to declining numbers of commercial farms; rural development and quality of life issues for rural residents, and major trends in the production and consumption of important commodities.

Our adaptation also recognizes the importance of *students* within a university setting, consistent with Ball's ideas. Students are broadly defined to include all consumers of the educational product produced by the department not only undergraduates and graduate students, but also adults.

The portion of Figure 2 labeled *professional judgement* represents the realm of the faculty member. Faculty members view the public as potential users of their information product. Self interests of individual faculty members are largely influenced by a desire for approval by the faculty member's peers. Individual faculty members pursue strategies designed to elicit peer approval. Approbation by peers leads to professional (and perhaps financial) rewards to the individual faculty member.

Collective choice within an agricultural economics department involves both individual self-interest and the collective interests of the faculty. Collegiality (decisions primarily consensus among groups of faculty) is more likely when there is a commonly accepted ideology or mission. This model implies that a department of agricultural economics should be more than merely the collection of individuals pursuing their own self-interests in pursuit of approval by peers. It is here that collegial paradigms become important. A collegial paradigm suggests that the collegiality of the faculty and staff within the organization is at least as important as peer recognition of individual faculty members' work in affecting the department's ranking and reputation.

Furthermore, it is clear from this model that personal goals of individual faculty members must mesh with the collective goals of the department. For example, if the desire is to improve the reputation of the department by making greater contributions to the refereed journals, this collective goal must be consistent with faculty members' individual career goals. Conversely, if the collective goal for the department to achieve a stronger reputation for being able to solve practical problems for farmers within the state, this collective goal must be consistent with individual faculty members' desires to seek peer-appraisal through successful attempts at solving problems for farmers.

The departmental administrator forms liaisons between the department and the various groups represented at the top of Figure 2 (the component labeled *administrative fiat*). These groups include both agribusinesses and other businesses, particularly those catering to the needs of rural residents; the public as taxpayers and consumers; federal, state, and local government officials;

foundations and private individuals who are potential donors for the support of departmental programs; and the various commodity groups and issue-oriented farm organizations. Collectively, liaisons between the departmental administrator and these groups represent the external relations component of the administrator's position.

Because many of the goals of an academic organization tend to be diffuse and intangible, the strategy formulation process in an academic setting frequently differs considerably from strategy formulation in business. Strategic decisions involving collective choice traditionally have been associated with decisionmaking by consensus. More recently, collective decisions are made by participants individually seeking to serve their own self-interests.

Schuh argued that the narrowing of research focus within colleges of agriculture roughly coincided with the increasing emphasis by college of agriculture and university administrators for quantitative evidence of research productivity. Faculty members will, over time, adapt to the perceived reward system in place, and new hirings will be faculty members judged to have skills needed to succeed under the reward system. If Schuh's arguments about the narrowing of research focus are correct, this may partially explain why many faculty and administrators within agricultural colleges have reduced their emphasis on public-service activities in favor of a more narrowly-defined mission.

## Systems

WPP define *Systems* as "*all the procedures, formal and informal, that make the organization go [function], day by day and year by year.*" Within an agricultural economics department, systems include a variety of items including research budgeting, ways of covering teaching assignments, computer and word processing support systems, office assignment procedures, and the assignment of graduate students.

WPP claim that to understand how an organization really gets things done, one needs to look at the systems. This claim is supported by evidence from departments of agricultural economics. In large measure, the success and reputation of an agricultural economics department hinges on the effectiveness of these internal systems. To disrupt an organization without superimposed restructuring, try changing the systems. Anyone who has been involved in changing a graduate student assignment system surely can attest to the validity of this contention.

Agricultural economics departments vary considerably with respect to their systems. Much of the variation is in the type of non-faculty employees hired. For example, a few departments rely heavily on full-time masters'-level research associates. Other departments rely on graduate students as teachers in undergraduate courses, leaving the faculty to primarily conduct research, direct graduate students and teach graduate-level courses. There is also considerable variation among departments in skills, education and mix of secretaries, computer programmers and other non-faculty support personnel that are employed.

Some departments see their primary role as one of providing first-tier undergraduate instruction, and their systems are consistent with that goal. Other departments view scholarly research in the refereed journals as the primary goal, and design their systems consistent with the effort needed to achieve this end. Still other departments view their primary role as that of solving the important problems faced by farmers in their state, and faculty allocate most of their time to research and extension activities aimed at fulfilling these needs. Academic administrators frequently have considerable influence with respect to how these roles are prioritized.

Very few departments are consistently successful at simultaneously fulfilling all of these aforementioned roles at the "first tier" level. Although agricultural economics departments are seldom successful at being "all things to all people," the systems that are put in place need to be consistent with the role or roles the department is attempting to fulfill. Hildreth has suggested that one of the strengths of the Land Grant system lies in the fact that departments within colleges of agriculture in the Land Grant universities each view their mission differently: that is, all agricultural economics departments are not all equally proficient at doing all things and this diversity in mission must be viewed as a strength, rather than a weakness.

## Style

WPP refer to *Style* as the basic personality of the organization's management and, more importantly, how the manager (in an academic department, the administrator) chooses to allocate administrative time. One need only look at the administrators of agricultural economics departments to conclude that no single style (set of personality traits) dominates, and, while style differs from one administrator to another, there are many different styles that appear to be equally effective (or perhaps ineffective).

Mintzberg (1975) emphasized that good (and poor) managers do not spend their time in neat, compartmentalized planning, motivating,

implementing and controlling modes of classical management theory. Rather, for both good and poor managers, most of their days organizationally appear to be a mess. Administrators of departments of agricultural economics generally do not allocate specific portions of their work day, nor do they allocate lengthier periods of time specifically devoted to planning.

In most instances, the future is determined by the outcomes of a series of specific decisions which are each made individually at separate points over the time horizon. Examples of these decisions include selection among candidates for specific faculty positions, and decisions regarding who among the faculty is to receive promotion and tenure. In many instances, the administrator may not even be consciously aware of the fact that the series of individual decisions (many of which, when taken individually, appear to be relatively inconsequential) eventually comprise the long-run strategy for the department.

Periodically, faculty and administrators become concerned that not enough effort is devoted specifically to defining departmental goals and objectives and other long-run planning activities. Guilt eventually leads departmental administrators to schedule faculty time for general long-run planning sessions to insure that faculty members have "input" in terms of departmental direction. Then major decisions are often made that are inconsistent with the long-run plan.

If Mintzberg's ideas are applied to academic management, then neither administrators nor faculty members need feel guilty about allocating too little time to long-run planning. Rather, Mintzberg's ideas indicate that a series of correct decisions made over a long period of time based on the best available information will yield a more nearly optimal strategy for the department than would a strategy based on rigidly following a carefully constructed long-run plan. For example, in many agricultural economics departments, hiring decisions are frequently made which are quite different from what was envisioned in faculty meetings devoted to long-run planning, even inconsistent with job descriptions hammered out after much compromise and debate. Once the pool of applicants and specific hiring possibilities become known, sticking to the long-run plan sometimes forces the department to forgo opportunities not envisioned within the planning session.<sup>6</sup>

Style thus becomes intertwined with Strategy, as HLMR suggested. One implication from the management literature is that agricultural economics administrators should not be embarrassed about allocating most of their time to specific decisions viewed as critical at the moment. Rather, An effective administrator seemingly can provide effective leadership with regard to the overall direction of a program if each of the series of individual decisions (which



eventually determine the success and reputation of the department in the long run) is appropriate based on best available information at the time.

## Staff

Within the 7-S framework, WPP use the term *Staff* to refer to all the people in an organization. Staff and systems are intertwined. Within an agricultural economics department, staff are divided into faculty, non-faculty support personnel such as secretaries and computer programmers, graduate students (who are often part-time departmental employees) and perhaps other categories such as full-time non-faculty research or teaching associates. WPP point out that staffing requires both a consideration of the hard end of the spectrum-- including pay scales, promotion and appraisal systems, educational and training programs-- and the soft end-- meaning morale, attitudes, motivation and behavior.

Obviously, decisions involving the employees of an agricultural economics department can result in controversy. Major controversies arise over the definition of faculty positions. These controversies embody differences in opinions among faculty members with respect to the overall roles of the department. Some departments spend little time on the specifics of position definition. They advertise a position for "the best agricultural economist they can find." In reality, however, they are not merely seeking the best agricultural economist. Rather they are seeking the best agricultural economist they can find who has a specific set of skills consistent with how the department has defined and prioritized its roles.

Some administrators strongly believe in the pre-eminence of the right organizational structure in staffing decisions. As WPP note, at one extreme are those who argue, "get the structure 'right' and the people will fit". At the other extreme are those who argue, "the right people can make any organizational structure work." But WPP also suggest that neither view is entirely correct. People do matter, but staff is only one of several variables which must be considered when making changes within an academic department.

Conflict among faculty can arise over issues such as the allocation of funds to major categories such as faculty salaries, positions for non-faculty personnel, and the amount and number of stipends for graduate students. But the most controversial decision usually involves the selection of a chief administrator-- the head or chair. During the 1980s, administrators of agricultural economics departments seldom have been hired without considerable controversy and a lengthy search procedure.

Sometimes, the applicant for the position who has the strongest national reputation as a scholar becomes the administrator. These administrators generally delegate considerable authority to subordinates, perhaps non-faculty staff, who are responsible for day-to-day decisions regarding the department. This is of necessity, in part to free the administrator's time to maintain a reputation for academic scholarship. These administrators generally are most effective in hierarchical or top-down decision structures.

In other instances a key element in administrative selection is to find an administrator that is well-liked as a person by nearly all of the faculty. Academic credentials as a scholar and the perceived national reputation of the individual are comparatively unimportant in the selection process. In addition to being well-liked, the administrator should be efficient at doing the paperwork and other administrative chores viewed as uninteresting by the faculty.

In many of these departments, the senior faculty make key decisions, who routinely overrule the administrator as they feel is warranted. Or, the administrator, recognizing that he is in the position because of support by key senior faculty members, simply carries out the wishes of the senior faculty. In other departments, important decisions are based upon vote or consensus, with the administrator primarily tallying votes at faculty meetings. These administrators can be found in departments embodying either the elements of a hierarchical decision structure or the unsegmented decision structure, but not the top-down decision structure.

Sometimes, departments attempt to find a chair that is both well-liked as a person and has a significant national reputation as a scholar. But those faculty with national reputations for scholarship seldom are willing accept administrative duties if in so doing they must become subservient to faculty whom they feel are inferior as scholars. The position of chair or head of a department is attractive to a senior scholar in part because of the leadership responsibilities and control over funding allocations for departmental research and teaching and extension activities. Nationally-recognized scholars might have difficulty seeing themselves in a subservient, service-oriented, administrative role as suggested by Ball. Some faculty might have difficulty supporting an administrative candidate who places *too much* emphasis on leadership and program changes designed to reshape the academic research, teaching and extension agenda.

## Skills

WPP discussed *Skills* primarily from a business perspective, and their discussion has limited application to academic departments. Within an agricultural economics department, *Skills* might be better defined using a criteria such as faculty education-- theoretical or applied; whether or not some faculty members hold graduate degrees outside of agricultural economics such as in economics, mathematics, statistics, or business; specific quantitative and oral and written communication skills; a business school versus an agricultural school perspective, and others.

Within academics, what counts most are not skills defined according to specific input criteria such as this list, but rather the perceived scholarly reputation of the individual faculty members within their respective interest areas and across research, teaching and extension activities. An exhaustive treatment of skills as they might vary among academic units could allow for a more thorough comparison of the characteristics of academic departments, perhaps providing a better perspective than any of the other six variables in the 7-S framework.

This element of the model suggests that while collegiality is important, but it still is the reputations of the individual faculty members in large measure determine the reputation(s) of an academic department as a whole. It would be very difficult for a department of agricultural economics to be unsuccessful if individual faculty members are widely regarded as "first tier" within their respective areas by their peers, regardless of the organizational structure under which the department as a whole operates or other constraints and limitations.

An agricultural economics department will have a great deal of difficulty if it establishes a role priority inconsistent with the skills of its employees. The priorities of a department of agricultural economics department must be consistent with the existing set of faculty skills and the career objectives of existing faculty at any particular point in time. Without new faculty, setting departmental priorities in a manner inconsistent with existing faculty skills, special talents, interests and career goals is very difficult.

Suppose that an administrator wishes to change departmental priorities--for example, to encourage faculty to place increased emphasis on writing for the refereed journals. The administrator might attempt to accomplish this by ensuring that those faculty who publish refereed journal articles receive the largest pay increases. But even with substantial incentives, the administrator should not expect to see major increases in refereed journal article output overnight. Changing departmental priorities (by attempting to

alter, through the incentive system, individual faculty member's priorities) is at best a long-run proposition.

The administrator who agrees with Schuh's arguments--those emphasizing the need for more mission-oriented work aimed at practical problem solving and a de-emphasis on writing primarily for academic peers--would face an equally arduous task in attempting to revamp departmental priorities in departments that have achieved considerable success in publishing scientific articles in refereed journals. Faculty of many agricultural economics departments have as explicit career goals recognition by their peers through the scholarly journals. These same faculty would be unhappy working under a reward system that placed little emphasis on refereed journal articles as output and primarily catered to faculty who are highly successful at solving practical problems faced by farmers and other clientele groups.

It is not our intent to get into the middle of the debate articulated by Schuh, and Beattie and Watts--that is, to argue that one of these views about how departmental priorities should be regarded as the "correct" view. Rather, we only wish to suggest that administrative attempts to establish new priorities, however reworked, is a difficult task that only can be accomplished over a very long period of time.

### Superordinate Goals

*Superordinate Goals* are the "... guiding concepts -- a set of values and aspirations, often unwritten, that go beyond the conventional ... objectives." WPP state that "*unlike the other six S's, superordinate goals don't seem to be present in all, or even most, organizations. They are, however, evident in most of the superior performers.*" From this it follows, then, that agricultural economics departments and agricultural colleges should be "superior performers," i.e., to the extent that fidelity to research, teaching and extension missions has been preserved. That, of course, is a subject of considerable recent discussion among agricultural economists. The superordinate goals of a department are really the roles the department has defined for itself and the priorities placed on each of these role.

Although departmental administrators may believe that they have much to say about how roles of academic departments are defined and ranked, there are numerous constraints on administrative control at the departmental level over these roles:

*University-driven* constraints are those arising from university regulation or policy which encourage faculty members to engage in certain kinds of activities and limit other kinds of activities. For example, promotion and

tenure processes at the University level often encourage faculty members to allocate more time toward publishing in refereed journals than might otherwise be the case.

*Peer-driven* constraints are those which encourage faculty members to specifically engage in those activities that will enhance their reputations with their peers. In many instances, the peer-driven and the university-driven constraints encourage the same kinds of activities.

*Student-driven* constraints act to encourage faculty to be good or excellent classroom teachers. No faculty member wants a reputation among students as a poor teacher, but considerable variation among departments can be found in emphasis on and the amount of effort devoted to improving teaching.

*Clientele-driven* constraints act to encourage faculty to engage in research and extension problem-solving activities that will be of benefit to farmers or other clientele within the state.

The departmental administrator may not necessarily view the University-, peer-, student-, and clientele-driven constraints as burdensome. But neither can the departmental administrator feel free to define and prioritize roles as if these constraints did not exist. Understanding the relative importance of each of these constraints can enable the departmental administrator and the faculty to better determine the superordinate goals and prioritize roles for the department.

### Concluding Comments

Despite a limited emphasis on academic organization, the managerial organization literature contains considerable information relevant to a department of agricultural economics. The 7-S framework is particularly applicable to the organization of agricultural economics.

Much of the current debate surrounding the need for more mission-oriented work aimed at practical problem solving for clientele, is, using the 7-S paradigm, an example of debate over the determination of the superordinate goals of an organization. Who is responsible for determining the superordinate goals? Administrators? Faculty members? Both? In a profit-maximizing business, the major superordinate goal is inherent. In the case of an academic organization, there can be a number of different superordinate goals, and conflict can arise over and the appropriate roles of

administrators versus faculty members in the definition and prioritization of superordinate goals.

If there is disagreement about superordinate goals, there seldom can be agreement with regard to the strategy to be pursued or the needed structure. The specific strategies implemented within an agricultural economics department need to be consistent with the prioritized superordinate goals. For example, if the primary agreed-upon superordinate goal is problem-solving service to clientele then it is important that a department pursue as a strategy rewarding faculty members (through promotion, tenure, salary increases and access to support services) who achieve this goal. If the primary agreed-upon superordinate goal is furthering scientific knowledge within the discipline, then the reward system should emphasize publication in refereed journals and other activities which enhance the reputation of the faculty member among peers.

Since there is often disagreement about prioritizing superordinate goals, it is not surprising that faculty frequently find themselves in a situation where they have received mixed signals with respect to optimal strategy (career path). An illustration is the faculty member who has done an excellent job with respect to helping farmers solve problems, or who has an excellent reputation teaching undergraduates, but has published very little in refereed journals. This faculty member may have received very positive administrative signals in the form of large pay increases. However, if this faculty member comes up for promotion and tenure in a university which places great emphasis on refereed research, he or she will probably face difficulties.

The diversity of structures among agricultural economics departments suggests that there is no single optimal structure for a departmental organization. It is widely believed that a top-down structure headed by a dictatorial leader is not optimal. But neither is an unsegmented structure in which issues large and small are decided through votes at a faculty meeting. If all faculty members have an equal voice on every issue, as would be the case if every issue were voted upon in a faculty meeting, then promotion systems would not be needed. Discrimination based on abilities and skills (as embodied in a promotion and tenure system) is the essence of academics. Clearly, the optimal structure lies between the two extremes.

The style of the administrator is closely intertwined with the structure under which the administrator operates. Clearly, an autocratic administrator would be an inappropriate leader for a department with an unsegmented decision structure. Conversely, an administrator who believed that every faculty member ought to have an equal say on every issue would be inappropriate for a department operating under a hierarchical decision structure.

The staff of a department (both faculty and non-faculty) provide the skills needed to achieve the superordinate goals. In the case of faculty, upgrading or changing skills to conform to a reprioritized set of superordinate goals may not be possible without new hirings. The superordinate goals of a department are in essence a product of the faculty and non-faculty employees of the department.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Models in the contemporary business management literature are evolving rapidly and are becoming increasingly formalized. However, as will be apparent in this paper, these models generally are not as objective with respect to explaining the behavior of managers nor as detailed as those ordinarily used by economics researchers. As economists using such models, we might be more comfortable with the label "paradigm," rather than "model."

<sup>2</sup> We wonder why Middlebrook and Trail did not simply define a twofold role of *academic leadership, and administrative*, since the leadership of the department chairs is clearly in the academic realm.

<sup>3</sup> There is no way to summarize Mintzberg's analysis without introducing some oversimplifications. Accordingly, those interested in further applications of his model should study his 1975, 1979 and 1983 articles.

<sup>4</sup> WPP contend that any organization is effective, otherwise it is a *disorganization*.

<sup>5</sup> WPP point out that approximately 90 percent of all strategies don't work. They estimate that such failure largely results from inattention to the other S-factors. We see no reason why their estimate does not apply to strategies in academic organizations including agricultural economics departments.

<sup>6</sup> In academic departments long-run plans need to be more nearly cast in Jello, rather than in concrete. A good long-run plan is not something that should be followed irrespective of how events develop, but rather should be modified as events develop and new information becomes available.





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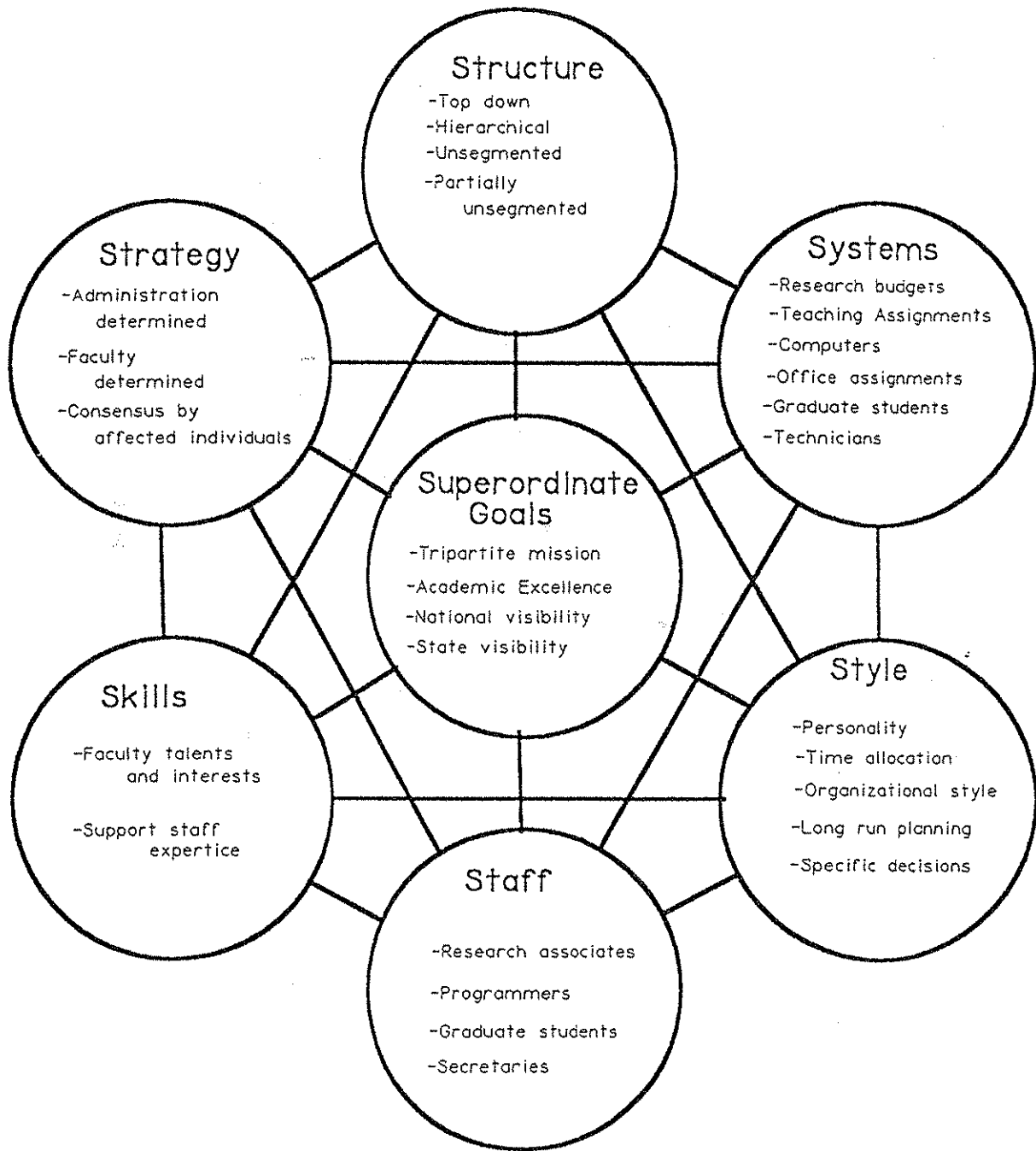


Figure 1. The 7-S Framework in Agricultural College Academic Units

Source: Adapted from Waterman, Peters and Phillips

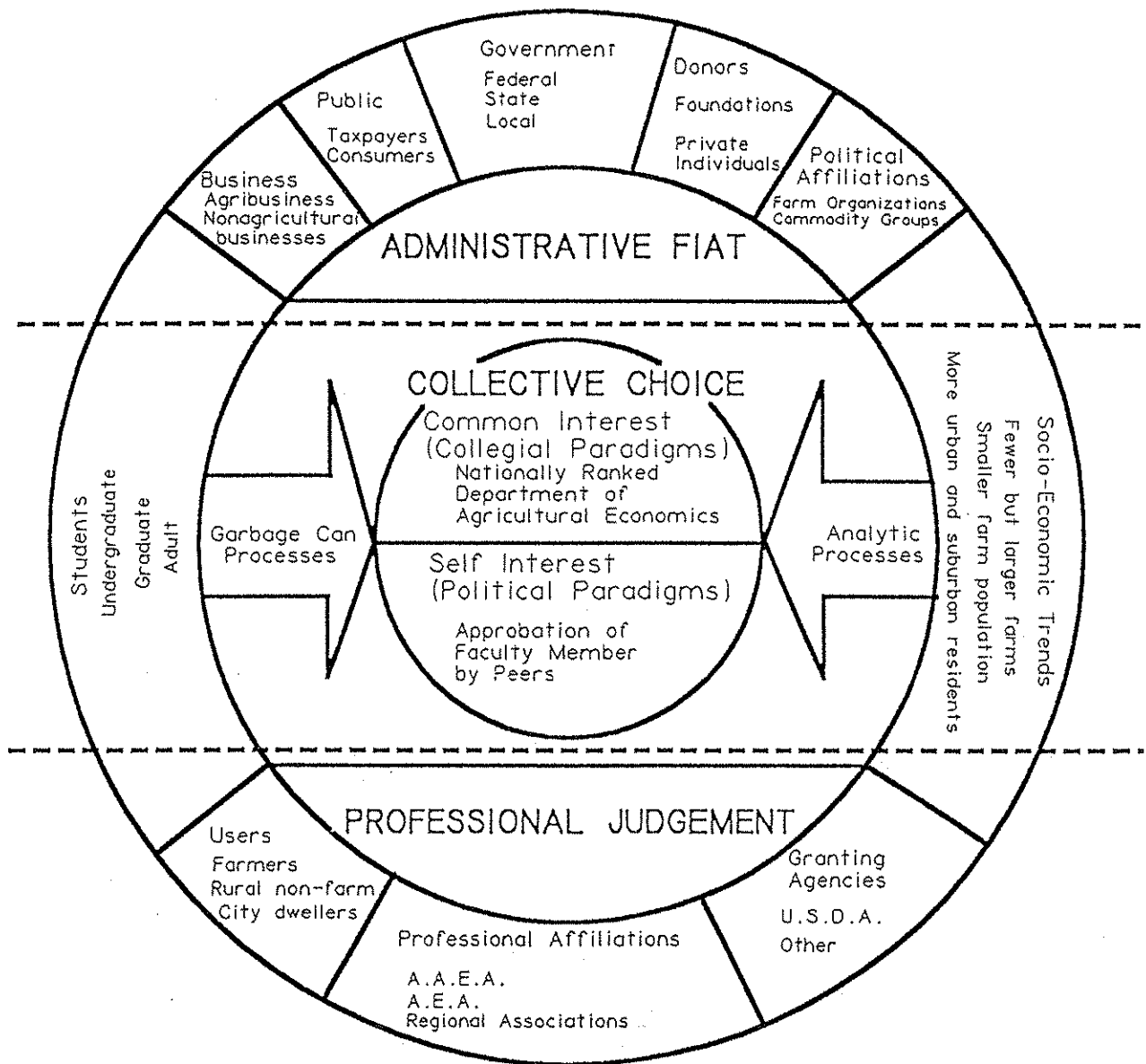


Figure 2. Strategy Formulation in a Department of Agricultural Economics

Source: Adapted from Hardy, Langley, Mintzberg and Rose