Cultivating Careers: Professional Development for Campus IT

Cynthia Golden, Editor
Part I: The Organizational Perspective
Preface: A Commitment to Professional Development
• It’s All About the People • Time and Money • The Role of IT Leaders • What Works • Summary • Endnotes

Acknowledgments

Part I: The Organizational Perspective

Chapter 1: Perspectives on IT Leadership
James D. Bruce, MIT, and Brian McDonald, MOR Associates, Inc.
• IT—the Innovative Frontier • Different Times, Expanded Skill Sets • IT Leadership and the Required Competencies • Leadership Roles • Conclusion • Endnotes • About the Authors

Chapter 2: A Comprehensive Approach to Professional Development for an IT Staff
Gene Spencer and Jeannie Zappe, Bucknell University
• Conversation, Commitment, and Concerted Effort • A Complex Interrelationship • Professional, Collaborative, and Leadership Skills • Engaging the Right People • Additional Examples of Bucknell Efforts • Conclusion • Endnotes • About the Authors

Chapter 3: Organizational Strategies for Fostering a Culture of Learning
Marilu Goodyear, Kathleen Ames-Oliver, and Keith Russell, University of Kansas
• A Vision of Organizational Learning • Elements of an Organizational Learning Infrastructure • Conclusion • Endnotes • About the Authors
Part II: The Individual Perspective

Chapter 4: Taking Control of Your Career
William F. Hogue, University of South Carolina, and David W. Dodd, Xavier University

- Career Management Equals Career Development
- It Takes Careful Planning
- Closing the Gap: Enhancing Skills and Experience
- Evaluating Professional Opportunities
- Career Development: Continuously Building Relationships and Optimizing Opportunities
- Make Career Planning a Habit
- About the Authors

Chapter 5: The Importance of Mentors
Susan E. Metros, The Ohio State University, and Catherine Yang, EDUCAUSE

- The Need to Develop IT Leaders in Higher Education
- Organizations’ Responsibilities
- Goals of a Mentoring Relationship
- Types of Mentoring Relationships
- Types of Mentors
- Mentoring Phases
- Politics of Mentoring
- Conclusion
- Endnotes
- About the Authors

Chapter 6: The Profession Needs You: Engagement as Professional Development
Cynthia Golden, EDUCAUSE, and Dan Updegrove, The University of Texas at Austin

- Stay Current in a Dynamic Field
- Broaden Your Perspective
- Make Professional Contacts
- Gain Recognition for Your Work and Your Institution
- Serve the Community
- Develop Leadership Skills
- Enhance Communication Skills
- Find Career Opportunities
- Change Your Environment
- Make Friends and Have Fun
- Next Steps
- About the Authors

Chapter 7: Work and Life: Achieving a Reasonable Balance
Tracey Leger-Hornby, Brandeis University, and Ron Bleed, Maricopa Community College District

- Personal Values—What Drives You?
- Managing Priorities
- Productivity and Managing Time
- When Worlds Collide
- Dealing with Burnout
- Making Changes
- Conclusion
- Endnotes
- Useful Web References
- About the Authors
Chapter 8: 12 Habits of Successful IT Professionals
Brian L. Hawkins, EDUCAUSE

1. They Are Multilingual • 2. They Avoid the Unconscious Conspiracy •
3. They Read Broadly • 4. They Educate Others About Information-Based Organizations •
5. They Understand the Limits of Their Advocacy •
6. They Are Cautious When Speaking Publicly • 7. They Cultivate Their Advisory Committees •
8. They Are Enablers • 9. They Don’t Whine • 10. They Are Generalists • 11. They Redefine Themselves • 12. They Maintain Balance •
Conclusion • Endnotes • About the Author

Chapter 9: Cultivating People
Lida Larsen and Cynthia Golden, EDUCAUSE

The Times, They Are A-Changin’ (Again) • Building the Higher Education IT Workforce • The Role of Professional Development in Retention • The Next Generation of Leaders • Harvesting Institutional Knowledge • Looking Ahead •
Endnotes • About the Authors
Take a moment to reflect on the experience of your organization over the past decade as it supported the mission of your institution. It should be fairly easy to recognize key moments of dramatic change driven by clearly identifiable major events or longer periods of persistent changes (as minor as they may have seemed at the time) that proved a catalyst for significant organizational trial and transformation. Consider how those events and conditions shaped the future of your organization and its ability to succeed over time.

Change can occur for any number of reasons, including the arrival or departure of a key institutional leader, increased interest in a particular issue by a governing board, a significant new advance in technology, a new institutional strategic plan, or a groundswell of demand from a key stakeholder group. Other catalysts might be more subtle but no less transformative for an IT organization’s focus and operation over the long term—a newly elected chair of a faculty advisory committee, a key vendor’s withdrawal from the market, a budget shortfall, a major grant or gift, or the arrival or departure of a key member of the IT staff.

Change can happen at any time. We can’t predict which events and conditions will be the most transformative until the passage of time brings clarity and perspective. How, then, can we create the climate and conditions for success for our staff, our organization, and ourselves in the face of a rapidly changing environment that we cannot possibly control?

At Bucknell University, we identified several key events and changes in the environment that contributed significantly to moments of change for the IT organization. Our catalysts included the end of the mainframe era (which also signaled the end of our ability to effectively build our own administrative applications), the
creation of a new faculty computing advisory committee (with a focused vision for how technology might enhance the curriculum), the retirement of a long-standing director of the library (ending a productive chapter in the library’s development and opening the door to new organizational options), and the arrival of new campus leaders willing to take the risk of merging the library and IT organizations as an investment in the institution’s future.

In our earliest moments of dealing with these complex transitions, we identified the lack of a firm and cohesive commitment to professional development (PD) within the IT staff and a lack of ongoing organizational development of the IT organization as some of our greatest obstacles to success. The challenges we faced required a level of flexibility and adaptability in our organization that we had not previously achieved. New technologies and ways of working with our colleagues and with the campus community required an enhanced set of skills that could allow our organization to succeed in the midst of overwhelming change. We needed to prepare our staff colleagues for unanticipated and complex situations by helping build technical skills and cultivate individual attributes such as agility, curiosity, service orientation, empowerment, collaboration, self-motivation, leadership, accountability, and a willingness to embrace change and take appropriate risks. With these characteristics and skills, people could increasingly find themselves in a position where they could succeed, thus creating an environment of positive morale and providing a foundation for dealing with the next season of change or wave of transformation. Professional and organizational development became key components of our ongoing organizational change strategy.

**Conversation, Commitment, and Concerted Effort**

Far too often, IT organizations find themselves without the necessary resources and tools to develop their staffs in effective ways. Budgets for training and development are sorely lacking and often the first thing sacrificed when difficult choices must be made. Individual staff are often too busy to learn necessary skills—ironically, they are “too busy sawing wood to stop and sharpen the saw.” The most common tools for learning tend to be trial-and-error or learn-by-doing. These approaches work well for some individuals in some instances, but prove too slow or ineffective in others. In too many cases, attempts are made to solve problems without the benefit of the most appropriate tools because individuals simply do not have the latest skills to apply.
What would it take to change this picture? What kinds of resources would be necessary for the IT organization to foster an appropriate culture of learning within its staff? Fortunately, there is no single right way to apply professional development to an organization. Virtually any investment in PD can provide some positive benefit or momentum, and progress can be made in small, incremental steps if it is reasonably focused and if it engages the right individuals appropriately.

In our transformation at Bucknell, three key elements provided a foundation for sustained progress: conversation, commitment, and concerted effort.

As we started the first significant change process, we engaged in a series of conversations about the need for increased PD. We initiated a discourse within the organization and with the leadership of the institution; we spoke at length with anyone who would listen about our case for improved PD, citing the need for better service, better troubleshooting skills, quicker response, and improved solutions. We talked about the skills we needed to develop, while acknowledging that investing in those skills might make our staff more attractive to the external job market. (We firmly believed that creating an organization where people could learn and grow would encourage them to stay, and we were proven right.) We explained openly what support people would need and gave them that support. Most importantly, we created an environment where our staff could direct their own development efforts in ways that made sense to them, rather than having PD “done to them.”

Next, our organization made a conscious commitment to increase the priority given to training and development. As a first step, we put more of our financial resources into the budget for PD activities. We looked for ways to build the necessary training into every major project we undertook. (As with most colleges and universities, it was much easier to get funding for projects, systems, and networks than it was to get approval to hire extra staff or provide adequate training.) With the proper emphasis and justification, we were able to initially double the funds annually set aside for training activities because the argument simply made a great deal of sense: at a time when the campus community wanted our services to improve, we argued that training and staff development were key elements of the solution.

These conversations and commitments have become a habitual part of our organizational culture. They started modestly and grew from year to year, representing a concerted effort within our organization. We talk regularly about the ongoing development of the organization as the environment changes around
Professional Development for an IT Staff

Issues of professional development now pervade our discussions during the hiring process and in our conversations with new staff members, engaging them in a commitment to take responsibility for helping define their own PD needs. We have built self-assessment, feedback from colleagues, and goal-setting into our annual performance planning process so that it focuses more on the future than on shortcomings of the past. We have set an expectation that individuals are responsible for identifying and addressing their own PD activities, given the appropriate coaching and resources to do so. Most importantly, we have a strong commitment to protect (and even overspend) the funds set aside for PD, even during years when we need to aggressively trim budgets.

Finally, a key characteristic of this concerted effort is the ongoing assessment of our environment. At times, we approach professional and organizational development activities passionately and aggressively because of a perceived need and openness within the organization. At other times, we take a measured and subtle approach, sensing that the moment is not yet right and the opportunity needs to develop. Just as there are cycles of change, there are cycles in the developmental process that should not be ignored.

A Complex Interrelationship

The needs of the individual, the organization, and the institution are inextricably connected. Recognizing the complexity and dynamic nature of this interrelationship is an important component of success. IT professionals can easily be motivated to engage in those developmental activities that most closely meet the needs of their primary technical responsibilities. Other development activities, however, might actually provide a larger benefit for the organization or the institution as a whole, a benefit that an individual might not fully appreciate. For example, the IT organization may sorely need to engage in team-building skills or other collaborative skills such as coaching or problem resolution, yet these activities might seem like a lower priority to someone with a major project deadline bearing down.

At Bucknell, we engage in a regular discourse about the varying needs of the institution and the needs of the IT organization, to help colleagues understand the broader context. For example, we have invited key members of the university administration to talk to our staff about their roles in the mission of the university and how our organization supports them. We regularly engage in a state-of-the-university discussion at our departmental staff meetings. Our leadership team regularly sends “making connections” messages to all of our staff in an effort to
create context, make connections between seemingly random events, and help continuously mold organizational culture.

The 1997 merger of IT and the library at Bucknell provided our new organization with an excellent opportunity to focus on organizational development. In blending two staffs comprised of 90 individuals from two very different (and seemingly incompatible) organizational cultures, we felt an obvious need to create some consistency in vision, values, and organizational culture for the new organization. Our chief information officer at the time took two masterful approaches: he engaged two organizational development consultants to help us in our organizational work, and he defined a principle for moving forward called *opportunistic evolution*—to look for opportunities when people were ready to move forward and seize them in an evolutionary, nonthreatening way.

From our resulting organizational development work emerged a shared statement of vision and values for the new Department of Information Services and Resources (ISR). While this statement has undergone two significant revisions in intervening years, the values remain true to the organization we were attempting to create from the start. See Figure 1 for the current version of those values.

**Figure 1.** Bucknell University Information Services and Resources Values Statement

**Our Values Statement:** Within Information Services and Resources, we share a common set of values as we work to accomplish our mission of supporting the academic, administrative, and co-curricular functions of Bucknell University. These values provide us with a framework for effectively working together and meeting the needs of the campus community. They are ideals toward which we continue to strive in our daily efforts.

1. We value our role in the mission of the university.
2. We value exceptional customer service.
3. We value a collaborative work environment.
4. We value leadership throughout the organization.
5. We value professional expertise and professional development.
6. We value personal accountability.
7. We value a healthy work environment.
8. We refuse to let each other fail.
Our staff understand what these values represent, and they have been a powerful force in creating an environment where we can succeed together. Obviously, the first two values speak to our commitment to the institution and what it needs from us in terms of alignment, service, and skills. Our technical skills are irrelevant if not fully aligned with institutional needs or if we do not serve the community effectively. The third and fourth values define how we will work together as an organization, how we will relate to one another, and what expectations we can have about our joint work. The fifth and sixth values declare the attributes we require from one another, which include a focus on and responsibility for PD (in all of its forms). The final two values are simply commitments we make to each other about the ways we work in healthy and mutually supportive ways.

Over the years, our organization has worked to further explore and describe what each of these values means to each of us. At the same time, we have continued to reinvent ourselves in ways that are appropriate to our changing environment and to build an environment where we can all succeed together. More importantly, embedded within these values are several commitments that have allowed us to focus on the full range of developmental activities for the organization, such as professional skills, collaborative skills, and leadership skills.

**Professional, Collaborative, and Leadership Skills**

Professional development can have a wide range of meanings and can be accomplished in various ways. Many people in IT organizations, however, will focus primarily on the technical skills most useful within the technologies their work involves. These tend to be skills related to particular software and hardware systems, troubleshooting approaches, tool sets, security initiatives, and other elements of IT technologies. People can be more easily motivated in these areas because such skills often represent the interests and passions that originally attracted them to a job in our organization in the first place.

The other major component of PD activities falls into a category commonly referred to as soft skills or people skills. Unfortunately, IT professionals too often view these terms in a pejorative sense as being less important than the technical skills that enable them to do their work.

At Bucknell, our statement of values helps create a vocabulary for effectively discussing this sensitive issue. Naming our culture ("our collaborative work environment") has allowed us to subsume a variety of developmental activities often seen as soft skills under an umbrella we refer to as **collaborative skills**. As
technologies have become increasingly interrelated and integrated, most IT professionals can easily see the value of collaboration in accomplishing their work. Thus, they are likely to be more open to gaining the collaborative skills that help us work effectively together (including working with the external community).

Creating an expectation of leadership throughout the organization also creates an opportunity to engage the staff in another set of important skills, centered on the need for all of us to display leadership characteristics and behaviors. These skills are often considered the responsibility of a few people in a leadership position (the typical notion of leadership as a hierarchy). We consider the broad definition of leadership as “the skill of influencing people to work enthusiastically toward goals identified as being for the common good.”4 Clearly, we have people in defined leadership positions, but we also set out to build an overall climate where any individual can possess and exhibit the skills and behaviors required to take on a leadership role in an area appropriate to his or her abilities, interests, and span of influence. In fact, our collaborative work environment coupled with our relatively flat organization depends heavily on the sharing of leadership throughout the entire staff rather than relying on the relatively few individuals designated as managers.

Our statement of jointly held values provides a significant benefit for us in creating an environment in which the skills we need to develop organizationally can be viewed as equal components of a larger, more comprehensive professional development program embracing both technical skills and soft skills.

Engaging the Right People

The challenge of creating and sustaining a comprehensive approach to PD seems enormous at the outset, and the perceived obstacles can easily get in the way of even beginning to make such a commitment. Thinking about what it might take to build and maintain momentum might deter mere mortals. The solution to overcoming this obstacle is simple: make modest plans, be persistent, and engage enough of the right people in the process.

Over the course of several years and multiple transitions, ISR at Bucknell has taken many approaches to the development of our staff and organization. At one point, we appointed a single development leader to get a program started and provided a few thousand dollars for team training. Later, the leadership team took on the task and broadened the effort. Still later, we appointed a
Staff Development Team comprised of individuals from across the organization. Each of these approaches had some success within the environment at the time; each was replaced by the next iteration because its season had passed. We expected progress rather than perfection from these programs.

Our current Organizational Development Team (ODT) has been our greatest asset in the ongoing development of ISR. This group represents individuals from across the organization (most of whom do not hold leadership or managerial roles) and is led by a staff member who is deeply committed to our values and development goals. The group engages the talents and energies of people who are keenly interested in and passionate about PD and the growth of our organization. Each year, some members of the team step down and others are invited to join; most are self-motivated and ask to be a part of this work, so the group has a built-in process of self-renewal.

The energy within this group is astounding. One challenge has been to ensure that the team’s work aligns well with the activities of the entire organization. In particular, special care must be taken to define our major developmental activities in concert with the ebb and flow of the organization’s workflow. For example, it is critical for us to limit the major activities of ODT so they don’t occur during the busy summer installation season, even though some members of the team find more slack time then. The keys to this alignment are simple: one member of our leadership team sits on ODT as a full member, and our department head regularly joins the team meetings. In addition, the team meets as a whole with ISR’s leadership team on a regular basis to engage in a conversation about priorities over the next several months.

Having a team or group with the responsibility of continually focusing on professional and organizational development has been critical to our success. Further, the work becomes more manageable when shared among team members. ODT’s charge has changed and evolved with the organization. In the beginning, they focused on the basic skills required to succeed in our collaborative work environment: giving and receiving feedback, coaching, communication skills and strategies, good meeting skills, celebrating the successes of our collaborative work environment, and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) training. Their work has also focused on activities that keep our organizational values alive and celebrated. For example, we focused on one value per month for an entire year by hosting one or more related development opportunities.
ODT’s current purpose and mission (which will guide their work and activities for the next several years) follow:

ODT’s purpose is to serve as a partner to ISR’s leadership team in being stewards of a healthy organization that best serves the needs of the university. Together, we will set a learning agenda that the organization needs over the next 3–5 years. ODT will then focus directly on the implementation of that learning agenda. ODT should also help ISR keep its focus on: our values, our collaborative work environment, our alignment with Bucknell’s core competencies, improving our technical and professional skills, improving our organizational and collaboration skills, and shaping our new employee orientation program.

Additional Examples of Bucknell Efforts
In addition to the activities mentioned above, the ODT (in partnership with our leadership team) has hosted or sponsored varied professional and organizational development activities and initiatives over the past several years. A list of our most successful strategies follows:

- We retained the services of an outside organizational development consultant who we use in the early phases of training initiatives and change processes, or when an activity might best be facilitated by someone from outside our organization.
- We partner regularly with members of our human resources staff in areas where their skills and resources can best help.
- We have a weekly staff meeting called Thursdays@10, where any staff member can share information with our entire staff, teach a new skill, or facilitate a discussion. Attendance is optional and based on individual preferences and availability, but roughly 50 percent of our staff attend any particular session.
- We created two Staff Development Centers, which our staff can use for PD activities or as quiet space for reading, projects, or self-paced learning. Both centers also contain libraries of our favorite books and resources, including some of the latest books on leadership, staff recognition, managing change, personal accountability, and much more.
- We foster an environment of reading and learning about new ideas in the areas that we believe will help our organization. Our leadership team regularly shares books with each other and staff.
Within ISR, the largest portion of our PD budget goes to the development of technical skills. We understand and accept that these conferences and technical training activities are expensive and worthwhile.

We also create an environment where staff members regularly share those skills with each other.

A significant percentage of visible PD activities for our staff are devoted to collaborative skills and leadership skills.

Training sessions have been provided on many key areas, such as giving and receiving feedback, coaching, communication skills and strategies, good meeting skills, and the MBTI training.

We encourage members of our staff to get involved in professional organizations (such as EDUCAUSE) in a serious way, serving on boards, planning committees and task committees, and making presentations and teaching.

We focus regularly on living our values. For example, we held an exercise to tell stories throughout the entire ISR staff about successful collaborations that occur because of our collaborative work environment.

We took 14 members of our staff to an appreciative inquiry conference and have let that knowledge and information slowly permeate our organization.

We find exceptional developmental activities such as the EDUCAUSE Management Institute and regularly send one or two individuals to each session.

We created an ISR intranet that includes materials from previous PD activities, organizational skill development resources, and a list of professional organizations.

Our leadership team all have the following in their job descriptions: “To be successful, you must have a passion for your own professional development that includes developing leadership qualities in yourself and others.”

We specifically focus on issues of PD in the hiring process to identify needs, as well as to recruit the most desirable candidates.

**Conclusion**

We believe that the case can easily be made for a comprehensive approach to PD that can help an IT staff operate at its best. While there is no single right way to approach such a venture, the attention given to both individuals and the staff as a whole can pay ongoing dividends to the entire organization as it becomes better able to face the array of challenges that the future will bring. Clearly there are benefits to improving individual technical skills. But more importantly, an
organization can become a more cohesive unit by developing skills and competencies for effectively working together. We have found that creating shared meaning, building a vocabulary for discourse, and enabling better organizational understanding have contributed to creating an empowered and agile staff who continually leverage our collaborative work environment. Further, we feel ready for the next changes that we will face because our staff knows and values our commitment to doing whatever is needed in terms of professional development and preparedness.

Endnotes

1. This work can easily occur without the trauma of a drastic organizational event such as the merger of two departments. In this case, the merger simply created an awareness of the need and a willingness to act that might not have occurred otherwise.

2. To learn more about Information Services and Resources at Bucknell University, please visit <http://www.bucknell.edu/isr/>, in particular the “About ISR” section of the Web site.

3. We use the term technologies in the broadest possible sense here.


About the Authors

Gene Spencer is the associate vice president for information services and resources at Bucknell University. He serves an integrated library/IT organization with responsibility for all aspects of computing services, library services, networking, instructional technology, enterprise information systems, library collections, information access, and telecommunications. He focuses primarily on organizational development, leadership development, and creating a collaborative work environment. Spencer currently is the director of the EDUCAUSE Management Institute and serves on the EDUCAUSE Professional Development Committee and the InCommon Federation Steering Committee. He is active in the Consortium of Liberal Arts Colleges (CLAC) and the Oberlin Group of Library Directors.

Jeannie Zappe is the director of service integration in information services and resources at Bucknell University, where she leads the technology support group, serves on the organization’s leadership team, and plays a leading role in ongoing organizational development and service focus in the
merged IT/library environment. She also manages the centralized functions of the department’s contingent of student employees. She has worked in various IT roles at Bucknell, including user support, training, hiring, and staff development. She served on the EDUCAUSE Professional Development Committee and from 1998 to 2003 on the faculty of the EDUCAUSE Institute Management Program.