

### *Scenario Two*

Elaine Stafford is a new chair in Civil & Environmental Engineering department at a large, urban university. Formerly, she was a chair at a smaller university in the Midwest for six years. She took over for Jim Fopner, who recently retired. Jim was an affable man with a hands-off management style. In the last few years of his tenure as chair, the faculty had a running joke that started: “Last time I saw Jim...” and ended with a 70’s reference. Donald Stewart has been Dean of Engineering for twenty years and was close to a number of professors in the College, including Jim. He was one of the few people who knew about some of Jim’s health problems and was therefore lax with him. The President’s new plan to take advantage of the booming growth in the city by getting press on engineering students’ projects now has Dean Stewart anxious about the Civil & Environmental Engineering department. He knows that there are serious problems in the department and has tasked Elaine with making some major changes.

Dean Stewart is particularly concerned with the Construction Engineering division of the department. Both its undergraduate and graduate enrollment numbers have dipped and the retention rate for graduate students is well below average. This spring, Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) will be evaluating the department and Dean Stewart believes that major changes are needed to improve the quality of instruction and strengthen the program’s educational objectives. In their first few meetings together, he and Elaine discuss what improvements can be made to the Engineering program, including updating the curriculum by introducing inquiry-based learning, integrating topics across the core courses and strengthening the department’s relationships with local industries. He also handed her a folder of student complaints about a few faculty that had been escalated to him because Jim had ignored them. Elaine is confident she can implement the necessary changes with aplomb.

In the fall, Elaine held the first faculty meeting in many years. It was her first time meeting many of the faculty members and she made efforts to welcome all warmly. After introductions, she reviewed her agenda for the coming year. She discussed the pending ABET review and identified some gaps where improvements could be made. She reassured everyone that these problems were all solvable and put forth her suggestions on how they could implement changes together in the coming year. Her proposals were met with dead silence. Then a male faculty member casually dismissed Elaine’s suggestions saying those methods have all been tried to no avail. The meeting then began to focus on the allotment of parking spaces among faculty members and conference travel funding.

Over the course of several months, Elaine streamlined some administrative processes and continued to push for curriculum changes that she hoped would increase student enrollment and retention. Assuming that faculty care about students, she framed her reasoning with their best interests in mind. She pulled together some funding to get supplementary training for several mid-career faculty who had received complaints from students about their teaching. Even though the faculty are generally indifferent and some appear irrationally resistant to her ideas, she has not shared this with Dean Stewart, hoping that she will soon win folks over.

In the course of her outreach to local construction engineering companies, she discovered that there is a growing trend of hiring professionals with Construction Engineering certificates from on-line programs at large universities. Remembering that this was a strategy used at her former institution, and worried that the sub-discipline’s declining student enrollment could spell its doom, she drafts a plan to develop an on-line Construction Engineering certificate program that could provide much needed revenue as well as strengthen ties with local employers. She anticipates that the additional revenue stream will enable the department to better train its undergraduate students and provide the

city's growing construction industry with highly-qualified engineers. Enthusiastic about the plan, she keeps it to herself, anticipating that this innovation will be a welcomed solution to the problems facing Construction Engineering. When she unveils this plan at a faculty meeting, instead of the usual indifference, she is met with outrage. The faculty feel blindsided by this new idea and the workload it would require. Furthermore, they claim that offering a certification will undermine the degree programs.

Unbeknownst to Elaine, full professors in her department are complaining about her leadership style to Dean Stewart on a regular basis. They call her a "shrew" who does not listen to them and fails to defer to their expertise. Dean Stewart calls a meeting with Elaine to tell her how disappointed he is that she is not only demoralizing the faculty but provoking them. "What's going on over there Elaine? I've never had problems like this in the past! You're late in learning that the most important aspect to academic leadership is collegial relationships." He insists that Elaine change her leadership style, repair her relationships in the department and continue working toward on the agenda they agreed upon in fall. She responds that it is the changes in question that are causing her colleagues to be up-in-arms. She leaves the Dean with data demonstrating the profitability of on-line courses and goes home to call her mentor at her former institution to discuss her next steps.

### Questions

- 1. What is Elaine doing right and where could she improve?**
- 2. How is Elaine managing faculty expectations? And the Dean's?**
- 3. Where is Dean Stewart coming from and what do you think of his expectations of Elaine?**
- 4. Since Elaine is new to the department and its culture, what could she do to better manage the change in departmental leadership?**
- 5. If you were chair of this department, on which elements of this case would you seek advice from this group of peers?**