

December 2009

Faculty Development through Training: Political and Public Relations Implications

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Hughes, Claretha (2009) "Faculty Development through Training: Political and Public Relations Implications," *Journal of the North American Management Society*. Vol. 4: No. 2, Article 2.
Available at: <https://thekeep.eiu.edu/jnams/vol4/iss2/2>

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Faculty Development through Training: Political and Public Relations Implications

Claretha Hughes, University of Arkansas

Abstract: Many changes occur for reasons related the political atmosphere of an organization and/or its public relations status within the broader community. The first campus-wide training and development opportunity for faculty at a major, research institution in Southwestern Virginia occurred, partly, as a result of political and public relations concerns related to its emerging technological environment on campus. The success of this endeavor is perceived to have improved the political and public relations status of the University with regards to integrating technology into instruction. The concept of using tangible/measurable barriers as incentives appeared to influence the success of the program.

INTRODUCTION

The computer technology environment on campuses throughout the world began to change as the World WideWeb (WWW) expanded and individuals recognized its usefulness within the academic environment. The campus within this study was no exception. Integrating computer technology usage into the campus environment and convincing faculty to use it effectively was an issue of concern. Enhancing public relations and the political environment within the campus community and the state played a role in the implementation and acceptance of computer use within instruction on the campus. Pressure from parents, students, legislators, interested citizens and faculty themselves who felt that some faculty, particularly at major universities should teach more students (State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), 1993). "Teaching, in short, had become a public relations problem for university administrators..." (Nespor, 2006, p.47). Computer technology was perceived as one way to achieve the goal of teaching more students. According to Tilly (2001) computer-mediated instruction (CMI) has spread unevenly across the university as a product of contentious processes and the "actors ranging from legislators and university administrators to professors and students try to configure these relations to protect or extend their autonomy and influence" (Nespor, 2006, p. 2).

Although many faculty may have recognized the potential benefits offered by computer technology and the opportunities it would provide them in the classroom, they may not have been willing to invest the time needed to develop and enhance their skills. The barriers faculty were reluctant to address included: (a) upfront time required to develop their materials using a new technology; (b) lack of hardware and/or software resources; (c) funds to update hardware and/or software; and (d) experience, technical assistance and support needed to succeed (Eifler, Greene, & Carroll, 2001; Ndahi, 1998). Overcoming these barriers to incorporate computer technology into their instruction may or may not have been perceived as too difficult for the payoff that was to be obtained by faculty; yet, the public relations and political costs of not using computers within the instructional environment may be higher. Dealing with the barriers faced by faculty became a central part of the incentives that the Faculty Development Institute (FDI) used to motivate them to participate in the training program.

Organizations establish programs to achieve specific goals and expectations. Often their goals are achieved over longer terms and objectives are broader than specific goals of individuals or developers.

Developers create programs to achieve certain goals and expectations as outlined by their affiliated organization. Programs are often designed to teach specific concerns. Outcomes of goals and expectations of all stakeholders may or may not be the same. Key issues of whether these goals and expectations match up hinge on effective communication before, during, and after program implementation. If goals and expectations for a program held by stakeholders involved are good matches, the stakeholders are usually satisfied and the program is often seen as having been valuable and successful for all involved. However, if there was a poor match between goals and expectations of stakeholders, they may not be satisfied; therefore, they perceive the program as ineffective, unsuccessful or a waste of resources.

In an attempt to address specific faculty needs, the university decided to enhance and build upon the idea of a formal faculty-training medium through the FDI. FDI was the first introduction of a large scale, formal faculty training program to this university environment. The university and FDI developers had specific goals and expectations with regards to the FDI program. Their goals and expectations may not have aligned with each other and may not have been met. The degree to which they did align or were met was likely to be a determining factor in the extent to which all involved with the program viewed the program as having been effective and valuable. If they did not align, the effectiveness and value of the program may have been questionable. The extent to which the outcomes were valued also affects the extent to which they were implemented. If the organization, developers, and participants value outcomes, it was likely to be continued and possibly expanded. Thus, the organization may choose to invest more resources, developers may enhance workshops and /or add new workshops, and the participants may come back for further workshops and implement acquired skills into their instruction.

The changing culture of students who came to campus expecting to use their existing computer skills and the need to make the process of learning more efficient and effective were determinants for development of a training entity that could help faculty acquire computer skills they needed in a relatively short period of time.

The vision of the FDI as initially implemented at the university is as follows:

A major initiative in instructional computing will transform the academic lives of all students and faculty and change the nature of teaching and learning at the university. Anticipated outcomes include courses with more emphasis on active and independent learning strategies, problem solving and collaboration; strengthened student competitiveness in the job market; improved student retention; improved quality of interactions among students and faculty; and improved use of computer skills by students and faculty throughout the entire academic enterprise. The university would gain from making a major commitment to its teaching mission that will enhance our competitiveness in student recruiting and placement while strengthening the long-term appreciation of alumni for the institution. (Instructional computing proposal, 1992, p.1)

Eight anticipated outcomes were expected four years after beginning the FDI initiative. However, the following four were essential to this study as they relate to faculty use of technology in instruction:

All faculty will receive a highly functional computer and an installed set of core software productivity programs (or a credit voucher towards a computer of even higher functionality). This will provide an

equitable baseline of computing technology for all faculty. Periodic replacement of these computers is included.

All faculty will be better prepared to take advantage of computing technologies by participating in summer faculty development workshops, hands-on software training, and small-group faculty-led discussions on re-thinking instruction. Faculty will be encouraged to develop and assess alternative approaches that unlock courses from traditional formats by making increasing use of computer-aided multimedia instruction, both in and out of classrooms.

There will be substantially different and higher levels of contact between students and faculty, through greatly increased use of electronic mail, electronic discussion groups, and “24-hour electronic office hours.”

All students and faculty will have 24-hour access to improved technical support and consulting on the common core of supported desktop software programs. Faculty will have enhanced access to professional staff and a support lab for help using new technologies in teaching. (*Instructional computing proposal*, 1992, p.2)

These four anticipated outcomes have been identified by Eifler, Greene, & Carroll (2001) and Ndahi (1998) as barriers that faculty faced when asked to integrate technology into their instruction. FDI appears to have made it a goal to eliminate barriers for the faculty at this University. FDI provided short-term training focused on utilizing computer technology for instruction based on perceived needs and specific objectives. Faculty were provided skills training on the use of computer technology within the instructional process. In addition, they had an opportunity to be actively involved in their skill development and gained access to technical assistance resources that allowed them to work at their own pace. They were allowed the opportunity to build relationships with other participants and facilitators of the FDI workshops and to use these individuals and other peers as mentoring/coaching resources after leaving the workshop(s). They were also provided written documentation of training materials that were specifically designed to meet their needs during, and as a reference after, the workshop.

This article offers an applied study assessing the impact of a training program on university faculty development. To assess the effectiveness of the FDI program for faculty training and development, the following research questions guided this study:

What were the goals and expectations of the university and FDI developers?

What were the perceived outcomes for the university and FDI developers?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Kirkpatrick (1994) developed four levels of an evaluation that have been extensively used by trainers and evaluators. They are: (1) Reaction – how participants react to program, (2) Learning – a measurable change in participants' attitudes, knowledge, and/or skill after attending the program, (3) Behavior – a measurable change in behavior after the participant attended the program and (4) Results – the overall results that occurred after participants attended the program (Kirkpatrick, 1994). Cascio (1998) concisely described the purpose of evaluation as a dichotomous outcome (i.e. either a program has value

or it does not). Sackett and Mullen (1993) identified four reasons to evaluate training: (a) to make decisions about the future use of a training program or technique (e.g., continue, modify, or eliminate), (b) to make decisions about individual trainees (e.g., certify as competent, provide additional training, etc.), (c) to contribute to a scientific understanding of the training process, or (d) for political or public relations purposes (e.g., documenting success may increase the training function's credibility and visibility within an organization). They also felt that if concern for one of the first two (i.e., a program will not be repeated and no personnel decisions will be based on trainee performance), evaluation is unlikely unless the evaluator has a strong enough interest in the third or fourth to expend the resources needed for evaluation. All of their reasons were important to this study; however, c and d contributed most to the purpose.

Limitations of this study are self-serving bias and personal recall theory. Self-serving bias is “centered on the premise that people tend to accept responsibility for successes while blaming external factors for failures” (Miller & Ross, 1975, p.214). The developers of the program in essence based their career achievement on the success of this program. They may not have shared all of the negatives associated with the program. Weaknesses found with personal recall are that the prior response is likely to be:

biased when states (a) have changed and respondents are unaware of the change, (b) have changed and respondents uniformly miscalculate the degree or nature of the change, and (c) are stable and respondents assume that they have changed in a particular fashion ... people exaggerated their consistency over time and inappropriately inferred that a prior response followed from their current state; people overestimated the extent to which their present state differed from an earlier state – they inferred a prior response that was too much at variance with their current status; and evidence was found that linked both of the above mentioned biases to people’s implicit theories of stability and change for the attribute in question. (Ross, 1989, p.351)

The developers’ responses were captured years after the program had been developed; therefore, there may be some personal bias in their responses.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Human Resource Development (HRD)

Human resource departments within organizations are designed in part to assist employees in their professional development. Training and development activities are “planned programs of organizational improvement undertaken to bring about a relatively permanent change in employee knowledge, skills, attitudes, or social behavior” (Cascio & Aquinis, 2005, p.381). HRD also focuses on the individual’s ability to perform what has been learned in training and development activities after returning to the job. Performance is described as the demonstration of learning; the “observable, measurable behavior from which we infer learning” (Cascio & Aquinis, 2005, p. 381). HRD departments within organizations try to ensure that learning occurs whenever any training and development activity has been provided. One of the most prevalent areas of focus for HRD and training and development efforts throughout the past decade has been computer training and education because of the information technology revolution.

Training and education are processes or methods that are often used to introduce new technological innovations to individuals within organizations. Training is narrow in the sense that it focuses on the “gap” as described by Silberman (1998) or the assessed need of the individual to acquire some specific knowledge and/or skill. Training is often short-term and specific to a particular environment or task. It

also focuses on processes and/or procedures needed to perform one or more tasks by providing specific 'need to know' information to the individual.

Education, much broader in nature than training, is designed to prepare individuals for future aspirations as opposed to current needs. It often provides general, as opposed to specific, knowledge and/or skills, and in contrast to training, is more long-term and general in nature. It is a more all-encompassing process of acquiring knowledge. Education focuses more on theory and background of applications as opposed to practical application. Training and education are different in many respects; however, they are similar with regard to their primary purpose, which is to transfer knowledge to an individual.

Faculty Professional Development

Professional development of faculty on a university campus is a special case of HRD. Considerable learning occurs within organizations, but not all of it is planned. "Some of this learning is planned and formally sanctioned by the organization, but much of it is serendipitous, unplanned, and informal (e.g., learning from someone who has the inside 'track')" (Cascio & Aquinis, 2005, p.381). Traditionally, university faculty have acquired training and education through self-study, informal collaboration with peers, seminars, workshops, and professional conferences; however, those forms of skill acquisition techniques were often not specific in detail nor did they provide opportunities for faculty to develop their skills through practice. This training was often not directly related to the instructional roles of faculty.

Faculty were constantly in contact with students and were the ones who needed to become adept at providing these computer enabled resources to students. Because of their unique positions, faculty were considered to be in the optimum position for imparting new and evolving knowledge. Thus, faculty were placed in situations that may not always have been comfortable for them and required that they acquire additional knowledge and/or skills to provide necessary information to their students. In the past, course materials primarily consisted of written documentation (i.e. books, papers, course handouts, etc...) and whatever the student could obtain through lectures, labs, workshops, etc. In order to enhance student comprehension of the subject matter being presented, faculty spent considerable time preparing and revising their materials. The addition of computer technology does not reduce the amount of time faculty members must spend preparing (Deden, 1998). They could not take for granted that computers alone would enhance student learning. Course materials using computer technology needed to be well designed and much consideration given to how the materials were implemented into the instruction (Oliver, Omari, & Herrington, 1998)

The organization of FDI resembled more of a formal training program than a traditional education program. It provided short-term, specific training focused on the task of computer technology utilization in instruction. It was based on a perceived need and specific objectives. Its focus was not on following traditional teaching or educational methods, but on specific skills training -- how faculty could use computer technology within their instructional process. It helped faculty develop skills in an environment that promoted learning by doing (e.g., Dewian). Faculty were provided an opportunity to be actively involved in their skill development and gained access to technical assistance resources that allowed them to work at their own pace. They were given opportunity to build relationships with other participants and facilitators of the FDI workshops and to use these individuals and other peers as mentoring/coaching resources after leaving the workshop(s). They were also provided written documentation of training materials that were specifically designed to meet their needs during, and as a reference after, the workshop. Faculty members must also remain actively involved in their own development (Hurst, 1994).

They must not be intimidated by technology, but be willing to take on new challenges for their own, and their students' future development. This is accomplished by embracing new technologies, employing the necessary skills, and continuous improvements in the development process for educational growth.

Expectancy Theory

Vroom (1995) pioneered the development of expectancy theory for use in explaining work behavior. Since his initial study, many researchers have used expectancy theory to explain work behavior. As a result, many models have been designed, developed and modified to explain expectations, values and instrumentations. Porter, who worked closely with Vroom, and Steers focused upon the role that "met expectations" may have on withdrawal behavior of an individual. Their concept of met expectations is described as the "discrepancy between what a person encounters on this job in the way of positive and negative experiences and what he expected to encounter" (Porter & Steers, 1973). Porter and Steers (1973) hypothesized that when an individual's expectations – whatever they are – are not substantially met, propensity to withdraw would increase. Irving and Meyer (1995) believed that the met expectations hypothesis could be tested by utilizing difference scores reflecting the discrepancy between post-entry experiences and pre-entry expectations. Investigation found, however, that difference scores produced artificial relations with outcome variables. The use of direct measures requires respondents to indicate how well their pre-entry expectations concerning their jobs were confirmed (Irving & Meyer, 1995). A weakness of direct measures of met expectations is that it requires individuals to recall their prior expectations after having been on the job for some time. Individual recollections of pre-entry expectations are filtered by more recent experiences and behaviors (Irving & Meyer, 1995).

METHOD

This study evaluated of the impact of training on initial 50 faculty participants of FDI through perceptions of the FDI developers. It also evaluated expectations and goals that were considered by developers of FDI as they made decisions about the future of the training program. This study also assess the contribution to the scientific understanding of the training process by evaluating the alignment of developer and participant expectations – whether they were met or not and how they affected perceived outcomes.

The population for this phase of the study was the five developers of the Faculty Development Institute. The developers of FDI were identified through meetings with current directors of the program. Their experiences working within a university environment at the time that FDI was developed ranged from five to 20 years. They worked in areas including the Provost office, information systems, media services, adjunct faculty, and other areas of the university. Four of the five were male, three of the men held doctoral degrees. There was 100 percent participation by the developers.

The research design for this study is a mixed methodological approach. Qualitative methodology was chosen to address the portion of the study that deals with the goals of the university and the developers of FDI. Interviews were conducted so that developer's goals and expectations could be determined. Open-ended questions were asked so that the interviewees would not limit their response (Seidman, 1998). Data was also collected from historical analysis of documents relevant to the initiation and development of FDI.

The credibility and dependability of the data in this study was affirmed through the use of triangulation, member checking and participatory or collaborative modes of research (Merriam, 1998). Member checking was used allow the developers to review the summary of their responses for accuracy

throughout the study and adjustments were made as deemed appropriate. A participatory or collaborative mode of research was also used by meeting with the developers and obtaining their assistance with gathering documents and finding participants throughout the study.

Quantitative methodology was used because this was a descriptive and *ex post facto* study. Quantitative data was gathered from survey questionnaires. The questionnaire was developed from the interviews with FDI developers and historical document analysis. The survey participants in this study were the five developers and 50 faculty members who were the first to participate in the training program. The survey instrument was used to triangulate the developers' interview responses and historical document analysis data. The reliability and validity of the Likert survey used in this study was evaluated by the dissertation committee and faculty members from the Education Research (EDRE) program within University's Department of Leadership and Policy Studies. The survey was sent to various individuals for evaluation of readability and usability. All suggested changes were made to enhance the survey.

RESULTS

Evaluation of the political and public relations impact of the training was not an initial plan for this study; however, during the qualitative interviews it emerged as a consistent theme that the FDI developers were led to develop this program due to the political climate from state needs and public relations implications on campus and within the community.

The comparison results evaluated within this study are as follows:

University Expectations vs. FDI Expectations

The university and FDI had different expectations regarding the probable outcomes of the initial FDI workshop. The university had 11 broad strategies, goals, and expectations for meeting the challenges brought on by technological change and changes in the university environment. Of those, FDI had the potential to directly and significantly influence two. The first of those was the University's goal "to establish a comprehensive program of human resource development for faculty, staff, and administrators". The FDI initiative was in alignment with the university objective "to strengthen and expand faculty development programs related to teaching effectiveness, advising, and the applications of advanced computing and communications technologies in the teaching-learning environment".

The second goal of the university relevant to FDI was "to enhance the quality and accessibility of library and other information resources and advanced computing and communication technologies" (The University Plan: 1991-1996, 1991, p.1). FDI made that one of their expectations and assisted with providing faculty with the technological hardware and software necessary to meet this university goal. The FDI initiative may have impacted most, or even all, of the university goals to some extent; however, these two goals were those most compatible with the focus of FDI as initially conceived and implemented.

University Expectations vs. University Outcomes

Through historical document analysis information, the University expectations in regards to FDI were met and achieved according to the *University Plan: Progress Toward 1991-1996 Goals (The University Plan: 1991-1996*, 1991). FDI was a part of a larger Instructional Development Initiative and the outcomes that impacted on the broader university goals were achieved. According to findings from FDI developer interviews, FDI provided the capability for the accomplishment of many changes to help the

University achieve a number of goals. For example, one of the FDI developers made the following comments to illustrate how FDI sparked a transformation in the University environment:

The faculty development program has produced faculty ... [driven] ideas. It was faculty out of the faculty development program that came up with the idea for the math emporium and pushed us to help them implement the math emporium. It was faculty that had gone through the [FDI] that established something called the Cyber School, which was an early sort of online university pilot... It was faculty ... who realized we really need to know that students had a certain high level of computing capability ... and based on that proposed the requirement for everyone to have computers ... [at] the university...

FDI Expectations vs. FDI Outcomes

Sixteen of the 17 short-term or 94.1% and 21 of 24 or 87.5% of the long-term expectations were perceived as having been achieved by the developers. The extent to which individual developers believed each expectation was achieved differed. The difference can be explained based on the viewpoint from which the developers were measuring achievement. They all came from different areas of the university and were looking at the program from different perspectives and came to the project with different expectations.

The developers unanimously agreed upon the following eight items from the questionnaire as being among their long-term expectations as a result of the initial FDI workshop:

Outcomes	<u>% Yes</u>
Improved undergraduate student education. (n=5)	100
Curriculum change within disciplines would occur through implementation of formal course development for targeted courses. (n=5)	100
FDI would become a forum for faculty to re-think their teaching strategies and how they were teaching. (n=5)	100
Faculty could develop new ways to use technology to help students learn. (n=5)	100
Faculty would be provided with an opportunity to explore new approaches to instruction. (n=5)	100
All faculty would develop higher levels of computer literacy and skills. (n=5)	100
The quality of interaction among students and faculty would improve. (n=5)	100
The university would become a national leader in the use and ntegration of computer technology in teaching and research.(n=5)	100

According Kunneman, Key, and Sleezer (2000), the use of technology, the relentless speed of change and the skills needed by working people have provided the platform for change within organizations (2000). Interview findings show that developers saw the opportunity, were in positions to influence change and made the decision to so. FDI evolved out of that decision. Developers stated:

...you know the argument was made, we talked about it as a good idea and I agreed and told people to go ahead with it...I was central to the executive decision that yes we should go ahead, it was a good idea.

I went to the University Provost and proposed our, initiating a program that would be aimed at, a faculty development program that would be aimed at 100% of our faculty over several years, then I indicated that I would be willing to reallocate internal resources... to support personnel and operating costs associated with this program, but that I would need support in winning a reallocation of some of the equipment trust fund monies to pay for the equipment that would be allocated to faculty...

According to the developers comments below the timing and involvement of individuals in the university community played a role in the success of the program as well:

we did it rather quickly because we first started meeting in October, November 1992 and the first workshops occurred June of 1993, so basically, we had six months. It was relatively fast for a University.

Actually, I think for a University initiative, it happened pretty quickly. I think one of the reasons why FDI was so successful was that there was a period of planning that extended for ... three to six months before each workshop that happened with the representative or representatives of the groups that were going to be coming through and I think that made the workshops more meaningful for people who came...it was a workshop that was tailored to the needs of the group.

DISCUSSION

The initial FDI initiative was successful in meeting the expectations of the developers and the university. The perceived outcomes for the university were: (a) The Instructional Development Initiative would provide an opportunity for all faculty members over a four-year period with a state-of-the art computer and an intensive workshop focused on the integration of advanced computing and communications technology into the curriculum. Over 650 faculty members, almost half of the faculty, have participated in this program; and (b) the university has leveraged the communications infrastructure, enhanced through network technology and resources, allowing the development of hundreds of Internet home pages on campus (*The University Plan: Progress Toward 1991-1996 Goals*, 1996).

Sackett and Mullen (1993) stated that training programs should be evaluated for political or public relations purposes (e.g., documenting success may increase the training function's credibility and visibility within an organization). This study was an evaluation of the FDI. The results of this study show that FDI was successful in increasing its credibility and visibility within the university community. FDI is still a very viable training entity within the campus of this university. Faculty members are allowed to suggest topics for training that is customized to meet their needs.

A particular faculty member in this study offered the following synopsis:

From my perspective the FDI initiative has been a resounding success at helping faculty become computer literate; however, few faculty incorporate technology in their classroom instructional strategies. I have been using technology in my classes for years. The FDI initiative has given me updated hardware, which I greatly appreciate; however, the integration of technology in my classroom behavior more or less comes from my professional interests. How do students learn? How can technology enhance this learning? (personal communication, 2001)

Today, all faculty at the university has had an opportunity to attend FDI workshops and seminars and all new faculty are required to attend the sessions to obtain their initial computer. University faculty are continuing to develop new uses for technology within their instruction. The FDI has also been expanded to include graduate student development. The future of FDI is open for ideas that are generated through enhanced training programs. Effective evaluation increases credibility and visibility of the training function. FDI has been a visible and integrated part of this university's community because of its design to be a success initially. They focused on areas that were doable and measurable. They also "built and organizational base and generated trust and participation among professors interested in developing CMI, by making not-yet-worked-out technologies visible to them in demonstrations" (Nespor, 2006, p. 5).

IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

This study provides training and development professionals with another perspective from which to enhance evaluations of training programs. Understanding developer and organization's expectations before a program is developed should lead to a better utilization of resources when implementing a program. Better measurement of the transfer of training occurs because what individuals expect to receive from training would have been clearly identified and documented. This method would allow trainers to use direct measures in which respondents would indicate the extent to which they perceived their pre-entry expectations concerning the training to have been confirmed (Irving and Meyer, 1995). Trainers can also use incentives that are directly applicable to removing barriers that participants encounter to potentially motivate learners. The computers and technical support that were provided to participants upon completion of the program was a significant factor in their participation in the program and they were subsequently used after the program. They may not all have been used directly instruction by all faculty members but there was evidence of application of some of the computer knowledge being applied upon return to the job.

Trainers can also add to scientific learning and enhance their relationships and public relations image within organizations by effectively documenting and communicating successes. Effective evaluation increases credibility and visibility of the training function. FDI has been a visible and integrated part of this university's community because of its design to be a success initially. By focusing on areas that were clearly measurable and readily identifiable, they also benefited from an organized and informed base and established a rapport with professors, which helped the success of the initiative.

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