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ACADEMIC PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The major objective of this investigation was to study the academic professional development of staff members (N = 34) from a department of a New Zealand university.

To achieve this objective, a case study approach to data collection was adopted. This involved interviews with the staff members, and consulting documents relating to professional development at the university in which the study was carried out. As well, people involved with academic professional development at the universities throughout New Zealand and overseas were consulted.

Seven major themes emerged from this study. The themes are: Induction into the Department, The Roles of Academic Staff Members, Attitudes towards Professional Responsibilities, Role Improvement, The Evaluative Procedures, The Reward System, and Ways of Professional Development.

Among the major findings were : - structured assistance for academic staff during their first six months in the department being investigated was non-existent; the roles of the academic staff in this department included teaching, research, administration, work in the community and other (e.g. communicating with colleagues); the most and least satisfying aspects of their role for academic staff members were teaching and administration respectively; formal or systematic opportunities for professional development of the academic staff members did not exist; formal evaluation of the professional responsibilities of academic staff was not carried out; and the formal reward system in the department emphasised promotion through research and publication.

On the basis of these findings, two major recommendations were suggested for the professional development of these academic staff members : (1) A systematic induction programme for those staff members new to the department, especially those who have not previously held an academic appointment and those who have had no previous association with the department; and (2) More opportunities should be provided for those staff members who wish to improve their professional skills and competencies, particularly in the area of teaching and research. Such opportunities could be provided by setting up workshops and seminars and by encouraging the formation of interest groups within the department.

This investigation also attempted to contribute to the study of academic professional development by focussing upon a theoretical framework based on role theory. A model which highlights the nomothetic and idiographic factors influencing the roles of academics has been presented.

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INTRODUCTION

*A lecturer is a sound scholar,
who is chosen to teach on the ground
that he was once able to learn.*

Francis Cornford

The worldwide economic recession in recent years has resulted, *inter alia*, in close scrutiny being given to many public funded institutions. Among these have been universities, of which it has been argued that, since their staff constitute the primary cost factor and major resource, it is the competence, quality and attitudes of these staff which will essentially dictate the nature of the education offered to students and the contribution their institutions makes to society.

Over the past three decades, most studies of academic staff in universities have usually been of two types: first, those which have sought to study the characteristics of the 'ideal' lecturer or professor, and second, those which have examined the effectiveness of university teachers. To date, however, little research has been carried out into the professional development of academic staff within universities (McAleese, 1979a).

It was against this background that the present investigation evolved and formulated into the research problem, which was to study the academic professional development of staff members from a department of a New Zealand university, and in particular,

1. To explore the initial on-the-job experiences of these academic staff members;
2. To examine the current professional responsibilities of these academic staff members;
3. To examine the attitudes of these academic staff members towards their professional responsibilities;
4. To describe opportunities available to these academic staff members for improving their professional competencies;
5. To identify departmental and institutional procedures for evaluating the performance of these academic staff members;
6. To suggest recommendations for the professional development of academic staff within this department.

As the study of professional development is still in its infancy, theories underlying this field of study are only now being

developed. In view of this, and after considering a number of alternatives, it was decided to use 'role theory' as a theoretical framework in which to consider academic professional development.

The report of this study consists of five chapters. The first chapter briefly reviews the history and notion of academic professional development in Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and then discusses the objectives of the present study together with some of the possible theoretical perspectives that may be applied to a study of academic professional development. In Chapter Two, the concept of role and some of the criticisms of role theory are examined, and this is followed by a review of studies relevant to the present investigation. The third chapter focusses on the research and methodology and Chapter Four details the results. In the final chapter, these results are discussed both in relation to the literature on academic professional development and role theory. The report concludes with a bibliography of the research and literature consulted during the study.