Conflict in Higher Education Faculty Evaluation
by Susan Waller, Cabrini College

"We should look long and carefully at ourselves before we pass judgment on others." So said Moliere in *The Misanthrope* and so think many faculty members and administrators in institutions of higher education. Much of the reluctance surrounding faculty evaluation arises because of its two conflicting purposes: evidence upon which to base personnel decisions, and information upon which to improve teaching performance. The summative and formative natures of this one activity lead to confusion and apprehension. Although Centra (1979) argued that the "two purposes ... need not be mutually exclusive, [but] should, in fact, go hand in hand" (p. 1), other researchers pointed clearly to the difficulties that arise when the two purposes are joined (Mill & Hyle, 1999; Ory, 1999). Yet, even the researchers who acknowledge these difficulties are hard pressed to describe an alternate solution to the dilemma.

One way of understanding the tension between the conflicting purposes of faculty evaluation, that of performance and that of development, is to consider it in the context of organization theory. Initially, the conflict arises because higher educational organizations and the individuals who work in them want to inhabit an idealized environment, where appropriate, just decisions are made about promotion and tenure, and where faculty members continually strive to improve their teaching. In the context of organization theory, such desires follow the rational model that describes an ideal organization. Many of the elements of Weber's rational-legal bureaucracy surface in idealized descriptions of faculty evaluation and its place within the academy. Along with the rational model, the literature concerning faculty evaluation also reveals aspects of classical management theory (Miller, 1974).

However, as Perrow (1986) noted, the idealized rational model is incompatible with the real world of organizations. Therefore, other aspects of organization theory apply in understanding and explaining

systems of faculty evaluation and the dilemmas they create. One fruitful theory views organizations as cultures. By understanding the cultures connected with an organization, its members can better understand the conflicts that occur. By examining the various levels of organizational culture as they relate to faculty evaluation, administrators and faculty can achieve a better understanding of the purposes of evaluation and the best means to use when undertaking it.

Rationality

As Seldin (1980) noted in Successful Faculty Evaluation Programs, informal means of evaluating faculty have always existed. What is relatively recent, however, is the desire to formalize the evaluation methods and to use evaluation for multiple ends. The formalization, in theoretical terms, exists in the bureaucracy of evaluation that most universities have established. Perrow (1986), in Complex Organizations, delineated the aspects of a bureaucracy as first described by Max Weber, a nineteenth century German sociologist. Weber listed these key elements of the rational-legal bureaucracy:

1. Equal treatment for all employees.

2. Reliance on expertise, skills, and experience relevant to the position.

3. No extraorganizational prerogatives of position... The employee cannot use [the organization] for personal ends.

4. Specific standards of work and output.

5. Extensive record keeping dealing with the work and output.

6. Establishment and enforcement of rules that serve the interests of the organization.

7. Recognition that rules and regulations bind managers as well as employees; thus employees can hold management to the terms of the employment contract. (p. 3)

Much of organization theory responds in some way to Weber's depiction of this rational model of organizations. Subsequent theorists used the rational model as a touchstone, revising it or reacting to it in their

attempts to devise theories that explain the workings of people within organizations and the organizations themselves.

Reliance on the rational model predominates in the literature concerning faculty evaluation, underscoring the desire for those who evaluate to operate in a rational world. Rifkin (1995) found in a literature review that both faculty and administration held views concerning the "ideal methods and purposes of faculty evaluation." Miller (1974) insisted that the accountability that comes from evaluation "means relating objectives sought to ends achieved" (p. 3), while Seldin (1986) emphasized that faculty evaluation can "provide a rational, equitable basis for crucial administrative decisions on tenure, promotion in rank, and retention" (p. 5). Even Menges (2000), in an article critical of the positivistic, rational approach to teaching research, suggested a line of inquiry into the practice of teaching that is based on the rational model. He proposed research that would investigate why faculty did not incorporate proven and successful teaching methods into their classrooms. This question implies a logical, rational approach to teaching that identifies and implements the most productive behavior to achieve the desired ends. Such language supports a rational-legal bureaucracy where decisions are made by management for rational reasons supported by the legal framework of the organization (Perrow, 1986).

Another early organization theory, classical management, also appears in the faculty evaluation literature. Perrow (1986) noted that classical management theory, based on several European sources, developed in the United States in the early 20th century before Weber's views were translated and widely circulated. Classical management theory applies maxims or what Perrow (1986) called proverbs to management. Contemporary theorists have little time for this approach, yet Perrow (1986) argued that the maxims, though simple, are usually quite applicable and current theorists have not found suitable replacements. In the right context, such maxims prove effective and productive.

Miller's (1974) Developing Programs for Faculty Evaluation presents an exemplar of these maxims. In Chapter One, after quoting John Masefield's poem, "There are Few Earthly Things More Beautiful than a University," Miller listed these suggestions: "Process is more important than product...; willingness to change is inversely proportional to proximity...; expect opposition...; know your faculty...; keep strategy flexible and low-key" (pp. 10-14). One can see why contemporary scholars might ridicule such an approach as naïve and simplistic, yet managers often overlook simple approaches in favor of more complex ones with ineffectual results.

Formative v. Summative Purposes

The rational model of organizations and classical management theory provide a straightforward view of faculty evaluation; however, neither model fully accounts for the conflict that arises in all faculty evaluation systems. The crux of the conflict comes from the dual purpose of faculty evaluation. On the one hand, faculty evaluation promotes, encourages, and supports faculty development; as such, it constitutes formative evaluation. On the other hand, faculty evaluation yields information upon which decisions regarding promotion, rank, and tenure are made; in this form, it involves summative evaluation (Centra, 1993; Mills & Hyle, 1999; Ory, 1991; Rifkin, 1995; Seldin, 1980).

The conflict has been growing as faculty evaluations have developed over the past forty years. Ory (1991) described the evolution of faculty evaluation in terms of changing purposes and methods. Early evaluation was based on "informal assessment" by the chair or dean (Ory, 1991, p. 30). However, in the 1960s, students initiated faculty evaluations because they wanted accountability from the faculty and a way to inform fellow students about faculty's teaching expertise. In the 1970s faculty began to take control over evaluation procedures to enhance faculty development. In the 1980s, administrators saw the potential for evaluation as a means to address issues of accountability, both internally and externally. In this decade the public increasingly called for accountability in higher education, and universities experienced lawsuits brought by professors who had been denied tenure (Ory, 1991).

Foremost among the explanations for the conflict is perception. Reviewing many studies, Rifkin (1995) found that faculty perceived discrepancies between the ideal purpose of evaluation, as stated by the administration, and its practical application. In fact, these perceptions "of how the results are used interfere with the overall success of evaluation systems that attempt to incorporate both [formative and summative] purposes." These misperceptions often result from the competing nature of the two purposes, according to Mills and Hyle (1999):

When these approaches are combined in one review, faculty members must choose between providing honest, reflective self-criticism or minimizing weaknesses while emphasizing (even exaggerating) their contributions when reviewing their performance with their chair, who is expected to use information from the review to justify a summative decision reported to higher levels in the institution. (p. 353)

Despite the conflict and some literature that supported separating the two purposes of evaluation (Keig & Waggoner, 1994), much of the literature endorsed the combination of purposes and called for reform rather than revolution.

Many of the "how-to" guides addressed the issue from the dual-purpose perspective (Centra, 1979; Centra, 1993; Miller, 1974; Seldin, 1980; Seldin, 1984). Mills and Hyle (1999) in their study of faculty evaluation practices from the faculty's perspective found that faculty wants to keep the dual system, but wants it improved. Both Rifkin (1995) and Ory (1991) advised improvements and reforms, including multiple methods of evaluating such as chair and dean evaluation, student evaluation, classroom visits, peer review, syllabi and assignment evaluation, teaching portfolios, research and publication record, and service opportunities (Aubrecht, 1984; Keig & Waggoner, 1994; Johnson & Ryan, 2000; Murray, 1995; Ory, 1991; Seldin, 1984). However, these methods will only be effective if they are appropriate to the context, or culture, of the university.

Culture as a Means of Understanding Organization

In her textbook on organization theory, Hatch (1997) described organization theories as frames through which we can view organizations and the aspects and cultures within them. She argued that theories allow practitioners to abstract the events occurring around them in order to evaluate those events. Armed with the results of the theoretical evaluation, practitioners can then return to their concrete organizations with a clearer understanding of the conflicts and with possible ways of responding to them. Faculty evaluation in higher education is an area of conflict that can be addressed through the abstraction of organization theory. The theory of organization as culture provides a helpful framework for understanding the conflict in faculty evaluation. Hatch (1997) noted that culture in organizations can be considered in three productive ways: the organization is a culture, the organization has cultures within it, and the organization is affected by outside cultures. All three of these approaches can apply to faculty evaluation in higher education.

Much has been written about the unique culture of higher education. Although in the past decades, significant effort has gone into treating higher education as a corporation, many of these attempts have been unsuccessful because of several traits that distinguish organizations of higher education from those of business. In How Colleges Work, Birnbaum (1988) clearly articulated the causes of these difficulties. He

began his discussion with the provocative paradox that "American colleges and universities are poorly run but highly effective" (p. 3). The areas or problems of organization that create the unique culture of higher education, according to Birnbaum (1988), include the system of dual control where both administration and faculty govern the university; the multiple missions of the university -- teaching, research, and service; constraints of resources as more and more funding sources are external to the university; and the confusion over types of leadership and power sources that are effective in such an environment.

Whereas Birnbaum's (1988) discussion addressed higher education in general, numerous articles in the faculty evaluation literature considered the impact of the culture of higher education on faculty evaluation specifically. Geis (1984) described the significant culture change that occurred post World War II when universities went from prestigious men's clubs populated by somewhat eccentric, highly motivated, and autonomous individuals to diverse institutions composed of heterogeneous workers (sometimes unionized) who processed knowledge and students to create products. Evaluation and accountability were irrelevant in the old culture, but have become critical in the new one.

Despite the culture shift, aspects of the old paradigm still exist. Mills and Hyle (1999) suggested that the multiple missions of the university and its emphasis on individual achievement and autonomy make it difficult to evaluate in an efficient and practical way. Their suggestion of mixed and multiple practices of evaluation is an attempt to mold evaluation practices to match the culture of the organization. Seldin (1984) noted a peculiar aspect of teaching in the culture of higher education that directly influences the ability to evaluate faculty performance. Unlike teachers at other levels, college professors rarely receive any pedagogical instruction as part of their training. Furthermore, few teaching in-service programs are offered to university faculty with virtually no incentive to attend. In addition, the reward system is heavily weighted in favor of objective means of evaluation, such as student ratings (not always based on the quality of teaching) and research and publication records.

Although a dominant culture of higher education can be identified, it is hardly monolithic. The theoretical frame of culture also allows for sub-cultures within a dominant culture and considers their impact, especially in terms of conflict. An analysis of subcultures within higher education that affect faculty evaluation yields two sets of conflicting worldviews. One set involves the friction between teaching and research. The other set involves the argument concerning valid means of evaluation.

Research and Teaching

A powerful myth that operates in higher education is that a good researcher is a good teacher (Arreola, 1984). Existing before the culture shift that Geis (1984) described, the insistence that research and knowledge production in one's field correlates with effective teaching continues to permeate the academy. The conflict has developed because, as Aleomoni (1984) maintained, lip service is given to a three-fold culture (research, teaching, and service), but rewards are based primarily on research. Such a conflict is a good example of Argyris' "espoused theory [versus] theory in use" (as cited in Seldin, 1984, p. 92). This conflict is fueled by conflicting perceptions. Administrators think that evaluations based on their perceptions and student ratings are valid, but faculty often questions both sources of data (Aleomoni, 1984). In addition, faculty members say that they were hired to teach, that both they and administrators name teaching as a top priority, yet faculty do not see teaching being rewarded in terms of personnel decisions (Aleomoni, 1984; Arreola, 1984).

Another wrinkle in the conflict between research and teaching comes in terms of distinguishing sub-cultures based on occupation (Hatch, 1997). Aubrecht (1984) maintained that faculty evaluation systems do not adequately account for merit, worth, and market value. Faculty positions that teach occupational disciplines such as business, engineering, and computer science have greater market value but not necessarily greater worth. However, they are rewarded according to their market value. In response to this inequity, Aubrecht (1984) suggested tailoring evaluations to match various disciplines. Another example of an occupational sub-culture is developmental studies (Eble, 1984). Faculty members who teach remedial courses are not usually afforded many opportunities for research and publication. Given the emphasis on these areas in promotion and tenure, faculty suffers. Ironically, faculty members who teach developmental courses are becoming more important to the university as it admits more underprepared students. Yet the rewards system has not changed to address their strengths.

Collegiality *vs*. Accountability

The second conflicting set of worldviews that manifests itself in sub-cultures within higher education organizations concerns the nature of evaluation methods and the importance of accountability. The difficulty, as described by Chickering (1984), is with "evidence and criteria" (p. 92). Before the post World War II culture shift, what little faculty evaluation that occurred was affected by collegiality and was informal (Eble, 1984).

On some college campuses and in some departments, this culture of collegiality is still quite strong (Birnbaum, 1988). After all, chairs and deans who are evaluating their colleagues today will most likely return to the ranks of the department and be evaluated, possibly by those same colleagues, in a few years. This recycling encourages evaluations that avoid confrontation and accountability (Mills & Hyle, 1999). However, the sub-culture of collegiality is being challenged today by one of accountability. Unionization and larger faculties preclude informal methods of evaluation (Eble, 1984). In addition, administrators seek methods that are more comprehensive and more objective, thus easier to judge.

The conflicting cultures of collegiality and accountability provide a prime example of the third way to view organizational culture: the organization is affected by outside cultures. The increasingly strident calls for accountability from both legislators and the public translate into evaluation methods that are easier to judge because they are empirically based (Aleomoni, 1984; Chickering, 1984). The importance of accountability is also a byproduct of uncertain economic times with the accompanying results of inconsistent enrollment and declining budgets (Chickering, 1984). Furthermore, changes in the economy mean that universities may be forced to trim their ranks. Given the litigious nature of our society, such decisions must be based on evidence that can stand up in court (Arreola, 1984; Eble, 1984). All of these external cultures have influenced the culture of the university, its sub-cultures, and its views on faculty evaluation.

What should be made of a discussion of the culture of higher education? What abstract ideas can the practitioner, in Hatch's (1997) model, take back to the concrete organization to use to address these conflicts? How can faculty evaluation be improved to meet the conflicting needs of all of the stakeholders? Although some organizational theorists contend that culture itself can be changed and managed directly, Hatch (1997) agreed with those that maintain that culture cannot be managed directly because its norms and values are too deeply imbedded in the participants and barely articulated, let alone malleable to direct change. Instead, Hatch (1997) proposed that rather than trying to change culture, managers should consider culture when instituting organizational changes:

When you attempt to change organizational culture, while it is true that something will change, generally the changes are unpredictable and sometimes undesirable (e.g., increases in employee cynicism toward cultural change programs). This does not mean that concern for culture is unwarranted. To the contrary, it is essential. But you need to give up

thinking of culture as an entity and trying to understand what it does. Instead, think of culture as a context for meaning making and interpretations. Do not think of trying to manage culture. Other people's meanings and interpretations are highly unmanageable. Think instead about trying to culturally manage your organization, that is, manage your organization with cultural awareness of the multiplicity of meanings that will be made of you and your efforts. (p. 235)

Following Hatch's (1997) advice, both administrators and faculty should be cognizant of the culture of their organization and seek changes in faculty evaluation procedures that account for the culture (Mills & Hyle, 1999). These changes could include evaluation methods that are appropriate to the image of the college, for example professional schools versus liberal arts institutions (Geis, 1984). Other changes that support the shifting culture involve more comprehensive views of teaching excellence and expertise and multiple methods of evaluation (Arreola, 1984; Kreber, 2002).

Regardless of the changes made, administrators and faculty members should understand the culture of their unique institution. Though many faculty evaluation guidebooks contain standardized evaluation tools, and though empirically-based tools demand the validity and reliability that come from multiple uses and analysis, administrators and faculty should consider devising tools that speak to the specific needs and unique aspects of their environment. Furthermore, those involved in faculty evaluation should propose organizational change that will support both purposes of faculty evaluation. Obviously, as in any organization, higher education administrators must make personnel decisions, and those decisions must be based on some type of data. Evaluation that clearly and honestly reports the goals of faculty members and their progress towards those goals is an invaluable aid to making personnel decisions. Moreover, one of the goals of every faculty member should be improved teaching. Faculty evaluation that truly serves faculty development is crucial for that goal to be met.

Most likely, conflict in faculty evaluation will never be eradicated. In fact, Hatch (1997) claimed that some conflict in organizations is healthy. As long as administrators and faculty envision an ideal environment with perfectly attuned evaluation methods yet live in a real world, as long as worldviews concerning mission, validity, and accountability collide, conflict will exist. Perhaps former City of New York University Chancellor Albert Bowker's metaphor is an apt one: Fires of conflict will always exist. Our job is to decide whether to pour oil or water onto them (as cited in Birnbaum, 1988). If administrators and faculty cooperate and

compromise, they can identify healthy aspects of the conflict surrounding faculty evaluation. Their combined efforts can enhance faculty evaluation, improve classroom teaching, and, ultimately, influence the culture of their university.

References

Aleomoni, L. M. (1984). The dynamics of faculty evaluation. In P. Seldin, Changing practices in faculty evaluation: A critical assessment and recommendations for improvement (pp. 75-79). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Arreola, R. A. (1984) Evaluation of faculty performance: Key issues. In P. Seldin, Changing practices in faculty evaluation: A critical assessment and recommendations for improvement (pp. 79-85). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Aubrecht, J. D. (1984). Better faculty evaluation systems. In P. Seldin, Changing practices in faculty evaluation: A critical assessment and recommendations for improvement (pp. 85-91). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Birnbaum, R. (1988). How colleges work: The cybernetics of academic organization and leadership. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Centra, J. A. (1979). Determining faculty effectiveness. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Centra, J. A. (1993). Reflective faculty evaluation: Enhancing teaching and determining faculty effectiveness. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Chickering, A. W. (1984). Faculty evaluation: Problems and solutions. In P. Seldin, Changing practices in faculty evaluation: A critical assessment and recommendations for improvement (pp. 91-96). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Eble, K. E. (1984). New directions in faculty evaluation. In P. Seldin, Changing practices in faculty evaluation: A critical assessment and recommendations for improvement (pp. 96-100). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Geis, G. L. (1984). The context of evaluation. In P. Seldin, Changing practices in faculty evaluation: A critical assessment and recommendations for improvement (pp. 101-107). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hatch, M. J. (1997). Organization theory: Modern, symbolic, and postmodern perspectives. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Johnson, T. D. & Ryan, K. E. (2000). A comprehensive approach to the evaluation of college teaching. In K. E. Ryan (Ed.), New directions for teaching and learning. Evaluating teaching in higher education: A vision for the future (pp. 109-123). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kreber, C. (2002). Teaching excellence, teaching expertise, and the scholarship of teaching. Innovative Higher Education, 27, 5-23. Retrieved March 15, 2004, from EBSCOHost database.

Menges, R. (2000). Shortcomings of research on evaluating and improving teaching in higher education. In K. E. Ryan (Ed.), New directions for teaching and learning. Evaluating teaching in higher education: A vision for the future (pp. 5-12). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Miller, R. I. (1974). Developing programs for faculty evaluation. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Mills, M., & Hyle, A. (1999). Faculty evaluation: A prickly pear. Higher Education, 38, 351-371. Retrieved March 15, 2004, from EBSCOHost database.

Ory, J. C. (1991). Changes in evaluating teaching in higher education. Theory into Practice, 30, 30-36. Retrieved March 15, 2004, from EBSCOHost database.

Perrow, C. (1986). Complex organizations: A critical essay (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw Hill.

Rifkin, T. (1995). The status and scope of faculty evaluation. [Eric Digest]. Retrieved February 27, 2004 from http://www.ericfacility.net/databases/ERIC_Digests/ ed385315.html

Seldin, P. (1980). Successful faculty evaluation programs: A practical guide to improve faculty performance and promotion/tenure decisions. Crugers, NY: Coventry Press.

Seldin, P. (1984). Changing practices in faculty evaluation: A critical assessment and recommendations for improvement. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Author Susan C. Waller, M.A., M.Ed. is Coordinator of the Writing Center at Cabrini College in Radnor, PA.