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CASE STUDY: APPLYING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE IN GRADUATE ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT FOR A CULTURAL INTERPRETATION OF WORKPLACE LEARNING

Dean Campbell, Nadielka Bishop, and Sanjiv Sarin

Abstract

This paper undertakes a cultural interpretation of the roles professional expertise and context play in workplace learning through human resource interventions with a community of post-secondary administrators at one institution. To better understand and evaluate Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of practice, this case study explores boundaries, intersections, and learning communities in communities of practice in graduate enrollment management (GEM). The paper examines the value communities of practice contribute to African American administrators' professional learning in an understudied context, Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Case study data define interventions as indicators of a community of practice in graduate enrollment management: a) boundaries of position; (b) constellations of communities; and (c) learning communities. The paper also considers implications for the study of workplace learning in context as well as implications for professional and organizational development.

Keywords: community of practice; graduate enrollment management; workplace learning

Introduction

The primary context for professional development and workplace learning for many postsecondary administrators is the higher education campus. Black and/or African-American administrators are at or above demographic (racial/ethnic) equity among full-time executives, administrators, and managers at a majority of public 4-year Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), while they are underrepresented at the 4-year predominately white institutions (Perna, Gerald, Baum, & Milem, 2007). Although research on learning in racially-diverse work environments shows mixed results, scholars point out that mentoring from those who have overcome stereotype threat increases performance in higher education for African Americans and creates high expectations for performance (Alston, Guy, & Campbell, 2015; Patton, 2009). Evidence also suggests that HBCU administrators' close relationships with students and the racial composition of the administration create an "environment that is less socially and academically isolating, marginalizing, and threatening" (McGaskey, 2012, p. 88). Academic achievement for HBCU students is distinctive; HBCUs play a significant role in the number African American doctoral recipients in US higher education (Sibulkin & Butler, 2011; Redd, 2008; Upton & Tanenbaum, 2014). In response to public scrutiny of

institutional viability, advocates of HBCUs have refuted media and public discourse critical of the HBCU existence, and reference better HBCU production of bachelor's degrees in STEM and preparation of African American students for graduate study (Chenoweth, 1997; Palmer, Hilton, & Fountaine, 2012).

Indeed, HBCUs employ administrators who are not African American, but HBCUs are an important microcosm of the larger Black community and are more often than not reflective of strong African American cultural influences in their creation and function (Hutcheson, Gasman, & Sanders-McMurtry, 2011; Sydnor, Hawkins, & Edwards, 2010). At the same time, there is a paucity of information about how the work environment of the HBCU administrator informs his/her professional development and effectiveness. This investigation focuses on the primary question: How does professional culture inform workplace learning and organizational change for HBCU administrators? The objective of this project is to examine the role of workplace learning in the professional development of administrators at an HBCU doctoral research institution and, in doing so, to develop a cultural interpretation of graduate enrollment management (GEM) through the organizing concept of Community of Practice (CoP). The research design involves participant observation and case study to frame holistic analysis of administrator workplace learning around three interventions: a) boundaries of position; (b) constellations of communities; and (c) learning communities. Herewith, a key argument is that CoP allows for analysis, explanation, and understanding of a community of adult learners who transition into a professional culture at one institution.

Theoretical and Methodological Model

Organizational researchers note that the study of workplace learning among professional managers is limited without a picture of the context that enables better understanding of the applicability of results (Marsick, 2009; McKee & Eraut, 2011). This socio-cultural, individual-context focused view of learning contrasts with cognitive, individual-only views of learning that take place "in the head" of the adult learner (Kirshner & Whitson, 1997). Researchers also validate informal workplace learning for administrators and suggest the value of systematic collection of "critical incidents" such as case studies as useful in documenting the impact of informal learning. The benefits of qualitative approaches for examining managerial learning include a deeper look at organizational context during a time of substantial change. In particular, Marsick (2003) noted that that informal learning among administrators documented in the study of communities of practice could not be better understood without a "deeper look at context and changes over time" (p. 393).

Graduate Enrollment Management and Communities of Practice

The original basis of the Communities of Practice (CoP) concept is culture, including ethnographic research in the workplace, and combined conceptual and anthropological work. A CoP is a special type of informal network among members of a particular specialty or work group that emerges from a desire to work more effectively or to understand work more deeply. Lave and Wegner (1991) stated, "a community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice" (p. 98). Communities of practice in organizations are assets that represent investments in mutual engagement. Wegner (1998) states, "Although workers may be contractually employed by a large institution, in day-to-day practice they work with—and, in a sense, for-a much smaller set of people and communities" (p. 6).

Graduate Enrollment Management (GEM) is an administrative strategy responding to the

ever-growing demand for postsecondary accountability and high performance (Barnes & Harris, 2010; Schulz, 2008; Wendler et al., 2010). In defining GEM, Williams (2008) portrayed administrators engaged in professional practice as those who "work proactively to build and maintain relationships across administrative silos…assigning responsibilities based on cost efficiencies, customer service, and expertise" (p. 57). Amidst this discourse of reform and accountability, GEM has gained increasing popularity and utility as a philosophy and practice in the administration of graduate education. Campbell and Smith (2014) examined the increasing professionalization of GEM administrators through the individual's identification with "roles as members of their institution and as a society of peers" (p. 10). The researchers identified the need for additional studies to understand the context and cultural processes that contribute to administrator effectiveness.

The learning that takes place within GEM is mediated by professional development efforts, both within and external to the institutional context. Professionals who order themselves into "tribes" or communities of practice in pursuit of GEM as "territory," a philosophy and process, promulgate GEM as intellectual content and as a cultural construct within that field of expertise (Becher & Trowler, 2001). Lave and Wenger (1998) explains learning inside a CoP occurring among "old-timers" (mentors) and "newcomers" (apprentices) as legitimate peripheral participation (LPP). More experienced mentors in communities of practice deem newcomers' participation as "legitimate" and accept their position in the community. LPP then, involves participation as a way of both contributing to and socialization into the culture of a community of practice. GEM newcomers advance through their careers through learning to master paradigms GEM mentors deem as suitable for professional practice.

Workplace Learning From A Cultural Perspective
A cultural perspective of learning in the workplace is concerned with those products and processes professionals engage with to become effective within communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Two approaches for understanding workplace learning are of interest. First, informal workplace learning is one important way in which adults construct meaning from their work experiences. Informal learning may include talking and sharing resources with others, searching the Internet, and experimenting with new techniques or tools (Boud & Middleton, 2003). In addition, informal learning in the workplace involves engagement in both structured and unstructured on-the-job activities that result in the development of new capabilities required for effective professional practice (Senge, 2006). Lohman (2005) surveyed human resource administrators and school teachers and found that major barriers to informal learning in the workplace were a lack of time and a lack of proximity to colleagues' work areas.

Personal characteristics found to enhance professionals' motivation to engage in informal learning were initiative, self-efficacy, love of learning, and commitment to professional development. Administrators engaged in graduate enrollment management are also engaged in informal learning within the workplace. Communicating with other administrators in functional offices lends insight on how a new practice initiated by one office is understood by another. For example, administrators learn from how to relay the impact of financial aid and academic grading policies to students from informal and unplanned conversations with other colleagues. Second, formal workplace learning emphasizes theory, planned objectives, systematic action to achieve goals, and the use of individuals outside of the organization as the basis for learning. Organizational culture emphasizes practices and norms prioritize conservative preferences for "the way we do things around here." In contrast, professional

associations present a "bigger picture of reality" (Rusaw, 1995, p. 221). Associations and other collectives of professionals socialize peers to techniques, knowledge, and ethics that result in shared experiences upon which professionals form communities of practice.

Administrators as Cultural Managers

A key cultural process is how administrators manage resources in their work. Bergquist and Pawlack (2008) maintained that managerial culture is a resilient and consistently important part of researching organizational climate in higher education. In the managerial culture, values emphasized include fiscal responsibility, effective supervisory skills or personnel management; authority is assumed to rest with formally designated administrators who maintain control over planning and managerial functions. Managerial culture for graduate administrators is concerned with effective and efficient administration of resources and implementation of policies in place in the organization. Professional standards increasingly influence administrator values through professional associations (e.g., National Association of Graduate Admission Professionals (NAGAP), Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), etc.) whose scope extends beyond a single institution. Many of these professional standards create aspirant institutions that peer universities esteem.

Priorities in managerial culture include a focus on optimizing political (i.e, power and coalitions) and structural (i.e., roles, plans, and goals) resources to achieve objectives (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Many GEM professionals participate in various work-groups, committees, and councils to pursue goals achieved in consultation with faculty and other administrators in units with competing interests. Often, establishment or revision of academic policies is characterized by contentious discussions.

Methods

This study used a qualitative goal-free program evaluation that is a methodological perspective that draws on administrator examination and judgment of the effectiveness and accomplishments of workplace activities. The use of qualitative methods in analysis of program evaluation points to flexibility in gathering data on program effects in addition to incorporating a focus on stated goals (Patton, 1987; 1990). Goal-free evaluation allows observers flexibility to focus on culture (GEM) in subunits within a larger organization (HBCU) rather than pre-defined limits on what is analyzed. Case study analysis allows holistic analysis of discrete pieces of information "woven into ideographic framework" (Patton, 1987, p. 148) as an evaluative report on a unique phenomenon.

The primary data-gathering strategies employed were participant observation of HBCU administrator workplace learning over a two-year period; two of the authors are HBCU administrators and one an HBCU doctoral student. Participant observation is an "omnibus strategy" which optimized the evaluation team's access to data, including direct participation and observation of workplace training events, analysis of institutional documents, and reflection and introspection (Patton, 1987; 1990). Information for the analysis includes review of on-campus office and in human resource activities, off-campus participation in professional association meetings and analysis of university documents and webpages. Human resource interventions include job re-design, informal workplace learning, and professional networking, among others. The period within which workplace learning interventions took place provided the basis for use of CoP as an organizing framework. Consistent with Wenger's (1998) conceptualization of CoP, the intervention of position restructuring enhanced boundary formation among the GEM staff. Informal learning became situated within the community when

professional colleagues trusted one another enough to share their expertise with other. Finally, professional identity formation became enhanced through participation in networks with other graduate enrollment administrators in extra-mural association meetings. Wenger (1998) referred to such intersections of multiple CoPs as "constellations" (p. 127). Administrators interact with one another, engage in professional pursuits individually and collectively, and learn as a group.

Case Context

The University

North Carolina A & T State University (NCAT) is located in the Piedmont Triad region of the state; the campus includes a 600-acre university farm. Founded as an HBCU in 1891 as a land grant institution, the university maintains a strong civil rights legacy characterized by the Greensboro Four who staged lunch counter sit-ins to protest Jim Crow racial segregation in the south. In 2014, NCAT ranked first nationwide in enrollment among all HBCUs (+11000/1500 graduate), subsequently 87% of the student enrollment is African American. NCAT is active in research with a Carnegie "doctoral/research university" classification and state university system ranking of third in sponsored research funding. The University's mission prioritizes "preeminence in STEM", including strategic plan goals:

(i)   Achieve Excellence in academic and operational efficiency and effectiveness; and
(ii)   Foster a more diverse and inclusive campus community by promoting cultural awareness, collegiality, and by cultivating respect for diverse people and cultures (NCAT, 2011).

The Graduate School and Division of Human Resources

The strategic plan calls for ambitious increases in the graduate enrollment over a ten-year period. The University's seven academic units offer 29 master degree programs, 9 doctoral degree programs, and several graduate certificates—all under the auspices of the Graduate School. All graduate education policy and governance matters are centrally overseen by the Graduate School, including admission and enrollment functions coordinated by the office's five full-time "Student Transition and Retention (STAR) Associates" and STAR director.

To achieve goals set forth in the strategic plan, the Division of Human Resources (DHR) developed university staff development objectives based on organizational transformation as a product of organizational capabilities (structure) and emotional intelligence (process) for sustainable change. As noted above, similar to the learning and cultural environments found at other HBCUs, NCAT employs African American and non-African faculty and staff, though African American faculty and senior administrators are well represented in staff leadership throughout and across the institution. DHR leveraged emotional intelligence as the overarching framework for many of the professional development workshops and training sessions based on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management key competencies to facilitate the shift from a transactional to a transformational organization.

Communities of Practice Measures

Boundaries in GEM positions

Wenger (1998) maintained that CoPs shape their own boundaries," engage in a "constellation of practices," and arise, evolve, and dissolve based on their own learning (p. 241). Structurally, there were two distinct functional areas with front line professional staff: graduate admission and graduate enrollment services. Operations within the Graduate School lacked horizontal connections with little operational cross-functionality between admission and enrollment staff; consequently operations were inefficient. The university's strategic goals prioritized new goals, and the need for different skills among the front-line staff became apparent, particularly in the areas of thinking analytically to problem solving in servicing clients' needs.

The graduate dean proposed and gained approval for a new organizational form inspired by momentum-gaining enrollment management shifts among leading doctoral institutions. The new organizational form featured flat reporting lines more responsive to the decentralized, departmental-focused research university structure. A nationwide search was undertaken shortly thereafter to hire of a full-time director to both supervise the enrollment staff and provide direction in GEM strategy and oversight to operations.

Position descriptions for the previous admission and enrollment jobs were different for staff at the same level. Knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) are commonly referenced elements of position descriptions in higher education. Job requirements reflect KSAs needed for an adult to be effective in carrying out responsibilities for the position (Galbraith, Sisco & Guglielmino, 2001). To attain the desired goals for capable staff, the new organizational form required new responsibilities and skills. In particular, staff needed emotional intelligence: problem solving skills, patience, and motivation to work within high levels of ambiguity. In addition, staff needed to be comfortable working in fast-paced environments and a willingness to learn parts of the business that were not in the previous job description. Part of the new director's responsibilities upon hire was to collaborate with the human resources office in overhauling the staff job descriptions to meet the business needs of the organization.

The new form now requires staff, called "STAR Associates," to work across administrative and service area functional lines located across units distributed across campus, including enrollment management offices (eg. Registrar, Financial Aid, Treasurer, etc.) as well as academic departments. Each academic unit is associated with a single "STAR Associate." The STAR Associate has responsibility for coordinating all admission and enrollment matters for students and faculty in that unit. The STAR Associate's responsibilities and day-to-day work entail two key areas: coordinating admissions and tracking degree requirements to award diplomas. Technology-based electronic tools and systems that required significant cross training within the staff support each of these functions. Students now have a single person to assist them with any graduate matter in their graduate career at the institution, admission through graduation. Staff development interventions, which harmonized and standardized routine processing practices in the office, include the use of Cloud spreadsheets to track processing activities. Regular staff meetings also provided the director opportunities to meet collectively to clarify what is expected in work performance. Individual one-on-one meetings with each staff member allowed further feedback and clarification for learning to do both phases of the new job responsibilities in admission and enrollment.

Constellations of CoP

Wegner (1998) indicated that CoP might become so focused on their practice within the community, "they do not even have a sense that their competence, individual and communal, is valued, recognized, and managed as an [organizational] asset" (p. 257). To minimize the weakening effect of institutionalization of practices, he suggests communities of practice link to "constellations" with connections to the outside world. In fact, "part of the practice of the community is to negotiate its place in this nexus of constellations" (Wenger, 1998, p. 258). Consistent with the philosophy, staff attended two regional conferences over a two-year period. The association sponsoring these meetings is a collection of senior-level deans, and the content of the meetings often focuses on policy-level issues. In some instances, informal networking with other graduate institution staff led to opportunities to discuss diversity recruiting opportunities—particularly for undergraduates of color at larger PWIs who were interested in attending an HBCU, or for majority students interested in attending another institution within state. These types of meetings serve as de facto "retreats" when staff can be away from the office to discuss common-faced problems without the distractions of the day-to-day demands of office work. Through roundtable conversations with other graduate administrators, individual staff gains insights on how to resolve technical problems encountered in their work such as processing enrollment records on similar legacy databases. The individual staff member brings information back to the office and not only corrects a problem, but may also introduce innovative new methods to other colleagues. Moreover, this kind of information sharing standardizes practices (and elevates institutional performance) to align performance of the graduate school with state peers, and ultimately enhances the quality of graduate education.

Other statewide collections of professionals include international educators associations. These associations provided a one-day conference that two staff attended. In a two-year period following the conference, the Graduate School experienced a doubling in the number of international applications for admission to graduate studies. One staff promoted to the role of international admissions and credential reviewer based on personal interests in professional growth. To enhance staff capability in the review of foreign credentials, and to gain a wider perspective on the suitability of organizing its operations, two team members were sent to participate in a state-wide meeting of international admissions professionals. The meeting allowed individual staff to collaborate with other professionals on problem solving and to discuss strategies for processing foreign credential in international admission and review. Staff learned the new procedures, and the office adopted standards and best practices employed by graduate institutions with more experience in internal credential review.

GEM as a Learning Community

Wenger maintained that communities of practice function as learning communities when experience and identity inform the curriculum. Curriculum is an "itinerary of transformative experiences of participation" as opposed to pre-determined lists of training content to cover (Wenger, 1998, p. 271). CoPs both organize learning and provide the "contexts in which to manifest learning through an identity of participation" (Wenger, 1998, p. 271). The staff developed a new model for its staff meeting, the "Academy," and it became part of the collective identity for individuals in new positions. The staff members, not the director, often set the agenda. Early on, the Academy served as a peer, cross-training venue; the admission staff trained the enrollment staff and vice versa. Within a few weeks the training evolved from basic

"how to" to addressing exceptional problems that arose and seeking multiple opinions on how to address problems. After several months, the Academy moved to a web-mediated meeting where staff attended from their offices and used slide presentation, websites, and other PC-based applications in sharing information for training purposes. Occasionally, staff professionals from outside the graduate school were included to lead discussions requiring input from other enrollment management areas.

All staff attended several human resource-office facilitated workshops on managing interpersonal skills in the workplace. Emotional intelligence is related to team learning competencies and skills that influence hiring, retention, promotion, professional development, and teamwork (Goleman, 1998). Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to monitor one's own and others emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide thinking and actions (Mayer & Salovey, 1993, p. 433). Goleman (1998) determined that the significant factors in predicting outstanding performance in employees was related to how employees dealt with their own emotions and the emotions of others, as well as the behaviors they chose in reaction to those emotions. All team members attended each meeting simultaneously to better ensure shared understanding of the material presented, and better enable real-time discussions of the concepts presented as those concepts applied to the team's workplace interactions. One session focused on communication skills useful in conflict management. The sessions were led by a non-university consultant; the director attended the first the session, but did not attend the second to allow more freedom for staff to express their views without fear of supervisor judgment. Some staff were appreciative that the director attended the meetings, and that he would "make time" to invest in enhancing interpersonal relations among the team. The supervisor required that the staff develop action plans for enhancing conflict management skills in the annual performance evaluation to ensure there was follow-up and a feedback mechanism for learning.

The impact of the changes implemented is visible in the formal role created when admission and graduation audit responsibilities became part of the day-to-day responsibilities of each staff member. The organizational form for the Graduate School more likened a true enrollment management operation with major functions set up in an integrated, rather than stove-piped, design. The flatter and integrated organization brought more accountability among peers and greater transparency in operations which clients (students and academic departments) valued. In many cases, the opportunity for the STAR staff to share their professional and technical expertise with others helped increase staff morale. Such encouragement was important in encouraging staff to persist during prolonged periods of ambiguity and change. The learning community formed out of staff meetings and office interactions relied increasingly on staff assuming the role not only of learner, but also that of teacher. Yet these opportunities also meant staff sometime felt the "fishbowl" effect wherein they wanted to be exceptionally proficient in order to appear professional competent before peers and sometimes before the supervisor. Finally, exposure to the work of other graduate enrollment professionals in graduate schools at peer and aspirant institutions reinforced the need for continuous learning and improvement. As a result, the office culture transformed to one that seeks out rather than reacts to change. The on-going challenge remains in matching the organizational goals to those of the professional abilities and interests of the existing staff.

Discussion and Implications

The concept of CoP provided some useful ways of accounting for many phenomena considered, however Tierney's (1999) cultural integrity was a more useful concept for explaining

adult learning among graduate administrators as well as attainment of the norms and expectations espoused by graduate enrollment management. In the absence of research on GEM and HBCU's, cultural integrity provides a useful starting place to explain contradictions often (unfairly) associated with HBCU's in the current political environment. Others have pointed to the limitations of CoP as an explanatory framework for workplace learning, but have not adopted cultural perspectives to account for context (Boud & Middleton, 2003).

Cultural integrity takes account of cultural capital (Bordieu, 1986), linguistic and cultural competencies individuals inherit and learn, and habitus, a set of perceptions individuals have of their environment. Cultural integrity as an analytical framework for administrators of color gives those individuals the status of "social agents" who "produce the conditions for change and improvements in opportunity" (p. 85). From a programmatic standpoint, cultural integrity points to the importance of the localized context, the local definitions of identity, and creation of institutionalized capital within communities of practice. Based on the examination of higher education programs aiming to support academic success and foster culturally sensitive learning environments for students of color in higher education, the cultural integrity concept gives a framework for analyzing learning among postsecondary administrators of color. When minority administrators are able to affirm their own cultural identities, their chances for learning, growth, and success in the workplace increase.

CoP provides a helpful definition of a boundary that outlines a collective. The idea of recruiting "from within" by transitioning existing staff in front-line positions to the new positions needed for future organizational change sent a message to the staff that management values talent within the organization. In addition, management looked to existing staff to lead staff training for day-to-day operations, while teaching each other new strategies. This resulted in capitalizing on a rich bank of experience and institutional knowledge needed to solve problems involving complex issues that intersect with other units. Management indicated in this way that the backgrounds of the staff—many of whom are alumni with several years of work experience at the institution—have the skills, aptitudes, appreciation, patience, and love needed to undertake the work needed to achieve "inside-out" transformation of the institution. While professional standards and orientation to one's work may lend to looking outward to peers at larger research universities with more prestige, cultural integrity affirms excellence in how administrators of color conduct their work when they formally and informally identify with professional peers within their communities of practice.

CoP also provides a filter through which to focus on identity formation through social learning. Graduate School staff interacted with significant others in becoming socialized to GEM and adopting a professional identity. Cultural integrity affirms the professional identities of staff through interactions with other experienced graduate administrators and graduate students of color. Graduate administrators of color served as role models. In cases where more experienced GEM administrators are African American, alumni of the HBCU, or simply have proven administrative HBCU experience, encouraging signal to supervisees received and encouraging signal that they too can achieve professional growth. Of course, not all "old-timers" or more-experienced GEM professionals must be African American to produce legitimate peripheral participation for newcomer administrators at the HBCU. The goal here is to point out how cultural integrity/habitus may interact with context in shaping local identity formation in the case of one institution.

Administrators: GEM and HRD

In summary, three distinct strategies formed the basis for one model of graduate enrollment management at an HBCU. Obviously, this analysis cannot speak to everything there is to say about communities of practice. Moreover, practice is not always perfect: individual performance is not always excellent. Performance evaluations find staff weaknesses, disagreements result in communication breakdown among colleagues, customer service sometimes is not legendary. The point here is to acknowledge that a combination of professional expertise (GEM) as a standard, along with communities of practice as an organizing concept together provides a roadmap for pursuing learning in the workplace.

In the case of African American administrators, there remains more room for further investigation of their workplace learning as the US becomes a more pluralistic society. NCAT is only one HBCU, but this experience in the graduate school offers another perspective on how professional learning takes place in the absence of traditionally-documented challenges faced by administrators in predominantly white learning settings, which researchers have pointed out often include feelings of isolation as well as (white) assumptions of similarity that contribute to "miasma" and unwelcoming educational environments (Livers & Caver, 2003). The findings from this investigation point to the benefits found in workplace learning when African American managers are participants in communities of practice with other managers in a culturally sensitive environment. Not surprisingly then, the benefits that Black students and faculty experience in the context of the HBCU are also found with the administrative staff. The racial context of the institution in this study is not unlike other HBCUs in that graduate education exists under-resourced. Software systems purchased, but only with limited "out of the box" capabilities which leave managers strained to patch together manual work-around administrative processes not needed at better-funded peer institutions in the state.

HBCUs have a tradition of institutional or presidential leadership symbolic of charismatic male ministry leadership stemming from cultural influences of the Black Church (Suggs, 2014). Wherein churches are community resources that have historically contributed to social capital formation within the African American community, human resource interventions foster richer, more complex interpersonal relations among peer staff, strengthen communication networks, and deepen coping resources individuals need to undertake and sustain themselves in the midst of change. In addition, when the organization chooses to empower middle managers to be change agents from within, and not exclusively empower senior managers for mandated top-down change to subordinates, staff may interpret this investment in them to mean the organization is more inclusive. For these middle managers all levels and all individuals of the institution's "family" matter.

This investigation contributes to a growing body of research human resource development (HRD) scholars and practitioners have pursued for some time regarding the place emotions play in organizational development. As has been pointed out, human resource practitioners at one HBCU have been concerned with managing emotions in staff development and view emotional intelligence as a key element of organizational transformation. While EI relates to one's own emotional and intellectual growth, acting out on that ability is emotion work, active attempts to influence emotions in others. Research on emotion work in non- profit organizations indicates demographic characteristics of staff reveal subcultures among communities of practice within larger organizations, and these subcultures in turn have issues and events that generate emotion work actions (Callahan, 2000). Some communities of practice emphasize communication while others focus on managing emotion work around workplace discrimination issues. Many at the HBCU and in the larger African American community view

graduate education as a symbol of both success and hope in the face of historical and contemporary injustice for Blacks in American society. HRD managers may emphasize EI and emotion work as cornerstones for leadership development efforts in producing future generations of postsecondary leaders who will continue a legacy of hope and inspiration associated with higher education and opportunity in American society.

Conclusion

HBCUs face the on-going challenge of mission paradox, particularly doctoral research HBCUs committed to providing access to higher education and producing new knowledge through research activities. The institutional mission and learning context present opportunities to network and learn from HBCU administrators in a research university setting that presents its own challenges and opportunities. Scholarship on student achievement and faculty productivity will remain critical to understanding those factors that leverage high performance in student achievement and faculty productivity. The impact that administrators play in helping the HBCU charts its course to institutional success relies on deeper understanding of the campus context and institutional culture. To be sure, CoP as an analytical framework provides researchers insight on the dynamics of inter-administrator relations in organizational behavior at the HBCU. CoP in this study provides insight on how organizational culture, policies and practices, contributed positively to the professionalization of African American administrators at the HBCU. Such research fills an important gap in the HBCU literature, which often overlooks middle managers. African American administrators at HBCUs liken their peers at other graduate institutions who are engaged in developing expertise in graduate enrollment management. However, the professional development of HBCU administrators is multi-faceted and draws on a combination of workplace learning strategies grounded in the institutional context.

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