Managing Department Climate Change at Utah State University

Professor Ronda Callister
ADVANCE Co-PI
Started with Survey 2003-04

- Surveyed 43 departments at 70% response rate and found significant differences in climates
- Data presented to Provost, Dean’s Council, Dept. Head Retreat (code #s)
- Selected and recruited depts. based on survey data and recommendations.
- Did not choose depts. in bottom 20%
Dual Agenda Approach:
Equity and Effectiveness

• Organizations are typically organized around masculine models of work.

• Address both equity and effectiveness
  – Creates sustainable changes -- everybody’s because interests are addressed
  – Avoids backlash with positive changes for all

• It is difficult to maintain equal focus on both

Change Philosophy

Women and minorities often suffer disproportionately in negative department climates.

In positive department climates most dept members are better off, but the positive benefits to women faculty appear greater.

Dual Agenda Methods

- Interview faculty to identify primary impediments to work effectiveness, job satisfaction and equity in the dept.
- Held a dept. retreat to present summary of interview data and brainstorm department improvements. Develop implementation plan.
- USU ADVANCE team provided one time funding for efforts that address both effectiveness and equity.
Aardvark Science Dept

Retreat Identified Problems
• Isolation, desire for increased interactions and collaborations.
• Closed doors – Untenured faculty had difficulty getting answers

Proposed Changes
• Weekly coffee hours & seminar series. Well attended, lots of interaction
• Restructured annual retreats – added more interaction
Cabbage & Carrots Dept.

Problem Identification
• Deep divisions
• Department Head -- conflict avoidant, difficulties with decision-making

Response
• Few actionable proposals at the retreat
• Provided outside facilitator for meetings and retreat
• Assistant dept head proposed to help DH
Sticks & Stones Dept.

Problem Identification

• Recently created department
• Junior faculty worried about mentoring, senior worried about their value.
• Few suggestions regarding whole dept

Response

• With dept head we designed monthly research seminars – very well received
• Cross disciplinary collaborative seed grants developed
Key Observations

• Retreats provide a place for engagement
• Faculty can contribute significant insights and ideas when engaged.
• Faculty generated change efforts can be effective.
• It is challenging to maintain momentum after the retreat. Regular follow-up meetings help
• Dept head skills and buy-in are important
Follow-up Interviews

Aardvark Science – “The seminars and coffee hours were good at bringing the dept together.”

“For those included … it created the atmosphere to stimulate [collaboration].”

“I had not talked to some faculty members for years. I didn’t even know some of the faculty.”

“A year before I had to knock on someone’s door or there was not much interaction.”

“It is especially helpful for young faculty to talk to each other.”
Follow-up Interviews

Cabbage & Carrots -- Facilitation

“The biggest thing is that we can talk now.” “Our administrators didn’t want to talk about unpleasant underlying issues.” “ADVANCE helped us do some soul searching.”

Sticks & Stones – “ADVANCE has done a good job of not just helping women, but trying to help everybody.

“They wanted to make [this] a better place to work” Dept head: “ADVANCE really helped faculty feel committed to this dept.”
2007 Climate Survey Outcomes

Aardvark Science
  +Improved Affective Climate

Cabbage & Carrots
  - No improvement
  - Divisions were too deep

Sticks & Stones
  +Improved on five measures
University S&E Improvements

Improvements in Annual Non-Retirement Attrition

Pre-ADVANCE
1998-2003

ADVANCE
2004-2008

women

men

8%

3.8%

3%

3.2%
Conclusions

• Dept. climate change is intensive, time consuming work and
• Survey assessments of improvements can be swamped by other negative events
• BUT, this is very important work
• Research suggests that women are more negatively affected by dept. climate than men.