



Department Chair Online Resource Center

Supervising Your Faculty with a Differentiated Model

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BACKGROUND

The University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh is situated in east-central Wisconsin and enrolls nearly 11,000 undergraduate and graduate students. We work in the College of Education and Human Services, which functions in the graduate school and serves students pursuing master's degrees in educational leadership and educational administration. These latter students receive state certification as building and central office administrators. One of us currently serves as department chairperson and is responsible for the annual supervision of faculty in the department. Another serves as alternate chair for the same department. Likewise, one of us has served as a public school principal and was responsible for annual teacher supervision and evaluation.

ISSUES OF FACULTY SUPERVISION

In the summer of 1998, we had the opportunity to collaborate in surveying new department chairs throughout the University of Wisconsin System campuses. These newly assigned chairs showed varying concerns regarding how to provide substantive and meaningful supervision to the faculty in their departments. The concerns ranged from how to provide supervisory feedback, in general, and adequate feedback to senior and difficult faculty, in particular. In other words, a main concern indicated by these department chairs focused on the fact that tenured faculty, nontenured faculty, and faculty showing difficulties in any of the areas of teaching, scholarship, or service have different needs, and hence, a one-size-fits-all model for supervision does not make sense. Quite often supervision is done haphazardly, if at all. So the chairs' efforts are quick and frustratingly meaningless.

A DIFFERENTIATED SUPERVISION MODEL

Models for teacher supervision do exist for K–12 school systems. It is our contention that a differentiated model can be adapted and be appropriate for faculty supervision in higher education. Such a model of supervision can take into account the varying and idiosyncratic needs of each individual teacher when the supervisor attempts to provide meaningful and substantive professional development.

A differentiated supervision model provides this appropriate framework. While this supervisory model is designed for K–12 school systems, the intended purpose and processes directly parallel those in a higher education setting, albeit with a few modifications.

The differentiated model of supervision conceived by Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (1998) is framed in such a way that new faculty, excellent faculty, and troubled faculty are all given individual attention best suited for their own needs. There are four approaches ranging from directive supervision, to directive informational supervision, to collaborative supervision, to nondirective supervision. These categories permit for varying degrees of guidance by the supervisor and for varying degrees of ownership by the faculty member. In the directive approach, the outcome is a supervisor-assigned plan. With the directive informational approach, the outcome is a supervisor-suggested plan. For the collaborative approach, the outcome is a mutual plan, and for the nondirective approach the outcome is a teacher self-plan. As the name would imply, directive is more structured and the supervision is directed by the supervisor. Likewise, nondirective allows for much more self-direction by the faculty member with much less guidance by the supervisor. Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (1998) have developed a supervisory behavior continuum (see Figure 1) to focus the supervisor’s tasks and relationships with the faculty in these four categories. Let’s now take a more detailed look at each of these in turn.

Figure 1

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Listening	Encouraging	Presenting	Negotiating	Standardizing					
T	Clarifying	Reflecting	Problem Solving	Directing	Reinforcing	t				
s	Nondirective	Collaborative	Directive-Informational	Directive	S					

Key: T = Maximum teacher responsibility
t = Minimum teacher responsibility
s = Minimum supervisor responsibility
S = Maximum supervisor responsibility

NOTE: For a much more detailed description and analysis of the continuum and four categories, the reader is invited to read Glickman, et al., pages 119–191.

DIRECTIVE SUPERVISION

Directive supervision is used when either the faculty member is very new and needs more directive guidance, or when the faculty member is struggling and needs close monitoring and/or guidance. In some instances, the supervising faculty member is considered to have greater knowledge or expertise than the new or struggling faculty member. When the supervisor takes on a directive style of supervision, he/she is also taking direct ownership of the problem and the corresponding solution. The role of the supervisor is very prescriptive and very active. The supervisor typically would initiate contact with the faculty member and direct the focus of all subsequent meetings. The supervisor/chair would use such supervisory behaviors as reinforcing, standardizing, and directing, as shown in Figure 1. It would certainly be the hope of all supervisors that their faculty colleagues are self-directed and professional. But there are times when direct messages must be given so that there can be no confusion about what is expected of the faculty member. Few faculty members would fall into the category requiring directive control supervision. This category is reserved for truly struggling faculty and for new faculty with no or little experience in teaching, or perhaps scholarship. Certainly, the goal of the supervisor is to help the faculty member move out of this supervision mode into one that places the onus more directly onto the faculty member.

DIRECTIVE INFORMATIONAL SUPERVISION

Directive informational supervision would probably be the mode appropriate for many new faculty members, at least for their first year or two at the institution. Once they gather confidence in their teaching, scholarship, and service, they will become more and more self-directed and will subsequently need less supervision. The directive informational supervision approach is used to help guide new faculty as they explore their research and service emphasis areas, and as they become more familiar and confident in their teaching styles and strategies. In this case, the supervisor still constantly takes a very active role in terms of "framing the direction and choice of the teacher," and is still primarily responsible for all aspects of supervision. Again, the supervisor/chair would utilize such supervisory behaviors as reinforcing, standardizing, and directing, but perhaps be more open to suggestions from the faculty member.

Interestingly, veteran faculty members may occasionally need more directive informational supervision at various pivotal times in their careers. For example, if a veteran faculty member takes on new responsibilities (e.g., program coordinator, grant writer, quasi-administrative position, etc.), or teaching responsibilities or content in which he/she has little experience, this category might be most

appropriate. In the latter example, a tenured faculty member might be expected to integrate new technology into the curriculum. This might be difficult and unnerving, so a little more directive guidance could be very useful. Again, the idea is for all faculty members to take more of this responsibility on themselves and to move on to supervisory modes that are more self-directed.

COLLABORATIVE SUPERVISION

Collaborative supervision is an excellent mode for the majority of nontenured faculty. If they already have some experience teaching and are very strong in their areas of expertise, this mode is perhaps best. Likewise, this approach is often used when the supervisor and the faculty member have roughly equivalent expertise. The supervisor helps the colleague to explore all possible alternatives, yet decisions lie within the responsibility of the faculty member, not the supervisor. The supervisor helps to clarify and provide some focus, but the faculty member has ultimate authority and cannot be vetoed by the supervisor. As Glickman et al. (1998) posited, "The purpose of collaboration is to solve problems through a meeting of the minds of equals. True equality is the core of collaboration" (p. 72). The chair would utilize such supervisory behaviors as negotiating, problem solving, and presenting. Again, the ultimate goal is for the faculty member to become totally self-directed.

NONDIRECTIVE SUPERVISION

Nondirective supervision is the mode that is designed for the excellent faculty member. Quite often, the supervisor helps this very good faculty member ask the right questions. While both the faculty member and the supervisor are still considered equals and colleagues, the individual faculty member is considered more of an expert in the particular area than the supervisor. In other words, most department chairs can identify a scenario where they are supervising faculty members who have more expertise than they in certain emphasis areas. For example, a physics department chair might be responsible for supervising all physics faculty. While certain faculty have special expertise—perhaps even international recognition—in quantum physics, the chair's expertise lies in the area of Newtonian physics. Nevertheless, in nondirective supervision, the self-directed faculty member initiates contact with the supervisor. The supervisor is asked for another lens, so to speak, through which to look at any particular issue. The supervisor is asked for suggestions and to help the faculty member think through the issue at hand. The supervisor helps to mirror or reflect the ideas of the faculty member. Finally, the point must

be made clear that the nondirective approach is not a hands-off approach. The supervisor does play an active role, but much of that role is defined by the faculty member. The chair would use such supervisory behaviors as reflecting, encouraging, clarifying, and listening.

CONCLUSION

We have seen this model work in a K–12 setting and have used it successfully in higher education. The chair can now provide meaningful feedback to all faculty, no matter their level of expertise.

REFERENCE

Glickman, C., Gordon, S., & Ross-Gordon, J. (1998). *Supervision of instruction: A developmental approach*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

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