What I’ve Learned: Reflections on 16 Years as an IR Director

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Career Trajectory

1996
• PhD, Developmental Psychology
• Purdue University

1997
• First tenure-track position, Assistant to Associate & earned Tenure
• South Dakota State University

2003
• Second faculty position, again earned Tenure
• University of North Carolina at Pembroke

2007
• Administrative Fellowship in Provost office at UNCP
• Unexpectedly took over as AVC for Institutional Effectiveness

2014
• Began at East Carolina University as Director of Institutional Research
• Will leave upon retirement in 2024
Communication

- Higher ed has always had, and probably will always have, a communication issue.
- Responsiveness is a virtue much to be desired.
- Don’t be hesitant to toot your own horn (or those of your staff).
- All voices matter.
- Express your opinion softly & humbly (delicate offense vs. adamant defense).
- Always be ready to agree to disagree.
- You will never be able to explain to your family what you do for a living.
Cognition

• Your time is not your own.
• It takes time to build a knowledge base.
• You don’t have to know it all.
• You will sometimes serve as the voice of reason and the “conscience” of your campus.
• (Almost) everyone works hard.
• There are multiple definitions for everything, and the numbers associated with those definitions may be correct even if they don’t match.
• The answer to almost every question is “it depends.”
• At the end of the day, it is just a job. A great job, a rewarding job, but a job, nonetheless.
Continuity

• Turn-over is a fact of life.
• Never underestimate the importance of cross-training.
• For every IR task/project, assign primary and secondary responsibility.
• Document, document, document....not only tasks but also projects.
• Recreating the wheel is how leadership rolls.
Competencies

- What they say is true: Hire good people and get out of their way. The staff member who must have constant supervision is a drain on the entire team.
- You will be a project manager, whether you want to be or not.
- You can't teach motivation or critical thinking.
- The devil may not be in the details, but your sanity is....OCD-like traits are required. At the same time, perfection can be the enemy of the good.
- Never send out anything without at least two pair of eyes reviewing.
- You learn something new every day. (IR is a great career for someone with a low boredom threshold.)
Collaboration & Coworkers

- Breaking down siloes will make your life easier.
- Make sure IR has a seat (or two) at the Data Governance table.
- IR is a close relative of IT, more so now than ever.
- You serve many masters (especially if part of a state system).
- Most people don’t know how to make a “good” data request.
Coordination

- Team building can be challenging (with IR introverts).
- You may have to push (i.e., encourage) team members to do “social” activities, e.g., conference presentations.
- Every IR team is greater than the sum of its parts.
- Micromanagement kills.
- No two IR offices are alike in function, structure, or responsibilities.
Now let’s hear from you.

Reflecting on your own IR career, what professional or personal lessons have you learned?
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There’s a QR code in your program for a conference evaluation form. You’ll also get an e-mail following the conference with a link to the form, which will be available until 4/30.

At your earliest convenience, please take this opportunity to let the planning committee know your thoughts about this year’s conference and where you would like to meet next year.