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Appropriate staffing is critical to effective institutional research, yet most institutional research offices are chronically understaffed. How many and what types of staffing are needed for the ideal institutional research office, and how can it be achieved?

Laying the Foundation: Institutional Research Office Organization, Staffing, and Career Development

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Staffing is a fundamental component of effective institutional research, yet determining and securing adequate resources can be difficult. In addition, as was noted in an AIR Forum presentation on the Achieving the Dream project (Rincones and Champion, 2008), even when colleges allocate money for positions they have difficulty finding institutional research practitioners. With new institutional research offices developing, existing offices expanding, long-time practitioners retiring, and demands on institutional research increasing, staffing issues—securing adequate funding; hiring, training, and retaining staff; and providing career development opportunities—will be acute.

This chapter addresses three questions. First, what are adequate institutional research staffing levels, and how can institutions achieve them? Second, what skills do institutional researchers need to conduct cutting-edge institutional research? Finally, what do colleges and universities need to do to ensure institutional research professionals' job satisfaction and retention? In addition to answering these questions about the characteristics of the ideal institutional research office of the future, we propose our view of its optimal structure and organizational location.

Relevant Literature

Over the past five decades, scholars and institutional research professionals have offered evidence, both anecdotal and empirical, regarding the nature of the profession. The literature consists of commentary on the skills needed to be an effective institutional researcher, job satisfaction, and effectiveness among members of the institutional research community, as well as typical staffing, structure, and responsibilities of institutional research offices.

Skills Needed to Be Successful in Institutional Research. The work performed by institutional research requires a broad range of skills. Some of these necessitate formal training, some can be learned on the job, and some come about only through long-term on-the-job experience facilitated through organizational and supervisory assistance.

Terenzini (1999) proposed three interdependent types of organizational intelligence that are necessary for effective institutional research. Technical and analytical intelligence is necessary for entry-level work in institutional research. Facility with databases, spreadsheets, word processing, and graphics packages; knowledge of quantitative and qualitative research methods, statistical techniques, assessment, and program evaluation; and factual knowledge of terminology, data definitions, and methodologies are some of the skills that comprise analytical and technical intelligence. Although skills such as institution-specific terminology and definitions may be, and usually are, deepened and expanded on the job, professionals generally acquire the basics through formal education. Thirty-eight percent of institutional research professionals hold a doctorate (Volkwein, 2008a). Fifty-three percent earned a master's degree. Most commonly, these degrees are in social sciences or education or, to a lesser extent, business. A few are in math, science, or humanities.

The second type of intelligence, issues intelligence, involves knowledge of issues the institution must address, such as enrollment management, budgeting, assessment, and strategic planning. In addition, it is helpful to understand how the institution functions, how it makes formal and informal decisions, and how to work effectively with institutional managers who undertake these activities. Such knowledge and abilities are a distinct skill set and are not inherent in analytical or technical skills. Without such organizational knowledge and interpersonal abilities, institutional researchers will find their effectiveness and influence extremely limited. Course work can provide overall knowledge of higher education, organizational processes, planning, budgeting, governance, and politics, but only job experience will develop a practitioner's institution-specific knowledge. Often practitioners gain such understanding through a combination of course work and job experience.

Contextual intelligence, the third type of intelligence Terenzini (1999) described, requires not only knowledge of the higher education environment, but also an understanding of the intricacies of a particular institution's history, politics, and culture and the external forces that affect it. This

type of intelligence also includes the formal and informal ways that the institution does business within the organization and with its external constituencies, as well as respect for the multiple disciplines, attitudes, and values of people at all levels of the organization. Contextual intelligence, Terenzini says, reflects “organizational savvy and wisdom. It is the form of intelligence that earns institutional research and researchers legitimacy, trust, and respect” (p. 25). Institutional researchers acquire this intelligence only on the job, usually over several years, and most effectively through active engagement with institutional leaders in all areas of the organization.

We emphasize the importance of social intelligence, which, in Terenzini’s formulation, is a component of issues intelligence. Social intelligence is the ability to get along well with others and to be able to understand and navigate complex social situations (Albrecht, 2006). This form of intelligence is a critical attribute for institutional research professionals at all levels. The extent to which this is a learned skill is debatable; however, it appears to be a skill that individuals can hone over time. Institutional research professionals often find themselves in positions in which they have little direct authority and must rely on negotiating and mediating skills. A high degree of social intelligence facilitates developing collaborative relationships that increase the effectiveness of such indirect means of authority. Having a sense of humor, being able to laugh and appreciate the ironies of many situations, is useful as well, particularly in complex, ambiguous work circumstances. Many even consider sense of humor a survival skill.

Job Satisfaction and Effectiveness. Nationally the percentage of institutional researchers who have been in the field five years or less appears to have increased in the past decade from one-third (Lindquist, 1999) to 39 percent (Knight and Leimer, 2009). The portion that has worked in institutional research for eleven or more years appears to have declined from 40 percent (Lindquist, 1999) to 33 percent (Knight and Leimer, 2009). According to a study of community college institutional researchers (Morest and Jenkins, 2007), there appears to be considerable movement of institutional research personnel among colleges. However, we do not know the actual rate of those leaving the field of institutional research. In a 1995 survey of members of the Southern Association for Institutional Research (Harrington and Chen, 1995), 20 percent were searching for a new position. In a 2008 national survey of Association for Institutional Research members (Knight and Leimer, 2009), 22 percent indicated they plan to leave their organization, and 31 percent said they may leave. Approximately 35 percent said they are thinking about leaving the institutional research field.

Because effective institutional research requires versatile, highly skilled people, such percentages represent a considerable loss of investment in recruitment, training, institutional knowledge, and expertise. All of the forms of intelligence Terenzini delineates take a considerable amount of time to acquire. Even the most fundamental form, analytical and technical intelligence, can take years given the need to learn the often idiosyncratic

nature of an institution's data and business processes that affect that data and the breadth of analytical and research tasks one may be asked to perform. Consequently, for an institutional research office to achieve maximum value to an institution, colleges and universities must be intentional about hiring, developing, and retaining institutional research professionals.

Overall job satisfaction, as well as satisfaction with specific elements of the work, is inversely related to employee turnover. In interviews with a select group of established institutional research professionals, Johnson (1982) found that job satisfaction was by far their most important priority. Institutional researchers, like most other professionals, want to contribute to their organization and want their organization to recognize them for their value. They want to see that their institution values their work, and they want to influence campus decision making. Under these conditions, institutional research professionals are generally satisfied and feel they are effective (Fenstemaker, 1982; Sanford, 1983; Harrington and Chen, 1995; Johnson, 1982; Delaney, 2001; Knight, 2006). Some suggest that institutional researchers indicate satisfaction with their work if it is autonomous, fun, and challenging (Delaney, 2001; Fenstemaker, 1982). They also enjoy positions that give them the opportunity to influence others, participate in making decisions, work with good people, and have a variety of professional responsibilities (Johnson, 1982).

Sources of dissatisfaction among institutional research practitioners include a short career ladder (Johnson 1982), limited promotional opportunities (Johnson, 1982; Fenstemaker, 1982; Delaney, 2001; Knight and Leimer, 2009), limited options for career development, stressful job demands (Delaney, 2001; Knight and Leimer, 2009), and excessive workload (Delaney, 2001; Knight, 2006; Knight and Leimer, 2009). Institutional factors that negatively affect their work are red tape, paperwork, routine, an immediate supervisor who does not value research and planning, and insufficient time to make deliberative decisions (Johnson, 1982).

Some sources of dissatisfaction differ for managers and analysts. Directors find it difficult to do their work effectively with inadequate staffing (Huntington and Claggett, 1991; Knight, 2006), in both number and, to a lesser extent, expertise. Additional obstacles to their effectiveness are reporting demands, lack of time, lack of access to decision makers, the perceived role of institutional research, access to and quality of information systems, and inadequate staff training (Huntington and Claggett, 1991). For analysts, stress and dissatisfaction can result from job monotony, lack of variety or opportunity to use their intelligence, not receiving credit for their work, inadequate time to do quality work, pressure to lower their standards, and lack of opportunities to be heard (Delaney, 2001).

Role conflict is a potential source of stress and dissatisfaction as well. Volkwein (1999) states that such conflict can arise when professionals trained to conduct research and analyses are instead required to produce accurate counts, descriptive statistics, and external reporting. Knight,

Moore, and Coperthwaite (1999) postulate that institutional research professionals' perceived effectiveness is a function of both individual and organizational characteristics that can result in a mismatch between executives' and practitioners' expectations of the institutional research role. For example, if executives desire extensive institutional research support in planning, assessment, and policy analysis, but institutional research staff time is dominated with reporting and filling immediate requests such that its ability to support high-level decisions is limited, the mismatch can result in institutional research being perceived by executives as ineffective. Under such conditions, institutional research staff too may perceive themselves as ineffective, and, by extension, job satisfaction suffers.

Typical Institutional Research Offices Today. Institutional research office structure, staffing, and responsibilities differ widely across institutions, so much so that it can be precarious to make general statements about it. However, Volkwein's (2008a) categorization offers a framework that describes typical ways colleges organize institutional research offices. He refers to four types of organizational structures: the craft structure, the adhocracy, the professional bureaucracy, and elaborate profusion. The craft structure is the most common. Usually a one- or two-person office, its primary responsibilities are reporting and responding to internal data requests. This type of institutional research office most commonly exists in institutions with fewer than five thousand students.

The adhocracy has a simple, flat organizational structure with two to three staff members who are generalists. Some staff members hold a doctorate, but most have a master's degree and work experience. These offices sometimes conduct applied research, but the location of the institutional research office within an institution's administrative structure shapes the type of work the office does. For example, institutional research offices that report in academic affairs are more likely to conduct studies of faculty salaries, workload, student ratings of instruction, assessment, and program review. In the president's office, support for planning is prevalent. In student affairs, projects are likely to include campus climate, residential life, the first-year experience, retention, diversity and effectiveness, and improvement of student services. In finance, institutional research commonly performs studies that support resource allocation and revenue projections.

The professional bureaucracy structure is larger and more formally organized. Staffing includes at least four professionals, and usually more, with a range of credentials, specialization, and experience in the field. More than one staff member is likely to hold a doctorate and have more than ten years of institutional research experience. Numerous student and graduate assistants and analysts who are new to the field are common. In this arrangement, sophisticated research is conducted within the office rather than with the support of other institutional units.

"Elaborate profusion" is an arrangement in which institutional research activity is performed in multiple units, usually by a solo researcher. While

this arrangement is common in some research universities, we argue that this is not the most efficient way to provide institutional research services to an institution. Volkwein (2008a) sees the craft structure, the adhoc-racy, and the professional bureaucracy as a continuum of maturing of the profession, with the professional bureaucracy being the most effective method of organizing.

The location of institutional research in the organizational structure and hierarchy varies as well. Most commonly, institutional research is situated in academic affairs (nearly half of offices) and, secondarily, in the president's office (approximately 25 percent). Much less frequently, campuses house institutional research in finance or administration, planning and effectiveness, student affairs, development, or computing and information technology. Frequently the institutional research manager reports directly to a provost or vice president for academic affairs. The next most common reporting line is to a president. Less often, institutional research reports to a nonacademic vice president. Approximately 16 percent of institutional research managers report lower in the organizational structure (Volkwein, 2008b). Making the institutional research manager part of the executive team benefits both executives and the institution. The institutional research manager is an objective voice in the midst of an array of interests and perspectives on a problem or issue, and keeping that person in the loop, close to discussions of institutional concerns, allows institutional research to gear its work toward the intricacies of those concerns (Chambers and Gerek, 2007).

The most common responsibilities and tasks of institutional research include enrollment management and external reporting (Volkwein, 2008b). Other than these tasks, which are nearly universal, the specific responsibilities depend on where campuses situate institutional research.

This overview provides a synopsis of literature about institutional research professionals and staffing of institutional research offices. Based on this knowledge and our combined experience in the field, the rest of the chapter proposes how colleges and universities should structure and staff the ideal institutional research office and how to hire and retain effective institutional research personnel.

Staffing the Institutional Research Office of the Future

Staffing an office obviously depends on the nature and number of responsibilities expected, and any department or unit must fit into the organization's existing structure and culture. Much of the variation in institutional research offices is due to differential needs and cultures of institutions. That said, however, we believe the institutional research office that can best serve higher education institutions generally matches the professional bureaucracy structure that Volkwein described (2008a). In this configuration, staffing should be adequate in both number and expertise. The staff should include those with general knowledge to allow for cross-functional support

and enough specialized knowledge to examine issues deeply and conduct sophisticated research. Such an arrangement creates an environment that allows coordination of research, sharing of expertise, and methodological diversity resulting in high-quality, timely research and analysis that directly addresses policy decisions, goals, and institutional operations. This valuable input to the decision-making process can facilitate the discovery of potential solutions and place the institution at an advantage in achieving its goals. The number of staff and type of expertise needed depend on the nature of the work a campus expects from the office and the number of clients the office serves. Offices currently structured in accordance with this model employ six to twenty staff (Volkwein, 2008a).

The ideal office needs a manager whose primary responsibilities are leading, coordinating, monitoring changes in the higher education landscape that have a direct impact on the institution, and contributing as an active campus management team member. Leaders should incorporate institutional research managers into the routine flow of information such that issues and context intelligence develop over time, and they can make strategic and well-informed decisions about the best way to bring the resources of their office to bear on institutional issues. Reporting should be to the president or provost—whichever better positions institutional research to work across organizational lines, grants autonomy, provides access to stakeholders, communicates critical information to the manager, and values, respects, and uses the products and services of the office. Depending on the number and experience of the line staff, a supervisor should monitor progress on projects, ensure accuracy, train personnel, facilitate smooth day-to-day operations, and represent the office in the manager's absence.

Institutional research offices need enough staffing to allow for some specialization, as well as coverage, so that work does not stop during vacations, sick days, or when a position is vacant. Ordinarily this requires a minimum of five professionals. Usually an institutional research office needs an analyst, or someone with a similar title, to handle reporting or to “compile facts and figures” (Volkwein, 2008a). This position does not absolutely require research and statistical training, but it does demand detail orientation, experience using databases, and comfort working with numbers. An analyst must be able to conduct decision-support analyses. The office must have at least one person skilled in research design, multivariate analysis, assessment, evaluation and survey research, preferably more due to the complexity of these methods and the growing demand for such services. These skills are critical to institutional research offices today and tomorrow. In fact, one might argue that it is important that many, if not all, of the analysts possess the combined skill set, with one analyst assuming primary responsibility for a particular area.

If the campuses structure offices to accommodate specific clients or customers, rather than organize them around specific functions, staff size may be even larger with an analyst who specializes in finance support, another who specializes in student services support, another in academic

support, and another supporting planning, development, assessment, or accreditation. Such a configuration creates a critical mass and fosters integration and coordination of projects and people where appropriate. Consequently, although the office may appear large, it is likely to be more effective than the same number of staff working in isolation in various units across the institution.

Rather than hiring a database developer or administrator within institutional research, information technology (IT) should support and maintain databases needed for institutional research work. However, making this a reality depends on the degree to which an institution's IT unit is capable of supporting databases designed for research rather than operations. If it is not, either an IT professional will need to be hired within IR or an analyst will need to be appropriately trained to handle these functions as part of their workload. In the event that the institutional research office relies on the campus IT office, an analyst will need some knowledge of computing systems, databases, and software applications in order to serve as the liaison with IT.

Clerical assistance is most effective if the person has a broad knowledge of the institution, a strong aptitude for technology, and an eye for design to be able to develop attractive reports and other communications materials. It also is helpful if this person has the ability to handle details, coordinate communications across campus offices, and keep track of paperwork for time, travel, supplies ordering, inventory, and budgeting. Undergraduate and graduate assistants can supplement the work of the institutional research staff and develop job skills that make them a potential source for recruitment. Such a strategy may lower recruitment costs, maximize the investment already made in training, and help maintain continuity of institutional knowledge.

In addition to the valuable high-quality work such an office would produce, the staff size and expertise allows for mentoring of new professionals. Given the difficulty in hiring and length of training time, mentoring helps new institutional research practitioners gain a solid grasp of the field and may contribute to job satisfaction and retention. Such continuity is a critical characteristic for positions that must accumulate extensive organizational knowledge to be effective.

Many, if not most, institutional research offices are chronically understaffed. Presidents recognize this as a barrier to practitioners' effectiveness (Harrington, Christie, and Chen, 1996), and it is a source of job dissatisfaction among institutional research managers (Huntington and Claggett, 1991; Knight and Leimer, 2009). They, like presidents, perceive inadequate staffing as an obstacle to effectiveness (Knight, 2006; Morest and Jenkins, 2007). With increasing pressure for accountability, assessment, evidence of improvement, and data-informed decision making required by accreditors and other external constituencies, institutional research offices cannot continue to shoulder the responsibility without adequate staff.

Studies show a positive correlation between the size of an institutional research office and the size of the institution (Delaney, 1997; Muffo, 1999). Presumably a smaller staff than that of larger institutions can handle the institutional research tasks at smaller institutions. However, factors that have little relationship to the size of the institution may determine institutional research workload. Given that accreditation and accountability requirements are increasingly similar for all colleges and universities, the relationship between the size of the institutional research office and the institution may have more to do with the availability and allocation of resources than the absolute need for institutional research services. Unless other departments conduct specific institutional research tasks and campuses restrict internal requests for data to senior administrators rather than being available to all campus constituents, it is quite probable that the workload, types of projects, and institutional support required of an institutional research office are comparable across sectors and institutional type and size. If this is the case, then relying on institution size or type to determine institutional research office size is an inappropriate staffing strategy. Instead, campuses should conduct a workload analysis to ensure adequate staffing levels and skill sets.

An option that would make the best use of staff resources in a small office and optimize the institutional research professional's expertise would be to configure the institutional research office to focus specifically on policy, issue, and goal-oriented research and analysis. The IT office or the specific unit that generates the operational data needed for the report or request could complete external reporting and many ad hoc data requests. Institutional researchers could coordinate requests and advise these units on appropriate data definitions as needed but would not extract, manipulate, and supply the data. Not only would this strategy make the best use of the individual's training and interest, and consequently avoid the type of role conflict that contributes to job dissatisfaction, but the research and analyses produced would benefit institutional decision making.

Hiring Institutional Research Staff

Very few institutional research professionals earned their degrees with the intention of pursuing institutional research. Given that no academic degree specifically provides preparation to enter institutional research, the field is largely unknown outside higher education. Only in the past few years have a few institutions created certificate programs in institutional research. Consequently, most new institutional research professionals enter with some technical skill set gained through formal social science, education, or business training and possibly some job-related experience in business, government, or another unit within the academy. Given this circumstance, recruiting below the management level generally means hiring people just out of graduate school with little or no work experience or finding people whose work history includes some set of applicable skills but limited knowledge of higher

education institutions. Likely gaps in preparation and uncertainty regarding necessary job skills and performance expectations complicate hiring decisions. It is essential to determine the skills and knowledge that are critical for each position in the office.

Technical and analytical skills are essential. Ensuring that applicants can demonstrate these skills is the first order of business when hiring. Requiring applicants to demonstrate their skill set should be part of the interview process. Evaluating these skills is more accurate if applicants know in advance what interviewers expect and if they have ample time to demonstrate their abilities and approach to problems like those they would encounter on a regular basis on the job.

Given that there is so much to learn in institutional research and so much of it involves on-the-job learning, versatility and intelligence are important characteristics to look for in job candidates. How flexible are they? How quickly do they acquire information or cues that constituents need more information? Are they naturally curious? Do they have enough initiative and resourcefulness to search for answers without direction from others? Interviewers should assess these characteristics through questions and scenarios. Managers should design real-world scenarios to give a sense of cognitive style, ability to share or draw on personal experiences, ability to synthesize information to reach conclusions, professionalism, maturity, flexibility, and sense of humor.

As is the case with any other hiring decision, matching the person to the position, and to the existing staff and organization where possible, is critical. Because scenario-type interview questions can reveal how candidates think and display their communication and interpersonal skills, they can be useful in determining a likely fit or mismatch. Matching the candidate's skills and expectations to the job is essential in maximizing job satisfaction, productivity, and retention. In part, the interview process provides the applicants with information about the kinds of tasks and skills the job requires and allows them to consider whether the position will suit them.

It is important for both the manager and applicant that the process reflects the actualities of the job. Role conflict can result in stress and dissatisfaction when expectations about using one's training on the job fails to match assigned tasks. While it is very important to be certain the skills the office requires match the candidate's experience and interest, it is critical that the hiring supervisor be clear to all candidates that higher education requirements are changing and the position is ever evolving. It is not uncommon to hear institutional research professionals lament, "I do everything." Given the current environment of increasing accountability demands and declining resources, it is more than likely that analysts will need to expand their skill set, explore new topics, and perform new and different analyses.

If one were able to write the perfect job description for an ideal institutional research manager, perhaps it would read:

WANTED: Patient, proactive, socially intelligent detective, debunker of myths, and problem solving, storytelling, institutional historian who is able to demonstrate proficiency in the three Terenzini intelligences, has strong leadership ability and managerial experience, and has the tenacity to build a network of colleagues in order to minimize isolation and to be ever vigilant of the external environment.¹

While this may seem a bit fanciful, it is not too far from reality. An individual who is managing an institutional research office must be patient. Building a sophisticated, mature institutional research function and a culture of evidence takes time. Institutional research offices that resemble the Volkwein professional bureaucracy have been years in the making. While the institutional research manager and other institutional research professionals often find themselves reacting to a situation, the truly effective professionals are the ones who can scan the internal and external environment and develop strategies to address issues that will surely arise in the near future. For instance, once every ten years, every U.S. higher education institution prepares a self-study for reaccreditation. Proactive institutional research professionals constantly monitor the accreditation standards to ensure their institution is in compliance, and if it is not, they make senior administrators aware of potential deficiencies.

Strong leadership characteristics are critical. Institutional research managers are constantly coordinating, collaborating, and bringing together others over whom they have no authority in order to achieve a goal. For example, during the past year in the United States institutional research directors have been working with registrars, admissions officers, human resource specialists, and IT staff to ensure that their institutions will be in compliance with new federal race and ethnicity reporting requirements. Another important leadership characteristic that accomplished institutional research professionals must possess is diplomacy. Institutional research professionals often find themselves in advisory and diplomatic roles. For example, some institutional research professionals routinely attend board meetings. It is not inconceivable that an institutional researcher might need to respond to a politically sensitive question posed by a trustee or provide additional information that supplements or clarifies comments made by a dean or provost.

We cannot overemphasize that the successful institutional research manager must possess a high level of social intelligence, a point illustrated by an ASSESS listserv discussion regarding the skills needed to work in assessment. Although it was not a direct response to the skills required to be an effective institutional research manager, the compiled inventory is germane: "sensitivity, open-mindedness, flexibility, listening, enthusiasm, commitment to learning, sense of humor, ability to see another's perspective, ability to build others' self-confidence, creativity, team-building,

problem-solving, a thick skin, tolerance for ambiguity, patience, ability to motivate others, ability to teach, ability to build trust, and the ability to use data to tell a compelling story” (Leimer, forthcoming).

Institutional research director job postings rarely use language requiring management skills or supervisory experience. This is perplexing given the fact that the ability to retain and develop staff is critical to a well-functioning institutional research office. An effective institutional research director must be able to hire, train, discipline, and even terminate an employee.

The institutional research manager must effectively navigate the bureaucratic and, in some instances, union processes and requirements, as well as be out in front of audiences. Some may underestimate the value of being present or visible on campus; however, it is becoming more and more important for institutional research professionals to serve on campus committees, make presentations at college and departmental meetings, and volunteer to spearhead campuswide initiatives. By doing so, the institutional research professional is able to demonstrate the value of using information to make informed decisions and to work continuously to build a campus culture of data-driven decision making.

Retaining Institutional Research Professionals

What do the institution and the institutional research manager need to do to retain staff? No one would dispute the fact that hiring staff entails considerable cost and then training time and money. Nor would anyone argue that given the types of activities in which institutional research offices engage, continuity is beneficial. Members of an institutional research staff with institutional memory and established relationships with other offices and divisions can save time and resources. Consequently retaining staff is important. Unfortunately, this often is difficult to accomplish. Therefore, it is beneficial to explore strategies to keep staff actively engaged in the institution, as well as interested in the work of the office. We present a variety of strategies that have the potential of mitigating the negative aspects of institutional research that contribute to job dissatisfaction: job monotony, lack of variety or opportunity to use their intelligence, not receiving credit for their work, inadequate time to do quality work, pressure to lower their standards, and lack of opportunities to be heard (Delaney, 2001).

Institutional research work can be socially isolating, especially for analysts in a small office. Although some employees are content with minimal social interaction on the job, few are satisfied without evidence that their work is useful to someone and that it makes a difference to the organization. Managers should inform their institutional research staff of the ways others use their work. For the institutional research director, recognizing staff contributions may be an act as simple as forwarding a thank-you e-mail

received from a customer or sharing a compliment about the analyst or the office received in a passing hallway exchange.

Inviting senior administrators to meet with the institutional research staff and talk about how they use the data and reports produced by the office can be valuable. These discussions provide the staff with an opportunity to interact with members of the senior leadership team. They also create an environment where those in institutional research can ask senior staff questions, and senior administrators can explain why the work institutional research does is important to them and the institution. Periodically evaluating the office and sharing the results with all staff is a good way to let everyone know how their work contributes to the overall effectiveness of the office and the institution as a whole. It is imperative that the institutional research manager acknowledge the work done by staff and give credit to the authors. At a minimum, the analyst's name should be on every project that leaves the office. If a director receives an invitation to present the results of a study, the analyst who has conducted the analysis should participate in the presentation if possible. Supervisors should be sure to recognize staff contributions to the office and the institution in personnel evaluations and promotions should be given when feasible.

Mentoring is one method that helps new professionals deal with the demands of the field (Delaney, 2001). Mentoring is also an effective method of retaining institutional research staff. Having a mentor can serve to help a new staff member feel welcomed and provide continuing staff with guidance and support and signals that they are part of a profession rather than just employed at a job. Mentoring opportunities for staff take a variety of forms. A manager may serve as an analyst mentor, or an analyst may be encouraged to seek a mentor from another institution. In the latter case, it is helpful to note that many regional associations, as well as the national Association for Institutional Research, provide opportunities for individuals to request a mentor.

Most institutional research practitioners have earned graduate degrees or have job-related experience, or both. In all likelihood, they are expecting to do high-level work that uses their training. Therefore, it is important to provide staff with the opportunity to work on a variety of tasks, new challenges and, when possible, some degree of autonomy. Not all the work performed by an institutional research office is exciting. However, it is within the manager's discretion to provide analysts with some latitude and allow them to use their professional judgment and creativity to look at an issue in a new way, create a new presentation format, or explore an alternative, innovative research technique. To take advantage of an individual's expertise, staff might serve on campus committees. For example, a staff member who conducts assessment-related research could serve on or work with a college's faculty outcomes assessment committee or perhaps work with an accreditation self-study working group.

Managers should try to provide staff with realistic deadlines to complete their work. A concern expressed by analysts that can lead to job

dissatisfaction is inadequate time to do a project to their standards of quality or thoroughness. Trade-offs often must be made between the time required for a project and its completeness. It is imperative to explain the situation to staff so they understand the complexities in conducting applied research.

Another activity that has the potential of being energizing is to have staff meet with members of another institutional research office. This activity may involve both offices describing their work and sharing best practices or just good ideas. It provides staff with an opportunity to learn about what other offices are doing, share war stories with individuals who will appreciate the details, and gain a better understanding of the similarities and differences that exist among institutions and offices.

Within the first few months, after the manager has had time to observe a new staff member on the job, the manager should establish a professional development plan. Staff members should be encouraged to take advantage of courses offered at the institution, participate in professional development workshops or seminars, attend professional meetings, and be active in professional associations. In the current economic times, with campuses eliminating or dramatically reducing travel funds, perhaps institutional research staffs can meet with other institutional research professionals in their local area.

A variety of factors contributes to job satisfaction among institutional research analysts and managers. Like analysts, institutional research managers want the campus to use and value their research. They want their perceptions of the institutional research role and expectations and those of executives to match. Some factors have been identified that contribute to the dissatisfaction of managers, including inadequate staffing, ever increasing external reporting demands, insufficient time, limited access to decision makers, the perception of institutional research as bean counters, poor-quality information systems or extraction tools, and inadequate resources available to train staff. The ability to ameliorate some of these factors is within the purview of senior institutional leaders; however, others are simply beyond their control.

Having adequate staffing is critical. Without adequate resources, institutional research managers cannot fulfill expectations. If it is not possible to provide the institutional research office with the necessary resources, then the manager has to have a serious conversation with senior leaders about what to eliminate from the institutional research portfolio.

Institutional research managers believe that decision makers should use their data and research to make informed decisions, and managers feel they are effective when this occurs (Knight, 2006). Interaction with decision makers is important to facilitating the use of institutional research products. For institutional research managers who do not have access to senior leaders, colleges and universities should create a place at the decision-making table so that the campuses can use institutional research managers' expertise. Especially in today's climate, the institution will make better decisions if an advi-

sor is able to draw conclusions and make recommendations based on sound research, analyses, and knowledge of higher education and the institution.

Conclusion

We have highlighted the critical elements required to create an ideal institutional research office. We have taken a very broad-brush approach, cognizant of the fact that institutional type and sector may have a significant impact on the actual configuration of the function. Yet to optimize the value of institutional research to the institution and higher education in general, colleges and universities must place institutional research appropriately in the organizational structure and hierarchy. They also must sufficiently staff the office with highly trained professionals whose skill sets match the work the institutional research office conducts. Campuses must give considerable thought and care to recruiting and making good hiring decisions. Once hired, institutional researchers should have work that is challenging and interesting, and campuses should offer professional development opportunities in an effort to retain these practitioners and ensure that institutional research is capable of promoting and supporting evidence-based decisions.

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Note

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