

## **BUSINESS FACULTY COLLEGIALITY**

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*This case, based on actual events, raises the issue of whether or not collegiality can be measured in an academic organization, particularly as an attribute in tenure and promotion decisions. Business school faculty are singled out, triggered by their major accrediting agency's recent suggestion in its magazine that collegiality is one of three essential future quality criterion for excellence. A senior professor is questioned by a young applicant for tenure who voices concern about meeting nebulous collegiality standards in contrast with more logical measures of candidates' teaching, research, and service accomplishments. The college's policy manual cites "interpersonal relationships" and "work habits" as variables for judging Collegiality and Organizational Fit. A literature search yields strong pro and con opinions and provides a useful view of the sometimes controversial issue. Instructors in higher education administration and leadership could use the case and its teaching notes to realistically demonstrate the complexity of this topic.*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Former Management Department Chair Evan Addison absentmindedly picked up the latest issue of *BizEd*, the AACSB's Management Education magazine. He was waiting in the outer office of Business School Dean Kent Lester on a rainy Monday morning a few weeks before the AACSB's scheduled visit for the Fifth Year Maintenance of Accreditation process. Evan had no particular concerns about the upcoming audit as their business program had been accredited for many years and their college was relentless in keeping up with trends and requirements. As he flipped through the pages he wondered if the AACSB was pushing any emerging agendas which might be good to know about when the dignitaries arrived in town. One article caught his eye: "Attributes of Excellence" which listed three measures of key expectations if a business school wanted to be among the best in the world. He was somewhat surprised to see that one of those three was collegiality. Could that be measured? His mind went back decades to an event when he was a doctoral student which inexplicably may have permanently affected his perception of the term "collegiality" in schools of business.

Dr. Addison had transitioned into business education from an aerospace industry job in engineering. Prior to that eight-year period he had been on military duty with the Army Ordnance Missile Command for three years. Development of “collegiality” seemed obvious and normal, for instance the close proximity of work stations, frequent interaction of colleagues, and interdependency of job assignments. In short, the daily routine brought and kept most employees together with frequent communication. Informal groups formed and friendships were created which often carried into social settings. After making the decision to switch careers into university-level teaching, as a graduate student he often found himself alone or with only one or two cohorts. The B-School “absence of collegiality” epiphany on the front burner of his mind at the moment took place in the College of Business’s brand-new, spacious, incredibly furnished, modern and very impressive faculty lounge. Nothing had been omitted in decorating and furnishing this gigantic room with perfect lighting, seating, and all the amenities that could be imagined. And, it was completely devoid of human life throughout his three years of residency.

“Are business faculty inclined to avoid collegiality?” he asked himself. Not long ago Evan had passed a colleague in the stairwell of their building, each of them not even slowing down as they exchanged pleasantries. Later that day he had told his wife that he and that colleague had been greeting each other that way for over twenty years with little other communication. “Oh well,” he had said, “Jim teaches accounting and we don’t have anything in common.”

Dean Lester’s administrative assistant interrupted his thoughts. “The dean is on the telephone and will be out in a couple of minutes, Dr. Addison.” “O.K., Becky. Thanks,” he replied, then once again examining the magazine article. The paragraph on collegiality sounded almost utopian, with words like “fostering significant engagement among all constituents,” “creating a positive and collaborative environment,” and “sharing responsibility and accountability,” etcetera, etcetera. The old professor was thinking, “Yeah, right” when Dean Lester appeared at his office door. “What’s up, Evan?” he called cheerfully.

## **BACKGROUND**

The scenario which led up to this case was the annual Promotion and Tenure meeting in a College of Business at a regional university which will be designated as Sunbelt University for purposes of confidentiality. In fact, the issue of collegiality came up regularly year after year when committee members were asked to review the information packets submitted by their non-tenured colleagues. Considerable collaborative effort by faculty and administration over time had resulted the publishing of concise guidelines for candidates to follow in applying for promotion

and/or tenure at all levels. The criteria for both tenure and promotion were Time at Sunbelt University, Degree Held, Teaching, Research, Service, *Collegiality*, and Organizational Fit. The additional criterion for promotion was Time in Rank. What triggered this case was an inquiry to Dr. Addison in his role as senior faculty member from a young applicant for tenure: "What do they mean when they say they expect us to demonstrate collegiality?" asked Bob Voorhees who was preparing his tenure and promotion information packet. Bob commuted to work some 70 miles each way, worked on research often at his home office (with laudable published results), won a teaching award, served on a number of university, college and departmental committees, contributed significantly to the success of several European study-abroad programs due in part to his excellent command of the French language, and was always at ease in social settings. "I really don't know all of the members of the Promotion and Tenure Committee very well. We all seem so busy with our regular assignments. Most of us teach different subjects and our class schedules cut across the whole week, day and night," Bob reflected. "You said it, Bob," Evan had responded. "I have been doing this since before you were born! It's a living, as they say and I happen to love it. Yet, you are reminding me that all of us could easily be perceived as just too busy to develop much collegiality, if that makes sense." He had occasionally wondered if this was a peculiar behavioral phenomenon of business faculty. Evan felt powerless to offer any useful advice to Bob. "What can I say?" he thought, "act collegial?" By the expression on Bob's face it was not a laughing matter.

### **LEGAL ISSUES**

Long before Evan Addison sat outside Dean Lester's door that dreary morning, he had pondered the serious responsibility of department chairs who recruited promising faculty and later had to be the ones breaking the news that their contract was not being renewed or that tenure had been denied. Once he had been overruled after disagreeing with a dean and vice president. It was an awkward situation and the person was shattered particularly when no one would tell them what was wrong with their performance for fear of legal repercussions. In retrospect, that policy made perfect legal sense but was nothing short of heartless. After getting the news, the disappointed candidate prepared an expanded documentation packet of their accomplishments (an unsolicited revised information packet in great detail with numerous copies) yet they never heard what they had done or failed to do. After one year their contract was simply not renewed. Could this person have survived if they had only somehow conducted themselves aggressively and proactively somehow so as to exude collegiality? Is collegiality an attribute which should be taught (or taught about) in doctoral programs?

### **MOOT OR MUTE POINT?**

When Dr. Evan Addison finally sat down in Dean Kent Lester's office he wondered if he should even bring up the subject of collegiality. After all, it was a nebulous topic at best. Yet the AACSB was willing to list it as one of only three "attributes of excellence." Dean Lester leaned forward. "What's on your mind, Evan?" he inquired without seeming to mind being interrupted. "Well, I just want to kick around the topic of collegiality with you for a few minutes," he replied. "I see that you've got a copy of *BizEd* on your desk. Have you seen the article on attributes of excellence?" "Yes," Kent replied, "but I haven't read the whole thing yet. I'll check it out before the next issue shows up!"

Evan picked the magazine up. "Take a close look at this second paragraph," he said opening to the topic in the article entitled "Three Key Expectations." Kent Lester quickly scanned the short paragraph under "collegiality:"

*A collegial institution fosters significant engagement among students, faculty, staff, and the surrounding community. It is stable and well-staffed, and it enjoys a well-developed infrastructure. A collegial organization doesn't just deploy enough resources to support its mission; it creates an environment that is positive and collaborative. Its administrators and faculty share responsibility and accountability as they establish strategic directions and action plans; they take corrective action if the school isn't demonstrating progress toward achieving its mission.*

"Wow! That sounds just like us," the dean said with a twinkle in his eye. "I figured that you would get right to the point," Evan laughed. "I do think we have a good grip on the macro concept of collegiality but what about our promotion and tenure policy? Let's take a look on your computer, if you don't mind." They accessed the business school's Faculty Policies Manual and Dean Lester printed out a couple of paragraphs provided as Exhibit I.

"So we are supposed to somehow be measuring interpersonal relationships and work habits," Evan said. "Not an easy assignment unless the applicant blatantly ignores normal courtesies or doesn't show up for work," Kent added, "but where do you want to go with this point?" Evan took a deep breath and gazed out the window. "Well, I have a few ideas but let me do a little research and I will be back to see you before the end of the week," he replied, standing up and heading for the door.

### **HAPPY THOUGHTS**

After doing some checking on his own, Evan scheduled a “Research Session” with a Sunbelt University reference librarian. A number of useful references showed up including articles which supported collegiality as a valuable attribute and others which were just the opposite. The latter opinion was especially strong when one looked at the American Association of University Professors (AAUP)’s philosophy: Academic Freedom can suffer when Collegiality is added to the traditional variables of teaching, research and service. Measurability or lack thereof on collegiality gives rise to obvious legal issues. There were plenty of ideas on how to improve academic collegiality.

Evan focused on the suggestions for increasing collegiality, e.g., department chairs’ development of trustworthiness and communications skills, emphasis on consensus, and even creating a departmental mission statement that includes guidelines for collegiality. The use of positive communication networks, mission-focused allocation of resources, collaborative team-oriented decision-making, and consideration of “career anchors” (the underlying drive[s] that motivates each person to make choices, Schein, 1990). It was satisfying to think of possible positive steps which could not only improve productivity but raise morale. He contrasted that with the many accreditation-driven rules and constraints that quite honestly were considered annoying, time-consuming, and demoralizing.

### **THE EUREKA MOMENT**

Evan Addison had just filled his coffee cup when Dean Kent Lester walked over. “Any more collegiality ideas, Evan?” he asked, spying an open box of doughnuts by the coffee pot. “Well, somebody around here is certainly in a collegial mood this morning because these doughnuts really hit the spot!” Evan answered enthusiastically as he munched away and tried unsuccessfully to maintain his professorial dignity. “I can’t figure out how to measure collegiality. It’s so much easier to count presentations, committee membership, and number of publications,” he said.

Kent agreed with Evan, excused himself and left the room. Seeing that no one else was in view, Evan ate another doughnut. His cell phone beeped and he answered. “Hey, what are you eating?” It was his wife. “I’m just being collegial, he sputtered, realizing that free coffee and doughnuts in the faculty lounge could be the solution to the whole issue.

**EXHIBIT**  
**from Business Faculty Policy Manual**

**Excerpts**

*Promotion Criteria*

*College promotion criteria, which were developed by a faculty committee and approved by the faculty, apply to all tenure-track personnel, regardless of specific position or assignment. The criteria are Time in Rank, Time at Sunbelt University, Degree Held, Teaching, Research, Service, **Collegiality**, and Organizational Fit. Meeting the minimum standards does not assure promotion. The collegiality and institutional fit requirements are judged on the basis of interpersonal relationships and work habits.*

*Tenure Criteria*

*The requirements for tenure are stated in the (State) University System Academic Affairs Handbook and the College of Business tenure criteria, which were developed by a faculty committee and approved by the College faculty. These requirements apply to all tenure-track personnel, regardless of specific position or assignment. The criteria categories are Time at Sunbelt University, Degree Held, Teaching, Research, Service, **Collegiality**, and Organizational Fit. Faculty receiving tenure should meet the minimum requirements in each area and should excel in at least two of the categories. Therefore, meeting the minimum criteria in each category does **not** assure tenure. The collegiality and institutional fit requirements are judged on the basis of interpersonal relationships and work habit.*

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