THE TIMES, THEY ARE CHANGIN': A LOGICAL APPROACH FOR DEVELOPING A PROMOTION AND TENURE DOCUMENT FOR UNCERTAIN TIMES

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ABSTRACT

Over the past few years, many U.S. colleges and universities have faced a series of challenges including decreasing enrollment numbers, significant budget cuts, and increasing reporting requirements. In addition, some universities have provided incentives for employees to participate in early retirement programs to reduce higher salaried headcount, while leaving open positions unfilled. As a result, organizations are modifying organizational structures to eliminate administrative positions and distribute administrative tasks. Decreasing resources, increasing reporting requirements and faculty workloads have prompted colleges and universities to re-evaluate their promotion and tenure (T&P) criteria to accommodate the changing landscape of the higher education environment. In this paper, the authors take a structured approach to revising the T&P document in their department to accommodate current and future in academe. Suggestions for use by other departments and institutions as well as direction for future research are also presented.

Keywords: Promotion, Tenure, Criteria, Logic model.

INTRODUCTION

University budgets are at the mercy of economic shifts, demographic changes and governmental appropriations. Faced with statewide budget cuts and a predicted decrease in nationwide enrollment numbers, the authors' institution, like many others was forced to make significant changes throughout the institution. One such move involved removing administrative layers and restructuring the university from a layout of five colleges and one school with 29 departments in total to five colleges consisting of 25 departments. At the same time, the departments within the College of Business were being further restructured to accommodate transferred programs, growth spurts and changing enrollment patterns.

Shortly after the restructuring dust settled, the reorganized departments (institution-wide) were asked to evaluate and develop new tenure and promotion (T&P) guidelines to accommodate their restructured programs. Rather than merging the T&P documents of the original programs into a patchwork criteria set, the authors' department took a clean slate approach to developing a point-based system unlike anything used in their previous departments.

In this paper, the authors describe a systematic approach to developing flexible guidelines acceptable to both tenure and non-tenure track faculty in AACSB and non-AACSB accredited programs. As colleges and universities continue to face uncertain times (e.g. COVID and its economic and social repercussions), universities may be faced with adjusting operational policies, such as evaluation processes, to accommodate lost and minimized resources. The authors propose their process as a starting point for programs evaluating their current processes.

LITERATURE BACKGROUND

Managing performance is no less of a concern to universities than to any other business entity. With expectations of accountability from stakeholders rising (e.g., state and federal government, students, parents, and employees), universities utilize performance measurement practices across functions, from graduation rates to first year student retention to employee performance evaluation (De Witte and López-Torres, 2017). Traditionally, evaluating the performance of professors (at all levels) has been completed through tenure and promotion standards (Perri, 2018). Such standards are not only based on past performance, but also consider the promise of future performance and contributions (Dennis, Valacich, Fuller, & Schneider, 2006). However, the past three decades have shown a shift away from the traditional tenured/tenure-track professor model, to one with a higher percentage of full and part-time non-tenure instructor model (Pandit, 2020). This shift requires the traditional tenure and promotion (T&P) document to transform into a more inclusive, performance management document that can be utilized regardless of professor/instructor status.

Adding another level of complexity in the creation of a T&P or performance management document, university restructuring as a cost-control measure has increased likelihood of multi-disciplinary departments. While department diversity can be beneficial, it also complicates the process of providing a fair evaluation of faculty, while preserving specialty and accreditation differences.

The tenure document for academics is often based on research, teaching, and service. Peer reviewed research remains the barometer for measuring scholarly output, but with the proliferation of open access journals, spread of predatory journals, and publications that charge sometimes substantial fees for inclusion, the ability of a T&P committee to successfully evaluate a tenure portfolio has become murkier (Bales, Hubbard, vanDuinkerken, Sare, & Olivarez, 2019).

Consequently, institutions rely on measures that rate or rank the efficacy of journals such as ABDC Journal Quality List produced by the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC), impact factor published by JCR, Academic Journal Guide published by the Chartered Association of Business Schools, and others (Millet-Reyes, 2017). These provide some structure for academic institutions to evaluate the quality of publications listed by candidates for tenure or promotion but does not address other output such as trade publications, monographs, books, and other forms of scholarly work. In addition, a limitation of such lists is reliant on ratings over actual review of the candidate’s research. They also instill a constraint on what a candidate might, or will publish, based upon inclusion on the appropriate list (Bales, et.al, 2019).

Universities have instituted various methods of evaluation of research, teaching, and service. Some utilize a narrative format where faculty describe their contributions to each area. Others assign weights to different categories. And still others, use a scoring or point system to quantify the value of each item on a promotion or tenure application. By far the most common type of T&P document is the narrative. In this format, the candidate responds to a series of prompts provided by the university, college, and/or department. Most cover all three categories of research, teaching, and service, although some may put greater weights on one or two of the categories. However, institutions like Clemson University's Economics Department expand these three to seven different categories (Clemson University, 2010). The Department of Management at Auburn University utilizes a narrative format and states that "there is no single model of excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service accomplishments" (Auburn University, Management Department, 2016, p. 2). This epitomizes the narrative format, giving a candidate an opportunity to elaborate more in one category than another, yet still maintaining a strong record of research, teaching, and service. At the same university, in the Marketing Department, special attention is paid to research with less weight being on the number of publications, but rather citation scores, grants, and outside reviewers (Auburn University, Marketing Department, 2011).

Though the narrative is common, some institutions utilize a point or scoring system to evaluate the candidate. A numerical value is assigned to various accomplishments in a checklist. Typically, the candidate must achieve a score greater than a predetermined level to be considered for promotion or tenure. For example, in the Department of Management at James Madison University, scales are used in all three main categories, with specific points in scholarly activities enumerated. Additionally, weights are approximately 50/30/20 concerning teaching, scholarly activity (for tenure or tenure track), and service respectively. The scales for teaching, scholarly activity, and service are Excellent (5, 6, or 7 rating points), Satisfactory (2, 3, or 4 rating points), and Unsatisfactory (1 rating point) (James Madison University, 2017). In the next section, the authors introduce the framework for designing their T&P document, briefly describe the elements of the modified Input Process Output model, and apply the model to the process they used in the development of their T&P guidelines.

APPLICATION OF A LOGICAL MODEL FOR STRUCTURE

Tenure and promotion are important processes requiring clear expectations, open communication, consistency, fairness, and value judgments. Faculty must invest a significant amount of time, both individually and collectively, to evaluate candidates' dossiers completely and fairly. Thus, employing a systematic approach to the evaluation such as using a logical model is ideal (Perri, 2018). For instance, logical models have been applied in law settings to assist in complex process development amidst ambiguous laws (Kowalski & Sergot, 1990). The tenure and promotion document is an employment document enforceable under state and federal law (Euben, 2000), application of a logical model to the development of the document can only serve to increase its validity in the face of legal challenge.

In this section, the authors take a structured approach (Figure 1) to revising departmental criteria for promotion and tenure based upon a combination of logical model characteristics (e.g., CDC, 2006; Taylor-Powell, Jones, Henert, 2002; W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004). The modified Input-Process-Output model displayed in Figure 1 provides an illustration of the variables the faculty team considered as they developed the updated T&P criteria. These variables follow the logical approach of the IPO model but have been modified to fit the context of this situation, which is explained in detail below.

Controls and Customers

After the college was restructured to accommodate university-wide changes, a meeting was convened to update the college's mission statement. Some of the controls that were considered in developing the college's mission statement included the requirements of the institution's accrediting bodies, the mission of the University, and the guidelines of the Provost's office. The college's customer base was considered as well, which included the needs of students, suggestions of the advisory board, and the desired skills sought by the college's employers. Although faculty are the ones who carry out the mission, they were also classified as a customer as their vision for their contributions to their areas of study help to guide the mission as well.

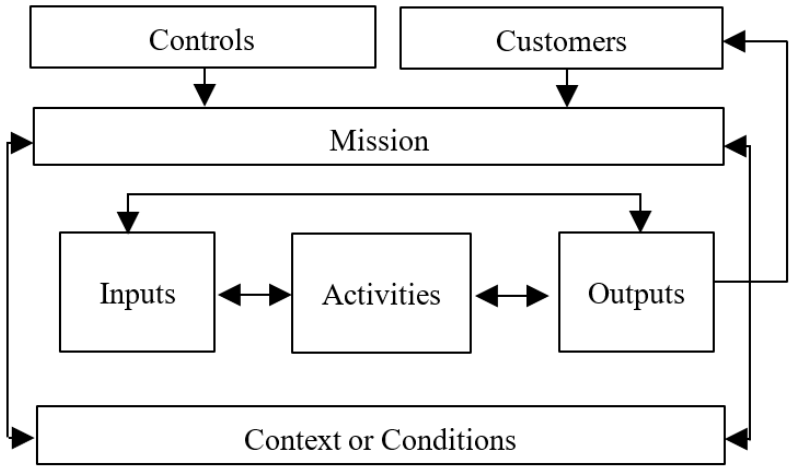

FIGURE 1
LOGIC MODEL FOR T&P CRITERIA DEVELOPMENT

Mission

The mission, in the authors' model, provides a two-fold combined direction. Mission represents the development of procedural guidelines to carry out the overarching mission of the college. The authors' institution is classified on the Carnegie scale as a teaching institution. Faculty are evaluated on their contribution to the teacher scholar model with a combination of quality teaching, professional growth and research and service to the students, university and academic community. The authors were tasked with developing revised promotion and tenure criteria addressing the three areas of the teacher scholar model considering the college's mission.

Context or Conditions

Context or conditions account for mitigating circumstances factored into the logical process and its approach to following the mission. Over the course of two years, the University underwent a restructuring process to adjust to budget cuts and program growth. The overall University makeup went from five colleges and one school to a five college structure with adjustments at the department level. As a result of the structural changes, the colleges were tasked with revisiting and updating their T&P guidelines.

The newly formed Department of Management was tasked with creating T&P guidelines to match the mix of programs and accreditation requirements. The department consisted of 16 full-time tenure and non-tenure track faculty in the undergraduate majors of management, entrepreneurship, hospitality management, healthcare administration, and healthcare management as well as some support course faculty. The department consisted of a mix of masters and undergraduate level courses as well as AACSB and non-AACSB accredited programs.

Inputs

Inputs to the process include both those expected and initially introduced as well as those incorporated through multiple iterations. The committee began the process of revising the T&P criteria by collecting input from departmental faculty through an anonymous survey and thoroughly examining the existing T&P documents from the authors' department, the college, institution, and peer institutions. The committee's goal was to craft a document allowing an individual faculty member freedom to present their dossier as desired, while maintaining a high level of rigor and providing a structure to aid both the faculty member and potential reviewers, particularly those outside the department.

Activities

Activities represent the multiple tasks that were undertaken to generate the output from the input. Based on information gathered during the external criteria review, a brief survey was created and distributed to the Department of Management faculty to determine what the most important considerations were for the new T&P document. The faculty were asked for their thoughts regarding expectations for how their time should be distributed (teaching: 57.16%, research: 21.29%, and service activities: 24.675%). A resounding 90% of the faculty who completed the survey felt a point system was, or could be, a good idea for the new criteria. Faculty's comments regarding the development of the future T&P document overwhelmingly focused upon the necessity to lower research requirements in light of increased teaching loads, and create a simpler process with less paperwork and more objective criteria guidelines. Based on the feedback, the committee began creating the new T&P document.

Outputs

The committee drafted a document radically different from its predecessor. A point-based system was developed throughout allowing for both qualitative (e.g. student comments) and quantitative (e.g. course evaluation scores) artifacts. Similar to the previous document, contributions were segmented and weighted by level of rigor and significance. For example, an "A" level publication (as defined by an external list such as Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) Journal Quality List), was given a higher point value than a refereed conference proceeding. Benchmarks were modified in each section to indicate level of performance for the ranks of outstanding, superior, good, and unacceptable. Restrictions were incorporated to minimize a concentration of points in just one or two activities and to encourage breadth and depth of participation across all point-based activities in each section.

Feedback

The process of collecting data, developing a draft proposal, and soliciting feedback to revise the document occurred three times. A final draft was then presented to the department, passed by majority vote, and forwarded to the college dean for the next level of approval before being sent to the university committee and the university's provost for final approval.

CONCLUSIONS

Taking a systematic approach to the evaluation or development of processes and documents can provide structure amid changing circumstances. In this article, the authors applied a modified logical framework to the development of new departmental T&P guidelines in the aftermath of significant institutional restructuring. Most academic institutions are reacting to similar circumstances. Like the authors, faculty may be faced with re-evaluating important documents and processes in light of current and future institutional changes.

As with any recommendation for major change, limitations to implementation are expected. The beauty of applying a logical model to the development of a T&P document is its applicability across disciplines and accreditation standards. The model allows for guidance on how to approach the task of revising the document, which is critical when working to ensure equitability across departments. At the same time, it allows individual departments to exercise academic freedom and shared governance practices to create a final document that works for their specific needs. However, without the buy-in from university administration (e.g., academic freedom and shared governance) and faculty (e.g., willingness to use a new approach and adaptability to change), even the best of approaches is doomed to fail. Ultimately, we maintain that the organized approach applying the logical model proposed meets the needs of multiple, often diverse, constituents within a department and across university levels.

Developing flexible, yet effective, T&P guidelines is an important task. The systematically-developed point-based T&P document will allow for greater flexibility and less subjective review allowing faculty to focus their efforts where most impactful. While final approvals are still pending, the systematic approach and level of input into the process provided faculty with the satisfaction of knowing that the new T&P document was thoughtfully designed to facilitate their personal growth. Due to space considerations, policy documents and tools used to gather information were not included in this review. However, they are available from the authors for any group that would benefit from them.

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