Engaging Faculty and Creating a Healthier Academic Environment

SPEAKERS
Katherine Sanders, Tierney King

Tierney King 00:01
This is the Faculty Focus Live podcast. This episode is sponsored by the Teaching Professor Online Conference. Join us from the comfort of your own home and transform how you teach with nationally recognized teaching and learning presenters. I'm your host, Tierney King, and I'm here to bring you inspiration, energy and creative strategies that you can utilize in your everyday teaching. Burnout, dissatisfaction, human motivation, and wellness - we've all heard these words a lot lately. So today we're going to look at ways we can increase human motivation and give faculty a sense of autonomy. We'll talk about the Motivation Hygiene Theory, where although someone can be highly motivated, they can also be highly dissatisfied. We'll also discuss the Job Characteristics Theory, where skill variety, task identity, tests significance, autonomy and feedback all help in the meaningfulness of work - we'll specifically relate this to faculty development. And lastly, we'll go over recognizing intervention points to promote health and wellness. Although you may have a current wellness program at your university or job, it doesn't necessarily address the causes of exhaustion and burnout. So we'll dig deeper into looking at the structures of work, how to shape people's daily working lives, and then how to make choices that improve people's health. Katherine Sanders will be guiding us in this program, How Can Faculty Development Increase Faculty Engagement?

Katherine Sanders 01:30
I founded and led a Faculty Development Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and we looked at faculty work through the lenses of teaching and learning, as well as the lens of research and specifically transdisciplinary research, as well as looking at people's work life balance, and the things that brought them health and well being. So I have some background in faculty development, but perhaps a unique twist on it, given my background in human factors and work systems engineering. In my consulting practice, I help organizations improve the engagement of their people, as well as their people's health and sustainable productivity. So I'd like to bring that lens into a discussion about faculty development, to talk about increasing faculty engagement. I want to start at the start and talk about Hertzberg, Frederick Hertzberg published his Motivation Hygiene Theory back in 1968. So it's been a while, and it was a groundbreaking theory and backed up by research. So the premise of it, which is, it seems to a large extent been forgotten is that there are two groups of kind of job design factors, the way work is designed that affect people. So there's motivation, things that motivate people, and there are things that if they're not taking care of can dissatisfy people. And this is super important, because it

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means that there's actually two scales going on. So we can have someone who is highly motivated, and yet also highly dissatisfied. So when Hertzberg did his research, he found that there are some things that when they're present in a job can lead people to be highly motivated to perform in that job. And that there are some things that when they're messed up or absent in a job can lead people to be dissatisfied. So for instance, policies and practices can lead to dissatisfaction: I disagree with the way this is happening. I disagree with these rules. I'm dissatisfied with these rules. Working conditions, it can be dissatisfied hours, the best we can hope for is that if we take care of working conditions so that they're good, people have a lack of dissatisfaction. So the dissatisfaction goes to zero. I am not dissatisfied, right? That's not the same as being motivated. That just means I lack dissatisfaction. Same with salary and benefits. If they're not the way I want them to be, I'm dissatisfied with them. But improving them only can bring me to a lack of dissatisfaction status in the organization. How others see job security, whether or not you get along with your supervisor, and how you feel about your supervising experience, how you supervise your own personal life, your coworkers, these are all things that can either lead to dissatisfaction or zero dissatisfaction. What Hertzberg found, though, is that there are certain parts of work that can create a situation where people feel motivated. For instance, if they're recognized for their good work, if they feel that they can grow in meaningful ways, that's motivating. If they feel they can achieve something that's motivating, if they feel they can make some sort of advancement, if they can feel challenged in their job, they feel that their job is using their skills and abilities. They feel a sense of responsibility. These are things that lead to motivation, and thus, potentially to high performance and engagement. It's useful to go a step further now and look at the researchers who come immediately after Hertzberg. They take Hertzberg as motivators, and they go further, they go deeper. So we're no longer talking about the dissatisfiers now, we're talking about more depth of understanding of what are the things that make work motivating for people? What are the things that make a job worth engaging. And so Hackman and Oldham in 1976, come after Hertzberg. And they start to study these motivators. And here's what they come up with: the Job Characteristics Theory. I use Job Characteristics Theory in my consulting projects to analyze jobs. So I look at skill variety, task identity, test significance, that all lead to meaningfulness of the work. I look at the levels of autonomy that people have that result in their feeling or responsibility for what they're doing. And I look at the feedback people are getting and the knowledge of results they have about their impact. When I look at the core job characteristics that people need in order to engage, and then I come back to think about faculty development, it gives me some things to imagine, right? I can imagine that, in order for engage people, I'm going to have to figure out how to increase the amount of variety in the part of their jobs that I'm interested in, how to increase the task identity, so how to see the end product of something, and how to talk about its significance so that people know that it matters, right? I also want to give people more autonomy. I don't want to tell people to do things the same way. Because that isn't going to increase autonomy. In fact, it's going to be a demotivator. I want to give people like a menu of choices about how and what and when to do things. And then if I can, I want to improve feedback so that it actually can feed motivation, as opposed to just kind of sit there at the end in a meaningless state. And if anything caused people to to be demoralized by hearing too late, that they did something that wasn't appreciated and wasn't helpful, and now they can't fix it.

Tierney King 08:00
As we think about the demotivators in our life, there's also a parallel to our levels of exhaustion and burnout. So how can we intervene in these systems to make things better, to give us hope and healthy

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habits in our working lives? In this program, How Can Shifting from Symptoms Thinking to Systems Thinking Make Your Campus Healthier? Katherine Sanders talks about people's exposure to sources of stressors, and how to actually reduce this pattern.

Katherine Sanders 08:27
So I want to talk a little bit about the levels of exhaustion and burnout that we're seeing in both faculty, staff and students. And then of course, where we can intervene in these systems to try to make things better. There is a rise since the pandemic and even before the pandemic of exhaustion and burnout in academia. And many times, leaders are told or are encouraged to turn to wellness programs to try to solve this issue for faculty, staff and students. So we want to invest in wellness programs to make sure that people are healthy, is that right? But how do you know if a wellness program can help you solve your campuses problems? That's what I want to talk about today. We have a whole laundry list of stressors that have been shown in the research to impact employee health. And these stressors are something that we never entirely get rid of, because there is no such thing as a stress-free life and there's no such thing as a perfect job. But at the same time, most jobs can be improved and many stressors can be reduced, if not eliminated, or at least mitigated. And to mitigate a stressor, what we do is go to that middle part about exposure or recovery time and look at the duration of time someone is asked to function under a particular stressor. So If I have really intense workload because it's the end of the semester, and I also have some publication deadlines ready, or grant application deadlines, then at least I know, in a couple of weeks, my workload will lighten. But if there is no such recovery time, either, we need recovery time between heavy workload periods. And we also need recovery time during each day. So we need recovery time, during the work day, not just when we go on vacations once or twice a year, engineers like myself, look at not only the stressors, but we look at where can recovery times happen, how can we decrease someone's exposure to these stressors. So when we think about wellness in this context, we can see that no matter how good a wellness program is, and some of them are very good and very worth investing in changing, the access to wellness programs actually doesn't address the source of the stress. And it's only when we address the source of the stress, or people's exposure to that stress, that we actually can reduce this pattern or the likelihood of someone getting ill. But the causes are something that we need to look at the structures of work in order to deal with. If we do choose to intervene in those structures. When we look at what shapes people's daily working lives, then we can make choices and improve people's health, we can actually look at what is a reasonable workload for people? How can I give someone more autonomy in order to self regulate? How can I provide more social support to my people, especially when they're working in isolation, perhaps it's physical isolation from each other. Perhaps it's the isolation that comes from being the only expert in your field. So thus, you have to teach the classes in your area. And you have no one to collaborate with no one who understands your particular area of expertise within your organization. Or perhaps your organization doesn't know how to value what it is you're offering. So that's a stressor that we could try to help people overcome by connecting people, to other experts across organizations. And also to try to build a more collaborative environment within our organization that appreciates different kinds of expertise, and allows for teaching to be more flexible and perhaps more collaborative, and less draining. My final point that I'd like to make is that in order for wellness programs to give the return on investment that we're hoping for, along with the money we spend with health care benefits, we have to address the problems that we're creating the stressors that we're asking our people to deal with on a daily basis. When we do that, then these programs, the wellness programs, the health care benefits

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programs, our medical experts that we turn to for help in crises and for ongoing preventative care can do their jobs most effectively.

Tierney King 13:28
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