

Why do I want to become the HOD?

Script by Karin Hakelius at the hearing on Friday, April 12, 2019

My motives and background to be a HOD

I am sure that some of you ask yourself why I have chosen to become a HOD-candidate also this year, as in 2016. I will start by explaining this, then continue to present my view concerning the HOD-role, what I see as necessary (mainly internal) improvements, say something about how I look upon the department's relation with both other units of SLU and external actors, and finally account for how I would tackle implementing the necessary changes.

As I said three years ago, I see it as extremely important to improve two aspects of the situation at the department: (1) the work-climate, and (2) the processes surrounding the department's educational activities. We all need to feel that we belong to and like belonging to the department. In this lie having a positive and energy-giving work-climate, including factors such as transparency, openness, communication, collaboration and respect.

In recent years, we have experienced that the department has problems making use of the staff's full potential, leading to many leaving us for other jobs, are forced to long periods of sick-leave, or, in one case, early retirement. Changing this trend is important and something I find interesting to be involved in – together with the rest of the staff.

Following that I now sit on the NJ-faculty's *Program board of education at Bachelor's and Master's level* [Programnämnd], I have taken part of evaluations made of our programs – as SWOT-analyses. Among the *weaknesses* mentioned here, discussed during a meeting on Tuesday (April 9) in the Program board of education, are that we:

- do not have specialized teachers in financial and managerial accounting [ekonomistyrning], leading to short-term solutions when it comes to finding teachers for these courses (i.e., FÖ0419 Introduction to financial and managerial accounting, and FÖ0426 Financial and managerial accounting).
- soon lack teachers in production economics – something that might lead to that we will not be allowed to examine students in the field Agricultural science [lantbruksvetenskap] !
- are not seen as an attractive employer, and have problems recruiting and keeping competent staff members

Threats mentioned in these documents, are that:

- the agricultural sector is shrinking and fewer – or even none – of the firms in this sector are actively looking for our students
- other universities are developing programs in the field of, for example, sustainability, and environmental economics, leading to that we have to develop our programs (MSc) in these fields in order to 'stay in the forefront' and attracting students
- some of our international students on our MSc-programs do fulfill our formal requirements for acceptance, but show knowledge-gaps when they have started the programs

In sum, the work-climate and the situation in the educational activities at the department are the two main reasons why I am motivated to run for the HOD-position.

What I think a HOD should represent

I will now summarize my view of the ‘HOD-role’, using the recent survey-results as a ‘hint’ of what the entire staff might think (the response-rate was only c 50%, so the results have to be treated with a certain degree of caution).

I see the role of a HOD as twofold:

1. **Internal strategies** are important and in this the ‘development of the department’s subject areas and specializations’ is given as the definition of this term. However, I believe that in the current situation, for some time to come, the main focus for the HOD has to be improving the work-climate and the staffing of and processes involved in our undergraduate teaching activities, leaving the main responsibility for the development of the subject areas and specializations to the research groups and the Applied analysis group.

Following the focus on the work-climate and the educational efforts, the ‘ekon-adm’-staff is VERY important! These act as ‘the spider in the web’, or as the ‘hub’ for most activities going on at the department. Hence, they have to be supported and appreciated.

The ‘most important characteristics’ of a HOD – according to the survey – are covered by the characteristics ‘fair’, ‘supportive/empowering’, ‘strategic’, followed by ‘prespicious [easy to understand, clear]/clear’, ‘empathic/understanding’, and ‘committed’. I believe my nine years of a HOD between 1999 and 2008 prove I have these characteristics.

According to the c 30-38 respondents (depending on which question we are looking at) of the survey, almost 50% think that the HOD should devote his/her time evenly between research and education. I agree fully here: the focus on the department’s educational activities has to be increased *a lot*, since it has been downscaled, or even ignored, during several years. We need to go through, develop and synchronize *all* courses we are expected to give – also those targeting non-business students – and think through who could be asked to teach in each course – based on data concerning the number of lecture-hours that each individual teacher gives. In this process, being transparent and clear with regards to the expectations – in terms of number of hours – on teachers, as well as thorough follow-ups of the results are essential. Needless to say, fairness also has to be the center of attention.

As I see it, the HOD has the main responsibility for issues like ‘work ethics’, ‘motivation’, and ‘conflict management’, but it is not reasonable that the HOD involves him/herself directly in all these issues, unless they cannot be handled by others. The task for the HOD is to safeguard that issues such as these are handled in a respectful and professional fashion – primarily leaving the main responsibility to do so to the research group leaders, the leader of the Applied analysis group, and the

administrative manager [administrative chef]. Only in the cases where these leaders cannot sort out problems like these, the HOD has to step in.

Similarly, 'internal management issues', such as 'appointment of tasks', 'work routines', and 'resource allocation', should be handled mainly within the research groups, the Applied analysis group, and in the group of administrative staff – the HOD only being part of developing the overall principles for how these tasks should be handled.

Only focusing on the output of publications and external funding has received far too much importance in recent years. At the hearing of 2016, Carl Johan said that the 'soft values', such as teaching achievements and extension activities had to be focused in the coming years. I do not know about you, but I have not seen any sign of this being done – so far.

Another important issue here is the division of tasks – between, for example the HOD-vice HOD, the HOD-the research groups (leaders), as well as within the research groups. As I see it, this division of tasks should be well thought-through and once the tasks have been divided among different actors, each individual having a task to perform has to make sure to be active in carrying out the task.

2. **External strategies** are important – c 50% of respondents indicate this task as important and I agree. We all have to put an effort into representing and marketing the department and its activities, but in some circumstances, the HOD has a special role here, for example in relation to the faculty and in relation to SLU's Vice-Chancellor [rektor]. Likewise, the HOD has a special role to fulfil when it comes to the relations with our financiers, governmental officials, the business community, etc.

Two important 'external channels' between the department and the society as a whole are our students and our alumni. Working with these groups is important for the long-term 'trademark' of the department and the overall responsibility for this lies in the hands of the HOD. As with other important tasks focusing our external contacts, the responsibility for these groups has to be given to suitable staff members.

How I see the future development at the department

In sum, I think that there's a pressing need to upscale the importance of the educational activities at the department. We need to safeguard our key subject-areas by having more staff being employed as teachers, hereby stop relying on those financed by external funds acting as teachers. Not having a long-term group of teachers lead to a short-sightedness when it comes to teaching and developing our courses and programs. This is important now, but even more so if and when we will get more students in the system.

As you heard me saying a few minutes ago, we have two urgent issues to deal with, i.e., to handle the financial and managerial accounting and the production economics, the latter being extremely urgent to handle, if we do not want to risk not being allowed to examine students in the field of Agricultural science [lantbruksvetenskap].

Also, the work-climate has to be improved. In order to do so, several measures have to be taken, for example through having clearer plans for the future, involving the staff in developing these, and dividing tasks in a transparent and fair way. Also, the information asymmetry existing today at the department has to be decreased and this does not imply increasing the number of information meetings – keeping those to be held every other Wednesday is enough (provided that they are always held when announced). These meetings give a chance to have dialogues and discussions, which is necessary sometimes. In addition to these information meetings, though, I think we should improve and expand the possibility to share information digitally.

My ‘keywords’ when acting as a leader are: ‘transparency’, ‘trust’, and ‘openness’, encouraging an open dialogue based on respect. This is based on having a management group at the department, consisting of the five research group leaders, the administrative manager, one representative from the Applied analysis group in Lund, and the HODs, hence 9 people (may eventually be shrunk, if considered relevant by the involved persons). In the management group, goals and strategies are to be discussed and plans developed for how to implement the strategies. Also, delegating tasks and responsibilities among the research groups, the administrative group, the Applied analysis group, and the HOD will be made here, as will developing plans for how the development shall be followed up/monitored. The management group’s meetings should be documented – in the form of notes/memos [minnesanteckningar] and uploaded to an intranet website for all staff to read.

Developing clear guidelines for what is expected of different staff categories as well as individuals is important – in terms of what is expected and how will the evaluation of the output will be carried out.

When transparency, trust, and openness are implemented, the HOD can delegate many tasks to the research groups – hereby the HOD needs not spend time on, for example, work ethics, motivation, conflict management, appointment of tasks, work routines, and resource allocation, but rather on internal, departmental, strategies, as well as external contacts.

Hence, my ‘philosophy’, as a leader, is to monitor what is happening at the department – making sure the development follows the strategic plan of the department – but delegating the details concerning the implementation of the department’s strategy to the research groups, and the Applied analysis group – asking these to let me know if and when things are not ‘going as planned’.

Why do I focus on this? Well, it follows from the fact that I was the HOD between 1999 and 2008, and the main lessons learned during this period are:

- ***Keep track of the financial situation:*** at the time we had a person employed [intendent] to manage the department’s finances (bookkeeping, economic reports, etc). Unfortunately, my predecessor as HOD, and I did trust that there were no problems when it came to how the economy of the department was managed, since no signals were sent from the person responsible and the economic reports presented seemed OK. It turned out they were not and a revision of the department’s financial situation had to be made – with the help of an economist from the faculty. When I stopped as the HOD, however, this had been sorted out.

- ***Be transparent and open for dialogue***, since this create a good atmosphere at the department and also inspires the staff to become committed to and willing to contribute to the activities going on at the department.
- ***Delegate!*** (i.e., dare to trust colleagues)
- ***NEVER ignore conflicts*** and handle each conflict (that the research group or the administrative group cannot handle) in a unique fashion.

I think that I can contribute with something new, i. e., moving the main focus to the areas where we have problems (keeping track of the research activities, too, of course): the undergraduate education and the work climate, hereby creating a stronger and viable department, well equipped for future challenges.

/Karin Hakelius