Event: Faculty APOs/Assistant Deans Group
Date: 03DEC15
Led by: Edith Finczak (Director, Academic Budget & Planning, Office of the Provost)
Anne Bailey, Amy Dambrowitz
Presentation: ISP Consult Slides, including update on themes
Number attending: 21
Scribe: Lindsay Baranowski/Amy Dambrowitz

Summary

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<th>Themes</th>
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<td>- Lack of alignment of financial functions and financial administrator roles between faculties leads to redundant problem-solving (each unit creating a unique solution to a shared/universal problem)</td>
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<td>- Lack of alignment of financial functions and financial administrator roles between faculties limits career progression and movement of administrators between units</td>
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<th>Thought Provokers</th>
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<td>- A two-year probationary period is a major impediment to APOs applying for new roles (and not aligned with similar roles outside the university)</td>
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<th>Tension to Drive Positive Change</th>
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<th>Strategies</th>
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<td>- Support secondment as a mechanism to create cohesive culture, encourage career development</td>
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<td>- Create financial working groups with the authority to identify and implement financial best practices across the university community</td>
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Introduction from the Chair: There will be a single plan, not two (unlike Discover (strategic) and Deliver (academic), which were separate. This is your opportunity for input before the creation of the first draft

Questions to Consider
  Question 1: How can we enable and enrich the intellectual, professional and personal development of staff members?
  Question 2: How can we improve staff mobility within the university and create more opportunities for career progression to the benefit of both the individual and the university?

There is little movement of administrators between positions (mat leaves/secondments) in the university business culture – this is a missed learning opportunity and likely an unintentional side-effect of faculty members’ immobility

Possible causes:
  - Inconsistency of classifications between units (failure to align = different pay structure)
- Extended probation period for APOs (2 years) means people are unwilling to try a new role.
- Lack of enticements to move has led to cultural resistance. It’s hard to get internal applicants for positions.
- Inconsistent cultures and operations between units inhibit movement.
- There is little training available to those who accept secondments.

The UofA is also missing an internal succession policy. Need to mentor people to move up. In many units, secondments are actually discouraged (because they leave holes/lack of institutional memory for academic administrators).

If the UofA wants to create a culture of shared knowledge and experience, the university needs to actively encourage cross-unit/faculty groups to come up with solutions for organization. The leadership team should encourage and support collaboration among strong performers – encourage building of relationships and understanding across campus.

It’s about culture, people are apprehensive to apply for a secondment as it might damage their relationship with the current unit/supervisor. Also, many new positions are temporary (too high risk).

Movement between jobs is not attractive to applicants. We are not reducing the risk associated with changing positions.

We are not building redundancy into our teams. If people leave (even temporarily), there isn’t sufficient spare capacity to fill the hole they leave. APOs provide continuity with changes in leadership.

APOs are not valued like professors, yet they have key professional skills and are completing essential tasks that faculty members should not be asked to do. When budget cuts are made, the reduced staff members are expected to provide the same services levels.

- Us vs. Them language is unproductive: APOs add to the diversity of expertise and provide unity by holding the units together.

- Question posed: What kind of strategies can we build into the plan that combine diversity of expertise and works against us vs. them culture (both academic vs. admin and central admin. vs. rest of institution)?

The UofA does not have a structured finance community. This means that financial professionals don’t have clear career progression, that there is a divide between financial generalists (in faculties) and financial specialists (centrally)/ An overall financial authority would help level the playing field.

The APO development fund is underfunded and distributed on first-come first-served principles – not effective use of a limited resource.

- Question posed: Would you suggest a dual report for financial officers?
  - Answer: No. An overarching plan, career progression/pathways.

There is a lack of institutional leadership in terms of how we act in finance areas, and few opportunities to create unified mechanisms for financial management.
- Data privacy is often cited as a reason to prevent faculties from sharing their data management strategies or the methods are dismissed as shadow systems; this results in continual reinvention of methods
- Attempts to share best practice are often actively blocked, discouraging people from taking roles of broader institutional leadership
- Working groups will be given no authority to enact the changes they propose, and do not see success for their efforts. Consultation/participation feels symbolic only.

- Question posed: Is this a question of transparency?
  - Not just transparency, actually comes down to accountability and expectations.

In smaller units where we don’t have interchangeability, financial APO feels like institutional memory of the unit, so moving leaves a void and discourages movement. Partial secondments would allow appropriate support of the original unit.

- Comes back to bench strength & succession planning.
  - Good succession planning requires you to pay for some redundancy while people acquire skills.
  - Coordination between units, and consistent basic job functions would reduce the need for redundancy, as those who moved would only need to learn the details of the unit, and not the basic job functions: It’s more about operational consistency, how we do business.