The Cross-Department Cultural Change Program
at the University of Washington

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Abstract: The University of Washington (UW) was one of the initial universities to receive a National Science Foundation ADVANCE Institutional Transformation Award in the Fall of 2001. The UW ADVANCE program created the Center for Institutional Change (CIC) to transform the culture for women in science, engineering and mathematics (SEM) departments. This paper will focus on one of the department cultural change initiatives, the Cross-Department Cultural Change Program (CDCCP) which was developed with ADVANCE Visiting Scholar Chris Loving. The program's structure reflects the need for skills development and frequent, ongoing opportunities to address cultural change. Emphasized is exploration of cultural change concepts and acquisition of related individual and leadership skills. Concurrently, these concepts and skills are used to create and implement specific initiatives to improve the climate for everyone in the department. This paper will describe the CDCCP theoretical framework, program structure, and resulting impact.

Introduction and Background

More than three decades ago, researchers began to study the differential experience of women faculty and students in colleges and universities. The term "chilly climate" became the catchphrase to describe the learning and work environment for women on campus. Today, the situation is still serious enough that Shirley Malcom, head of the Education and Human Resources Directorate for the AAAS, can ask: "Why, despite the movement in science and engineering, haven't women advanced more within these fields?" She locates the barriers to women's success in the structure of our institutions, agencies, societies, academies, and departments. Her message is that we must fix the system, not the women.[1]

Institutional transformation requires a significant amount of change in attitudes, practices and policies throughout the university community. These attitudes, practices, and policies are what define the academic culture, how people behave and relate to one another, who belongs and how decisions are made, and ultimately what has value and meaning in the organization.[2,3,4] Changing culture is never easy. It requires understanding and insight into the organization's culture, which depends on self-awareness at an individual level and at the organizational level.[2,5] Belief structures are at the core of the academic system.

Etzkowitz, Kemelgor, & Uzzi[6] note that leadership, not policy, is needed to change belief structures and that "… change of that nature appears to emanate from those in power within the department. They become the role models for the role models" (p. 247). Similarly, Rapoport et al.[7] note that leadership is important to bringing about change, but that "deeply held assumptions are not susceptible to change by executive order" (p. 159). For cultural change to be pervasive,

critical self-reflection is needed by every member of the academic community, but department chairs and senior faculty need to take the lead.

Since the success of institutional change hinges largely on the extent to which change occurs at the academic department level[8,9], the support and interventions should be tailored to each department's needs.[10] Yet academic department chairs, and faculty in general, are not often prepared to be change agents or administrative managers.[9,11,12] They often do not have the knowledge or the skill set to create "relational departments," as recommended by Etzkowitz, Kemelgor and Uzzi[6], in which the department culture and structure provide support to all its members and in which faculty, male and female, can wrestle with issues of gender, family concerns, and other obstacles that have affected the entry and persistence of women in SEM. The University of Washington's (UW) ADVANCE Center for Institutional Change (CIC) seeks to provide faculty with the skills and information necessary to become effective change agents and to begin to create these relational departments.

When the UW was awarded a National Science Foundation ADVANCE Institutional Transformation Award in the Fall of 2001, it created the CIC to transform the culture for women in science, engineering and mathematics (SEM) departments. The CIC is partnering with 19 SEM departments at UW to increase the participation and advancement of UW's women faculty in these fields. The CIC is focused on six key areas: leadership development for chairs and deans, mentoring women faculty in SEM, policy transformation, departmental cultural change, a Transitional Support Program, and a Visiting Scholars Program.

This paper will focus on one of the cornerstone department cultural change programs, the Cross-Department Cultural Change Program (CDCCP), which was developed together with ADVANCE Visiting Scholar Chris Loving. The CDCCP is an opportunity for department chairs and faculty to work together on specific department issues around cultural change. Department life and department change can only occur through increased self-awareness and relationships. Thus in the CDCCP the concepts and skills included are designed to foster and encourage self-awareness and relationships that will create sustained climate change.

CDCCP History

The initial stage of this program involved interviewing the 19 ADVANCE department chairs to understand the most challenging parts of their work as chairs and to begin developing relationships. Each department chair reported that people issues were the most significant challenge. Even those who were the most well prepared chairs were surprised by the amount and the intensity of the problems around people in their department. During the interview phase, several chairs stated they would prefer addressing these issues in the community of other chairs – they wanted to not only avoid the isolation they experience as chairs but also wanted to gain the insight and wisdom that a group of chairs working together could provide. As a result of these conversations and supported by the insights of culture-related literature, the CIC, in cooperation with Chris Loving, created the Cross-Department Cultural Change Program.

People issues are indicative of a need to improve department climate. The logical place to start addressing climate is to examine department culture.[6] Improving the culture improves the

climate for all and those who are differentially disadvantaged will be proportionally advantaged through positive culture change.

The cross department feature of the program is intended to facilitate cross-pollination of ideas and perspectives on departmental issues. Too often faculty exist in the silos of their departments. Assumptions, attitudes, and beliefs which may be taken as fact may actually be artifacts of the department culture. Recognizing these "facts" as myths or departmental assumptions is one of the first steps to self awareness and cultural understanding. Meeting in cross-departmental groups creates community and encourages group wisdom to emerge.

CDCCP Design and Structure

Once the CDCCP purpose, content, and outcomes had been designed, the next stage was to identify participants and determine meeting frequency.

Participant selection was a key consideration of the program design. It is not unusual for those typically disadvantaged in the academic culture (women) to protect themselves in culture change initiative by avoiding the department chair (typically male) as they seek to improve the climate. However, in listening to dozens of chairs and creating conversations about climate with department leaders, it can be noted that, virtually without exception, they are genuinely well-intentioned, caring about their department, and wanting to move their unit forward during their stint as chair. They are keenly concerned for the professional success of each member of the department. They wish for all members of the department community to be empowered and to excel and wish to navigate well personnel issues, trying to find the fair, just and healing solution. They feel burdened and saddened by troubling conflicts, sexual harassment, faculty fights over space, inappropriate behavior in faculty meetings, and poor recruiting of faculty, staff and students. Thus, our experience is that department chairs *do* care about climate and department culture. This program chooses to include chairs in the culture change process and, indeed, focuses on the chairs throughout the CDCCP process.

However, a department chair alone cannot change department culture. One of the key steps to transforming any organization is to form a powerful guiding coalition which consists of people who have power within the organization, in terms of title, access to information, social capital, etc.[13] The team need not be larger than three to five people, regardless of the size of the organization. This guiding coalition creates buzz and has the organizational influence with which to bring others into the change process.

To this end, department chairs participating in the CDCCP were encouraged to invite two or three faculty members to join them in the program. Because one of the goals of the CDCCP is to create a critical mass of change agents in the department, department chairs, with guidance from the CIC, invite faculty other than those who are already clearly supportive of department cultural change. If a department already has faculty who are "onboard" with the value and necessity of improved climates, it is important to pick other faculty who are at "worst" neutral on the subject, so that once they complete the CDCCP, there will be more voices added to those already in favor of improving the climate and culture of their department and the academy as whole. Doing so

also improves the learning environment in the CDCCP and enables more material to be covered in greater depth.

Experience has shown that excellence, interpersonal effectiveness and improved climates are attractive and contagious. Thus, it is much easier to change a department by working with those who already "get it." The CDCCP creative process is enhanced, the implementation has more natural buy-in from the change agents and those who watch their endeavors are attracted to excellence and things that are working and to people who are happier and appear to be making a difference. Once this dynamic is introduced, those who were initially reluctant or somewhat critical begin to open themselves up to the desired change. Indeed, as a result of the CDCCP, faculty within the CDCCP departments but who are not participating in the program have become interested in what their colleagues are doing through the CDCCP. Moreover, SEM chairs and other administrators around campus have started to express interest and desire to participate in a future cohort. Clearly the contagion effect is in operation.

A comment should also be made regarding the selection of departments to participate in the first cohort of the CDCCP. As observed by Eckel, Green, and Hill[14], "Constructively framed change agendas also did not assign blame, so that people did not feel threatened or indicted for their current or past behaviors, performance, or competence. Because faculty and administrators make substantial commitments to their institutions, disciplines, and professions, agendas that suggest failures on their part created resistance, disinterest, and defensiveness. Leaders of transforming institutions framed the change agendas about better futures without making people feel attacked or diminished." (p. 20)

In keeping with this philosophy, a cornerstone of this cultural change work is to "preach to the choir" – a practical approach that at first might seem odd. To first approach those who "need" these concepts and skills, the department members who are seen as "the" problem (those who are not choir members) usually creates resistance in the very people others define as needing this material the most. To approach those who "need it" sends the message there is something wrong with them and/or with what they do in the department. Being admonished as wrong encourages resistance and is not an effective or efficient way to encourage change. Change cannot be imposed. As Morey[15] notes, "For change to occur, a readiness for change must be apparent. Such readiness is predicated on an awareness of the need for change and a beginning willingness to tackle it." (p. 265) Faculty and departments who are resistant to change must be allowed to work out the reasons for change, the process, and the outcomes if they are to buy into the change process. Once they have personally identified with the goals of the change process, they are prepared to become change agents.[15] Hence departments who were invited to participate in the first cohort of the CDCCP already clearly demonstrated interest in the program and may even be seen as "least likely to need" the program.

In summary, each CDCCP cohort includes 4-5 department chairs plus 2-3 faculty from each department; thus a complete cohort would consist of 12-20 faculty. The CIC partners with the chair in selecting the faculty using the following criteria: (a) prefer tenured faculty; (b) faculty who are not resistant to improving department climate and may not yet be known as an advocate or proponent of good climate; and (c) the more diverse the better. This profile for faculty participation was selected to increase the critical mass of faculty within a department who would

be advocates for cultural change and who are respected and/or in positions of power with the department culture.

Also important to the program design and structure was the frequency of meetings. Faculty have intensely busy schedules and feel many demands. It is important to combine this awareness with the requirements of successful cultural change work when designing session length and session frequency. In order for cultural change to be implemented and sustained it is important that CDCCP sessions be scheduled over a 12-month period to allow for habituation of the newly acquired perspectives and skills and for the creation of the neuropathways that facilitate these new behaviors and thought patterns.[16] After initially experimenting with two-hour sessions, it was quickly discovered that while two hours respects faculty time constraints, the sessions were too short for the faculty to experience the impact and depth of the material. Thus, after two sessions, the faculty all agreed to lengthen the time to three hours and this time frame has made a huge difference. These three hour sessions, still respect faculty time and allow them to value the time they are spending. Moreover, scheduling these sessions during a meal and providing lunch or dinner has worked well.

CDCCP Curriculum

The CDCCP curriculum includes concepts and skills development and acquisition as well as a department project. The first few sessions are focused on skill development; however, as the skills become a part of the faculty member's interpersonal repertoire, the time focused on the department project increases (See Figure 1).
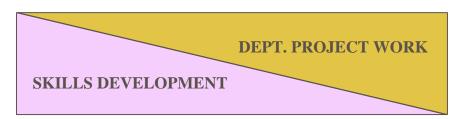

Figure 1: CDCCP Curriculum Structure over Time

Beginning with the first session and continuing throughout the entire program, these concepts and skills are practiced and applied in the sessions to enhance acquisition. Emphasized is exploration of cultural change concepts and acquisition of related individual and leadership skills. As the department chairs and their faculty focus on creating and implementing specific initiatives to improve the climate for everyone in their department, the skills and concepts not only facilitate these discussions, they contribute to the nature of what projects are chosen and how their implementation is designed.

Given the typical expectations people develop when introduced to change initiatives (i.e. a focus on task), included in all sessions is a segment devoted to defining a department project designed to improve the department's culture. For those more task-oriented participants, this structure helps reduce anxiety during the first sessions where the primary focus is the interpersonal and leadership skill set that will facilitate their success in department climate change.

What follows next is a more detailed outline of the design for each session.

Session One: Orientation and Communication Skills

This session begins with introductions, an overview of the program, how the time together will be utilized, and exploring concepts important for change work. The skills portion of the CDCCP begins with communication skills because it is the medium through which all the work will transpire[17]. Learning, implementing and practicing as soon as possible this skill set empowers the rest of the concepts and skills and, hence, the cultural change work. Steering clear of pop-psychology approaches, this component goes beyond traditional communication training to provide concepts and skills taught in graduate programs in the psychological professions[17]. Communicating well may seem simple, but being effective at connecting with those around us is a skill that often needs improvement. We conclude this session with a brief discussion envisioning the participants' ideal academic department.

Session Two: Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)

This session uses the MBTI as a tool for increasing self-awareness regarding cultural change skills. In addition to self-awareness, a key foundation for culture change[2,5], a series of conversations based on the MBTI that not only increase self-awareness but offer concrete and specific strategies for implementing improved interpersonal interactions are initiated with the group. It is important that the MBTI be presented in a way that makes the best use of it without being limited by an over-identification with its principles. If the program is too immersed in Myers-Briggs, the application component can get lost and it might create resistance among faculty who do not understand how psychometric instruments are used.

Once the theory presentation concludes, a series of discussions ensue.   The first conversation explores giving and receiving positive feedback. Participants are consistently surprised at the diversity of answers in this positively loaded discussion. Answers range from desiring constant positive reinforcement to preferring never to receive it. The advantage of starting with a positive topic is that there is little or no defensiveness in the group. Other discussion topics include giving and receiving negative feedback, collaboration style, the emotional landscape around conflict, leadership style, relationship to time, how people deal with pressure and what effects it can have on their relationships, etc.

This session concludes with each department team analyzing the current status of their department culture. They do so in light of the first discussion that explored each department's vision of what would be the ideal department.

Session Three: *Exploring Conflict*

Session three continues the skills and MBTI work with a particular focus on conflict. The participants are guided through a conversation about their relationship to conflict, their comfort level with different kinds of conflict with different department constituents, anticipating that department cultural change can lead to conflict.

Also, increasing time is spent on the department project component of the program. The third session's project-related discussion involves each department team exploring the gap between the ideal department and its current state and then generating a list of potential projects and strategies in order to improve the department climate.

Session Four: Cross-Department Conversations

The fourth session begins with introducing a step by step cultural change strategy chart. Department teams gather to revisit their Session 3 list of potential department projects and strategies and discuss them with respect to the cultural change strategy chart. The participants then gather in mixed department groups to share their vision and the solutions generated to date. The feedback which is gathered from these cross-department small groups is then shared within each department.

Sessions Five-Eight: Meeting by Departmental Teams

In order to provide the depth work needed at this stage for developing and implementing initiatives and to respect the three hour per month schedule, during this phase, the Program facilitators (the authors) meet with the departments individually to explore the concrete manifestation of the culture change work. These meetings also provide the opportunity to directly discuss how the department projects will specifically improve the climate for women faculty. Sample projects include building department community (particularly between staff and faculty), improving trust within a department, improving faculty participation and citizenship, etc. During this phase, the CIC consults with the department regarding the institutionalizing of their climate change efforts, looking for ways to sustain the changes and to help these changes become a part of the very fabric of the department.

Session Nine: Graduation

Once the projects are underway, the final session reconvenes all participants. In this session each department presents their department project. This session includes participants from other cohorts so they can benefit from the experience of others.

Additional CDCCP Components

Several additional programmatic activities are used to supplement the session material. Throughout the entire CDCCP process, regular meetings are scheduled with chairs, individually and as a group apart from the sessions. These meetings are brief and focused, allowing department chairs to explore leadership issues and share challenges in confidence. Individual meetings are also conducted with faculty, either at their request or ours, to discuss specific application of the concepts and skills and to further explore department solutions.

To help with the habituation of the newly acquired perspectives and skills and to understand how participants are using the skills, a review is held at the beginning of sessions two through four. This brief review of the previous session includes participants sharing anecdotes regarding their implementation of the concepts and skills. Furthermore, in order to increase the odds that the

CDCCP concepts and skills will be acquired and sustained, a brief mailing is sent to each of the participants, in between sessions, reviewing the material in the previous session, adding to what was covered and providing a brief preview of the next session.

Another key strategy in academic culture change is to meet people where they are and then move them toward additional outcomes as they are ready. As has been noted, chairs do care about climate. However, if pressed to define climate as only about women and underrepresented minorities, cultural change efforts can be derailed if the chairs and faculty are not ready. The strategy, then, is to raise specific concerns such as the climate for women faculty after the audience understands in greater depth the issues and the needed skill set.

The same strategy holds true with addressing the institutionalizing of change. Institutionalization and conversation about this final stage can happen more effectively after personal and departmental exploration. Having too much focus on this more policy-like component of change can make it easy for faculty to bypass the personal transformation that is central to sustained climate change.

Evaluation

The timeframe for organizational change is not easily measured, often taking years, rather than weeks or months.[5] It is difficult to predict at the onset how long the process will take. This ambiguity often frustrates faculty and administrators. Culture change is a long-term commitment without shortcuts.[13] Attempts to bypass necessary steps only serve to undermine the change efforts. Cultural change can be a fragile state. Each small success should be recognized and leveraged to encourage continuous engagement in the change process.[13,15] Organizations engaged in cultural change efforts need to be careful to not declare victory too soon because "…change sticks when it becomes 'the way we do things around here,' when it seeps into the bloodstream of the [organization]. Until new behaviors are rooted in social norms and shared values, they are subject to degradation as soon as the pressure for change in removed."[13] (p. 67)

Even though this lengthy time frame is recognized, people still push for evaluation of cultural change efforts. However, traditional evaluation approaches, particularly those from science and engineering, often do not fit with academic social change work. "[Faculty and administrators] tend to think of evidence as clear, tangible, and explicit. Yet transforming institutions also exhibit more subtle, but equally important signs of cultural change, which are important predictors of an institution's ability to engage in ongoing learning and change."[14] (p. 8) Evaluation should not be pushing for performance-oriented data. Rather, it should be encouraging participants to consider their ideal compared with the reality of where they currently are. In other words, when it comes to cultural change in departments, more progress will be made and evaluation more effective, if departments are encouraged to continuously explore the comparison of their vision of the ideal department with how the department is currently.

Transformative change requires trust[5] and evaluation needs to encourage trust, especially in social change work. Self-designed evaluations and department-created assessments encourage trust. There is already perceived risk when behaviors, patterns, power, relationships and structures are changing. Evaluations with a judging tone or style, which traditional and typical

approaches often are, increase the sense of risk and generates fear while discouraging trust—a key component for successful change. Evaluation needs to be engaged carefully and tailored to the particular moment or stage of a project. Thus, evaluation also needs to be looking at what is happening at the current time and exploring what the respondents can address.   In other words, it is important that during the planting seeds portion of cultural change (i.e. concepts and skill development), evaluation measures this component and not the harvest (i.e. department projects).

Whether conducted by those most affected and involved or by someone outside, when it comes to cultural change, conversations are preferable to written feedback. Dialogue reveals information, details and important nuances that paper assessment misses. To that end, this work engages in ongoing dialogue with the chairs and faculty to gather data about the Program's effectiveness. These conversations help assess the Program trajectory and suggest adjustments to the process in an effective and efficient manner.

This work has sought to engage participants in discussions about the work and the impact of the work in their daily lives as well as in their departments. One measure of impact of this culture change work is the degree to which faculty are practicing the skills that will help the change occur. Chair and faculty participants consistently report that the concepts and skills explored in the beginning of the program make a positive difference in their professional and personal relationships. In the CDCCP, over 80% of the participating faculty report returning to their professional and personal settings and practicing the skills and using new concepts to think about these settings and the relationships therein.

Preliminary findings from questionnaires and interviews with CDCCP participants indicate that the interaction and networking with other departments have been unanimously appreciated by all chairs and other faculty. Learning how others handle problems through the cross-departmental nature of the program has been enlightening to program participants. Sample discussion topics include mentoring graduate students, new hires and new faculty to issues of lecturers, post-docs, research faculty and gender. Participants report that the CDCCP has helped them better understand the processes that make up departmental culture and develop successful strategies to improve climate.

Faculty participating in the CDCCP have also noted that the practical communication training has been particularly effective in learning, for example, how to handle difficult and threatening discussions (such as budget cuts) with faculty and staff; how to work with difficult faculty; and how to find ways to help other faculty members become invested in making department cultural change. Multiple people cited the insights gained from exposure to the Myers-Briggs instrument, conversations suggested by the Myers-Briggs, and in-depth communication skills raise their awareness (both of self and of others), change their perceptions, and increase their understanding of how people process information differently.

In cultural change work, measuring is only a second or third order of importance component in the work. As Astin and Astin[5] note, "Maintaining one's *commitment* to the practice of transformative leadership is thus very challenging because measurable outcomes may take a long time to materialize. Another way to look at this issue is to focus also on the *means* (the process).

In one sense, then 'success' can be attained simply by continuing to practice the principles." (p. 95)

Conclusion

Developing relationships and partnerships takes time and takes vigilance. Most culture change is a combination of top down and bottom up efforts. Culture change taking root is greatly facilitated when department chairs, deans, and other upper level university administration understand, value, and reward healthy department culture. At the same time, in order for change to be deep and pervasive, there must be a grassroots component. The participation of those who live daily the department life is instrumental in pervasive and sustained change. Working top down and bottom up, the Cross-Department Cultural Change Program at the University of Washington helps departments enrich communication, enhance collaboration, seek and utilize diversity more effectively, and improve faculty recruitment and retention. The CDCCP encourages cultural change through more effective peer mentoring and collegiality, a positive and inclusive environment, and thus a more vibrant and fulfilling intellectual community.

Acknowledgements

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