**Going to the Dark Side:  
Thinking About Taking On Administrative Roles  
in Today’s Dynamic Higher Education Arena**

**Abstract (100 words maximum)**

Many faculty members contemplate moving from their teaching-scholar role to assuming an administrative role, be it voluntarily or by suggestion from their institution, sometime known as going to the dark side of higher education. In this session, several facilitators who have moved to the dark side will lead round tables to discuss considerations in deciding to take an administrative role, key skills needed to be successful, challenges within administrative jobs and within higher education, and returning to a faculty role after an administrative assignment. Come see if spending some time on the dark side is for you.

**Three Keywords**

Administration; Career Change; Dean

**Session Format**

Round Tables

**Time Requested**

60 minutes

**Resources Needed**

No additional resources are needed.

**Introduction**

In higher education, faculty members sometimes struggle so much with the decision of moving from a teacher-scholar role to an administrative role that is seen as moving “to the dark side”. Faculty members may consider administrative roles when looking for a career switch, desiring a new challenge, or when asked to take their turn to carry the torch of administrative responsibilities. Even though faculty interact regularly with many administrators, including reporting to Deans and department chairs, and believe they know what these jobs entail, once assuming these roles, new administrators often find the realities of administrative jobs are different then what they perceived. Curiously, little has been published on faculty assuming administrative roles with the primary emphasis of work life balance in academic life.

The proposed session provides a realistic job preview of what life is like “on the dark side” from several experienced MOBTS participants who have spent time on the dark side. While the facilitators’ career journeys will provide a baseline for discussion, the session will also explore the challenges and fluidity of the higher education administrative roles. The session’s target audience will be conference participants who are considering moving to an administrative role, or those in an administrative role who want to share strategies in successfully navigating the transition between faculty and administrative roles.

This session seeks to explore the nature and meaning of “going to the Dark Side” and examine the various administrative roles faculty may find available to them. We see seven key roles/areas where faculty members may have administrative opportunities as they progress in their academic careers:

* Accreditation
* Assessment
* Department Chair
* Assistant/Associate Dean
* Dean
* Assistant/Associate Provost
* Special Projects

In addition to briefly discussing the type of administrative roles available to faculty, we will also discuss issues of life and career issues when considering moving to an administrative role and challenges in higher education affecting administrative roles, as noted below.

When an individual should pursue or maintain an administrative opportunities may be dependent upon things such as stage of career, nature of employment (e.g., tenure-track position versus non-tenure-track position), geographic location, work-life balance, the role one fills within a specific moment in time (e.g., instructor versus administrator or mentor versus instructor), and the needs, capacity and capabilities of one’s institution.

Those coming into administrative leadership roles in higher education face a challenging environment: accreditors demanding higher standards from programs, ranking agencies influencing schools’ reputations and in turn, applications they receive, global competition receiving increased legitimacy, and technology helping to change traditional models of education delivery (Kambil & Budnik, 2013). In addition, schools are becoming increasingly dependent on tuition funding, causing increased financial pressure to maintain revenue and control costs. All of these challenges require those assuming administrative roles to understand these challenges and be ready to help lead their institution through them.

Depending on the needs of participants, the facilitators will lead several smaller discussion groups and report out to the larger group on the following topics:

* Things to consider when deciding to go to “the dark side” and taking an administrative role,
* Key skills needed to be successful in various administrative roles.
* Unexpected challenges encountered in an administrative role,
* Challenges in higher education that impact administrative jobs,
* Considerations in going back to a faculty role after an administrative assignment.

One of the anticipated outcomes of this session is that participants will become more aware of the potential challenges and issues related to key administrative roles/areas. A second anticipated outcome is that the session will enable a sharing of ideas regarding the strategies that may be employed to attain and remain in various positions/areas.

**Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications**

This session will use the transtheoretical model of change (TTM; Prochaska, Di Clemente, & Norcross, 1992) and midlife career theory (Barclay, Stoltz, & Chung, 2011). Most of those considering a move from a faculty role to an administrative role will be at mid-career, defined as 35 to 65 years of age (Dacey & Travers, 2004) which aligns with a post-tenure academic career. At midlife as well as post-tenure, individuals take stock of themselves and reevaluate where they are going and what they are doing with their lives, which may include a change to an administrative role. The TTM model includes the stages of precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination (Prochaska, Di Clemente, & Norcross, 1992). Individuals contemplating career changes will progress through these stages, conceptualizing the pros and cons of the proposed change. Our session may be especially helpful to those in the early stages of considering a move to an administrative role, as they contemplate and prepare to make such a move. Our table discussions will be focused on those at these stages of possible career change to an administrative role or return to faculty.

In addition to career theories and the facilitators’ personal experiences, we will utilize advice from industry publications and studies conducted relating to key skills needed for those looking to move to a dean or similar academic role (Cullen & Nickerson, 2017; Shinn, 2017)

Our broad goal for this session is to provide participants with insight, resources, and knowledge so that they can be ready if (and when) an administrative opportunity arises.

**Session Description**

The following is a summary of the proposed session:

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| **Activity** | **Time** |
| Introduction of Facilitators and Session | 5 Minutes |
| Roundtables Discussing Various Administrative Roles   * Anticipate 2 Rounds of Approximately 15 - 20 Minutes Each | 35 minutes |
| Debrief of Tables and Idea Exchange | 15 minutes |
| Wrap Up & Closing | 5 minutes |
| **Total Time** | **60 Minutes** |

***Introduction***

* “The Dark Side” Definition and Brief Overview of Facilitators and their Journeys to and from “the Dark Side”

***The Dark Side Round Table Discussions***

* Tables with each facilitator to discuss following issues about going to and from the Dark Side in various roles:
  + Things to consider when deciding to go to “the Dark Side” and taking an administrative role,
  + Key skills needed to be successful in various administrative roles,
  + Considerations in going back to a faculty role after an administrative assignment,
  + Unexpected challenges encountered in an administrative role,
  + What have you done to stay current in administrative roles or think you should do?

***Conclusion***

* Key Learnings
* Key Action Steps

**Conference Theme Track**

This session should be considered for the “Teaching Agents for Positive Change” Conference Theme Track

This round table session will generate dialogue about the challenges and issues related to the persistent call for faculty to assume administrative roles. Many faculty assume or pursue administrative roles with the goal of making positive changes at his or her institution. This session provides a forum to share ideas regarding the strategies that those serving in administrative roles can use to implement positive changes at their institution.

**Unique Contribution**

This work has not been presented at MOBTS or elsewhere.

**References**

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