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Faculty Promotions: An Analysis Of Central Administrative Control

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Very little significant research has been conducted on the university as an organized activity. This study helps to fill some of this void. The concept of central administrative control is used as a framework to empirically analyze faculty promotion policies and practices.

The universities of today are recognized as extremely important organizations in our society. Faculty members conduct significant research which advances knowledge in their particular fields of study. For instance, in the management departments of our universities, professors devote most of their research efforts to developing knowledge and insights into industrial organizations. In a few cases these professors have also researched hospital, government, and military organizations. They have not bothered to take an introspective analysis of the university itself as a functioning organization.¹

This study was undertaken to describe and analyze one phase of the university as an organized activity — the faculty promotion process. The analysis utilized the administrative concept of central administrative control. Control is simply defined as making sure things go according to plan and becomes especially important in large decentralized organizations. In these situations some degree of central control over organizational participants becomes necessary to achieve coordination and a unity of purpose. In fact, effective personnel controls may be the most important re-

¹In his recent editorial comment on "Can Deans Be Taught Management Principles?" Stanley Vance stated that "meaningful literature on these and related topics is very inconspicuous. What little commentary is available is generally in the form of empty exhortations, pedantic nonsense, or vitriolic diatribes. There seems to be a real need for sensible and scientific analysis . . ." *Academy of Management Journal*, X, No. 3 (Sept., 1967), 218.

quirement for organizational success.² Such controls do not imply strict bureaucratic standards and rules such as are found in the budgeting process but rather are based on effective personnel policies and practices.

In academic administration the specific concepts of major and executive control seem to be most applicable. In industrial organizations such as General Motors, major control is the line of authority running from the stockholders to the directors to two major committees chosen by the directors. Executive control rests with the central administrator who acts within the framework laid down by major control.³ The analogy of the university faculty members serving as major control and the central administration as executive control could be made. In terms of academic administration, this would imply that the faculty members participate in or even dictate central personnel policies. However, executive control would be dependent on central administration to see these policies carried out in practice.

With this reasoning serving as a foundation, the following model served as a framework for analysis of central control over faculty promotions:

1. The goals of the university should become integrated into a well established promotion policy. This policy becomes the norm or standard for the following:

- a. faculties' performance
- b. decentral policies
- c. promotion practices
- d. control decisions.

2. The promotion policies should be understood and accepted by all the participants in the university.

3. Finally, if feedback indicates that the university standards are not in accordance with performance, then a control decision must be made. Such a control decision may infer two types of action:

- a. The decision may be made to reexamine the present standards.
- b. Organizational sanctions may be applied to maintain present standards.

²For example, in a specialized book on management controls, Peter Drucker declared, "Employment selection and promotion decisions are the real controls. In the employment selection an institution decides what kind of people it wants altogether. In the promotion decisions it makes operational its true and actual values and its real performance standards." "Controls, Control and Management," *Management Controls*, ed. Charles Bonini, Robert Jaedicke, and Harvey Wagner (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 295.

³Ernest Dale, "Contributions to Administration by Alfred P. Sloan, Jr., and GM," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1, No. 1 (June, 1956), 42.

THE METHOD USED IN THE INVESTIGATION

The study was essentially designed to comply with the suggestion of Thomas R. McConnell, a noted scholar of university administration. He states that the research needed most at this time is descriptive and analytical, rather than evaluative or experimental.⁴

To obtain information for the analysis a confidential questionnaire survey was made of a stratified sample drawn from 47 state universities which contained 10,000 or more students and an A.A.C.S.B. accredited college of business. The business college was utilized because it was felt to be appropriate and interesting to a study of this nature.⁵

The central administration stratum of the sample contained a census of the population's presidents and academic vice presidents. The decentral administration stratum consisted of a census of the business college deans and a systematic sample of department heads or, in cases where none existed, the associate dean. The third stratum represented a systematic sample of three faculty members from each college of business.⁶

Of the 81 central administrators surveyed, over 80 per cent responded, with 58 per cent of the total responses usable for tabulation purposes. Of the 90 business college administrators asked to fill out questionnaires, 90 per cent responded, with 80 per cent usable for tabulation. Practically all (95 per cent) of the 139 faculty members of the sample returned usable responses.

FACULTY PROMOTION POLICIES

Inherent in the concept of control is the existence of a plan which serves as the standard or norm for administrative decision making and personnel performance. Applied to academic institutions, control of the promotion process would imply the presence of an all-university promotion policy. The survey indicated that practically all central administrators reported such a policy.

Effective control, however, does not cease with the mere existence of policy. The policy must also be known and accepted. The central administrators stated that these requirements are met by their universities'

⁴Thomas R. McConnell, "Needed Research in College and University Organization and Administration," *The Study of Academic Administration*, ed. Terry F. Lunsford (Boulder, Colorado: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 1963), p. 115.

⁵Dale Yoder candidly stated, ". . . the disfunction [of university governance] strikes more frequently, and its systems reach something of an apogee in our ranks. We can probably supply the best material for clinical study from our own back yards." "The Faculty Role in University Governance," *Academy of Management Journal*, V, No. 3 (Dec., 1962), 225.

⁶Theoretically, 329 administrators and faculty members should be included in the stratified sample. However, this number was reduced to 310 because one university in the population was used as a pretest, some business colleges had no associate dean or department heads, and there were some leaves of absence.

policies. However, to get a better picture of policy understanding and acceptance, faculty members were also surveyed in order to verify what their central administrators had reported.

Survey results showed that 5 per cent of the faculty sample stated that there were absolutely no policies whatsoever, while another 26 per cent said that if a policy did exist, it was so nebulous and confused that it could not be communicated to anyone. Besides this lack of understanding policies by practically one-third of the faculty members, there is also evidence that many do not approve of their universities' current promotion policies. Table 1 shows that over one-third of the professors are not satisfied. Moreover, in nine universities at least two out of the three faculty members surveyed stated that the promotion policies and practices were unsatisfactory. This represents 20 per cent of the universities in the population. On the other hand, only 8 per cent of the faculty members stated that promotion policies were well accepted and contributed to high faculty morale.⁷ Two out of the three faculty members in only one university stated such well accepted policies.

TABLE 1

Business Faculty Members' Descriptions of the Consensus of Themselves and Their Colleagues Concerning Promotion Policies and Practices to Full Professor

<i>Descriptions of General Consensus on Promotions</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage of Respondents</i>
Very poor, morale is declining because of the apparent lack of administrative rationale or consistency in promotions	10	8
Not very good, some bad promotions have been made and there is room for improvement	34	26
Recognizing the inherent problems involved in promotion decisions, our administration does a pretty good job	77	58
Promotion policies and practices in our institution are well accepted and contribute to high morale of the faculty	10	8
TOTAL	131	100

⁷No significant patterns emerged when the ranks and publication records of those professors reporting either extreme of acceptance were examined.

At the decentral level, the analysis of schools of business promotion policies indicates there may be little, if any, control by central administration. Only half of the decentral administrators (deans and department heads) stated that central policies are used as guidelines for their decentral promotion policies. The other half apparently did not use central university policies as norms in formulating their own college's promotion policies. Furthermore, a majority of the decentral administrators felt themselves (not central administration) to be primarily responsible for the formulation of promotion policies which affected their faculties.

FACULTY PROMOTION PRACTICES

The preceding analysis of the part central promotion policy plays in central administrative control was indirect in the sense of analyzing the basis for control rather than the direct application of control. This section analyzes control over actual practices taking place in the promotion process.

Objective Evaluations

The survey results showed that central administrators generally felt they could objectively evaluate faculty personnel. Eighty-five per cent of the central administrators stated they could objectively evaluate research activities, while 61 per cent declared they could also objectively evaluate teaching ability. The faculty members themselves did not agree. Over 80 per cent felt that central administrators could not evaluate research, and practically all the professors stated that central administrators could not evaluate their teaching ability. Nevertheless, administrative evaluations are made every time someone is promoted or is not promoted. How are these evaluations made?

About two-thirds of the central administrators reported the use of a consistent, objective method of evaluation.⁸ Once again, however, the faculties do not agree with these reported promotion practices. For instance, a vice president stated he used a bibliography and teaching reports to evaluate faculty members. Yet, a faculty member from his university stated, "In my opinion we make little provision for any measurement and no observation; hearsay evidence is all that is available to evaluators at the present time."

The close relationship and proximity of most business college administrators and faculty members probably explains the confidence decentral administrators had in their ability to evaluate their faculties. Only two department heads and no deans felt, in most cases, they could not evaluate research. Although they were not as sure of their ability to judge

⁸Excluded from the objective methods were the recommendation procedures used by all universities. Examined were tangible, objective methods of evaluation as a bibliography accompanied by the publications and, in some cases, objective teaching reports.

teaching, three out of every four felt they could most of the time. The majority of the faculty members agreed that their deans and department heads can make these evaluations. However, the professors thought that research was much easier for decentral administrators to evaluate than was teaching.

Promotion Criteria

The difficulties involved in objective evaluations undoubtedly influenced the faculty members to rate research as the major criterion for promotion (See Table 2). The weight given to research coincides with both central and decentral administrators, but the faculty respondents gave less weight to teaching. The attitude of faculty members toward the effect of teaching ability on promotion decisions was brought out by comments such as the following:

I would rank teaching effectiveness much higher as a weight in promotion decisions, except for the almost impossible task of measuring the teaching effectiveness. Unfortunately, it appears to be a subjective decision, which is difficult to measure.

TABLE 2
Promotion Criteria for Associate Professor of
Business to Full Professor

Promotion Criteria	Average % Weights Assigned					Average of the Five Raters
	Presi- dents	Vice Presi- dents	Busi- ness College Deans	Dept. Heads	Faculty Members	
Personal Characteristics	15	11	13	12	14	13
Seniority	12	8	10	8	14	10
Service	15	11	12	13	10	12
Research Activity	31	36	33	34	38	34
Teaching Effectiveness	22	29	27	28	16	24
Competitive Bids	5	5	5	5	8	6
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100

The faculty members' weighting of the other promotion criteria was approximately the same as those of both central and decentral administrators. A typical professor's opinion of promotion criteria was expressed as follows:

Good personal characteristics, seniority, and teaching are helpful in being promoted and are always taken into account. However, research activity is the only really necessary criterion — perhaps because no impossible teachers survive to the associate level.

Competitive bids are viewed as being somewhat unique as a basis for promotion. On an informal basis, competitive bids may have much more influence in promotion decisions than is indicated by the table. This indirect importance of competitive bids was implied in professors' comments:

I would judge the importance of competitive bids is highly variable. However, there must be some weight given to this criterion, especially if the bid comes from a "prestige" school — none if it comes from a "lesser" school. Competitive bids obviously not stated as a criterion but still one of the most effective levers for a good man.

Locus of Decision Making

The final factor used to investigate promotion practices was the weighting of the locus of promotion decision making. Table 3 indicates that all three strata of the sample viewed the decentralized level of the university as having the most influence in the promotion process. Faculty members' remarks, such as the following, imply the power the dean and department head have in promotions.

If a department chairman does not recommend a man for a promotion, the dean does not consider the person. If the dean does not concur, the Academic Vice President does not consider, nor does he have the opportunity to consider, the man.

Such power in the hands of decentralized administration was viewed in positive or negative terms, depending on the personality and leadership of the administrator in question. A professor declared, "The situation here is extremely bad — primarily because of the chief administrator of the Business College more than any other reason. Unfortunately, this man is not at all rational in his decisions about his faculty relationships." This statement does not seem to represent a small minority because the other faculty members surveyed in his university made similar responses. This does not imply that the decentral administrator cannot play a positive role in the promotion process. The professor quoted directly above added, "This situation is quite tragic since the previous Dean was of quite another type."

The central administrative level of the university was given very little weight by all three organizational levels of the university. This is undoubtedly the result of central administration delegating much of the promotion process to decentral administration and faculty. However, according to the concept of administrative control, central administration's responsibility does not end with the act of delegation. The next section attempts to analyze this aspect of the control function.

TABLE 3
The Locus of Decision Making of Promoting an Associate
Professor of Business to Full Professor

<i>Position of Influence</i>	<i>Average % Weights Assigned by</i>				<i>Average of the Four Raters</i>
	<i>Central Administration</i>	<i>Business College Dean</i>	<i>Dept. Head</i>	<i>Faculty Members</i>	
Discipline Colleagues	21	13	8	12	14
Other faculty members	6	4	7	7	6
Department Heads	23	21	29	26	25
Faculty Committee	12	16	14	14	14
Associate Dean	1	2	2	2	2
Dean of College	21	28	24	29	25
Vice President	9	7	9	3	7
President	7	9	7	7	7
Board of Trustees	0	0	0	0	0

CENTRAL CONTROL DECISIONS

Effective control includes the use of administrative control decisions if standards and performance are not in accord. These control decisions consist of reexamination of standards and/or the use of organizational sanctions to gain compliance with standards. The survey gives some evidence that such decisions are seldom made by central administrators.

Almost half the central administrators reported they seldom, if ever, rejected recommendations from below. This finding alone does not necessarily mean that no control exists. Informal agreements and implicit understandings between central and decentral administrators may limit the number of rejections, but control remains at the top. However, supplementary comments implied the infrequent rejections were not necessarily the result of this informal control or because there was perfect accord between university standards and decentral administrators' recommendations. On the contrary, the central administrators were generally depicted as a "rubberstamp" with "automatic approval." This interpretation was substantiated when control of research standards was analyzed.

The study found that research was a basic purpose of large state universities and the most widely recognized standard for promotion. De-

spite these research standards, over half the central administrators reported they sometimes promote faculty members who have few, if any, publications. Moreover, examination of the publication records of the faculty sample showed that many more professors who had no significant publication record prior to being promoted had been promoted than central administrators realized or cared to admit.⁹ Practically one-third of the full professors and almost one-half of the associate professors surveyed had a maximum of three articles and no books. This relatively large percentage of faculty members who have no significant publication records represents the college of business only; yet, almost half of their central administrators claim they very seldom promote a man without a substantial publication record.

In total, the survey evidence seems to indicate that central administrators are not making control decisions to maintain the promotion standards of their universities.

IMPLICATIONS

This study leads to several implications for academic administration. First, there seems a need for improved promotion policies. These policies should reflect the purpose and goals of the university and serve as standards for faculty performance, decentral policies and practices, and central control decisions. Most respondents reported they would prefer to give the faculties more influence in making promotion policies. The case for faculty participation in policy formulation evolves from traditions of academic freedom and the sense of community in institutions of higher learning. From a management viewpoint, faculty participation recognizes the professional status and expertise faculty members would have in setting their own standards of performance. Moreover, faculty participation would contribute to the necessary attributes of understanding and acceptance of promotion policies.

Second, there is indication for the need of improved promotion practices. A step in this direction may be the use of more objective methods of evaluation at all levels of the university. Methods such as maintaining current bibliographies, reading faculty publications, accumulating book reviews, ranking the relative importance of various journals in each field of study, noting the quantity of distribution of books and articles, showing evidence of manuscripts in process, and utilizing objective teaching reports from students and colleagues would seem very beneficial for central or decentral administrators in making promotion decisions. Once these objective methods of evaluation are decided upon by administration and/or faculty members, they should be fully communicated to all concerned.

⁹In a few cases, professors without a publication record may have been promoted before the present central administrator assumed office or before there was a change in policy. This possibility was held to a minimum by sampling recently promoted full professors.

Finally, evolving from and a basis for improved policies and practices is the need for better central controls. Central control of the promotion process is necessary to maintain standards and thus assure maximum faculty contributions to the goals of the university. If there are no central controls, the decentral administrators have a free hand concerning why faculty members are promoted or are not promoted. The possible consequence may be the inbreeding of a substandard faculty. The following hypothetical situation could possibly occur.

The faculty members of the college are complacent about doing research and use the same class notes year after year. The dean (or department head) is an undynamic individual who deliberately (or nondeliberately) perpetuates his own inadequacies by promoting these substandard faculty members. The university standards state that significant research contributions and dynamic teaching are required for promotion. Yet, year after year, the college dean (or department head) "pushes through" his recommendations because there are no effective central controls.

One way to overcome the above situation would be careful selection and development of decentral administrators. However, in most universities today, the faculties have the major voice in selecting their own administrators. Therefore, a substandard faculty may select one of their own kind to preserve the status quo. Developing administrators on the job may be foreign to universities.¹⁰

Another way to overcome the problem in the hypothetical case and thus facilitate maximum faculty contribution to the goals of the university would seem to be improved central administrative control. This was suggested by President Emeritus Harold W. Dodds of Princeton University:

This strong department discretion in selection and promotion tends to strengthen built-in forces of deterioration which the president and his administration must counter-act. The quality of the faculty is a personal responsibility from which no president should seek to escape . . . I suggest . . . that research will reveal a positive correlation between long-run faculty excellence and the manner and quality of presidential participation in selections and promotions.¹¹

Although it would be difficult to determine a faculty excellence — central control correlation, this study did find indication of a positive relationship between seemingly unsatisfactory promotion policies and practices and inadequate central control. If central administrators would revitalize the academic promotion process through effective control, they would be taking a stride forward in meeting the administrative challenges of today's large universities.

¹⁰There are a few training programs for university administrators such as the Harvard Institute or the administrative seminars for newly designated deans of the A.A.C.S.B. However, these are negligible compared to the widely used and accepted executive development programs in business and industry.

¹¹Harold W. Dodds, "Some Thoughts on the University Presidency," *Public Administration Review*, XX, No. 1 (Winter, 1960), 13.