

Chapter 9

The Academic Workplace: HRD's Potential for Creating and Maintaining a Positive Organizational Culture and Climate during Organizational Change

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ABSTRACT

This manuscript will consider higher education institutions as workplaces, and it will explore the relationships between the shifting landscape of higher education, the corresponding organizational changes that are identified and implemented by college and university leaders in response to those shifts, and workplace culture and climate. Its purpose is to offer a typology of HRD interventions that respond to organizational needs for skill building and education in order to equip individuals and organizations to thrive during periods of significant change. The context for this chapter is mostly through a U.S. based lens, although it is likely that several concepts and suggestions might have transnational relevance.

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The significant shifts occurring in the higher education environment and the corresponding structural changes with which individual colleges and universities respond, can lead to intra-organizational challenges of employee morale, civility, climate, culture and engagement. A decade ago, Summerville (2005) sounded the call that higher education is “in the midst of a revolution, not a process of slow evolution” (p. 293). The revolution involves questions and debates around

the meaning and purpose of higher education; financial pressures on colleges and universities due to declining state and federal funding, changing student demographics, and competition among institutions for resources and for students (Summerville). The purpose of this chapter is to propose a framework that offers a way to conceptualize the relationships between the macro environment of higher education and the micro environment of a college or university workplace. College and universities that are faced with the necessity of restructuring have distinct characteristics, chal-

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lenges, and opportunities. Watkins (2005) noted that a university presents “the most difficult change context because of a number of important features of higher education institutions” (p. 414). The purpose of the chapter is to, after examining the intertwined environments (the landscape of higher education as the macro environment, which impacts a college or university workplace, which is the micro environment), propose a typology. The typology offers a set of HRD interventions that can facilitate a successful, positive, and effective workplace environment that equips employees (faculty, staff, and administrators) to successfully negotiate organizational change.

The organization of this chapter is as follows. After offering a macro level examination of some of the larger trends and debates in higher education, it will then transition to a micro level discussion and consider how these broad trends impact a college or university and in particular, how employees might be affected by those changes. The proposed typology of the features explicates the particular dimensions of intra-organizational considerations for positive and effective organizational change, in order to identify and describe specific ways that HRD practitioners can contribute to overall organizational effectiveness in a turbulent environment. This context for this chapter is the United States. It will consider how these changes in the larger environment impact those who are employed in the higher education sector. This includes faculty, staff, and administrators. It will explore constructs that when taken together, create a composite model of suggestions for HRD practice in higher educational settings. The model consists of trust, civility and collegiality, ethics and integrity, positive organizational behavior, and effective leadership. The proposed HRD model can take each of these components as a separate initiative and then when taken together, comprise the spectrum of HRD activities to strengthen an organization. Directions for future HRD research will accompany these directions for practice.

DESIGN/METHODOLOGY/ APPROACH

The approach that this manuscript uses is a conceptual one, one in which I identified literature that, as Callahan (2010) suggested, supports and informs the premise of the manuscript. A conceptual framework “makes connections between multiple bodies of literature and knowledge bases to make claims toward a particular argument” (p. 302). My investigation includes some of the literature of organizational change, and related topics such as changes in higher education; workplace civility, trust, and collegiality; leadership, and positive organizational studies. Drawing upon literature from higher education, human resource development, management, organizational studies and psychology, the ideas and suggestions set forth here represent a composite of the ways in which HRD practice can facilitate organizational change in higher educational institutions.

THE CHANGING AND CONTESTED ENVIRONMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION: THE MACRO ENVIRONMENT

Higher education is experiencing significant shifts that are the result of demographics, technology, globalization, and policy. There are deeply contested perspectives regarding the larger institutional and global forces, or more specifically, the narrative about larger institutions and global forces, that are bearing down directly upon colleges and universities, and creating conditions where higher education administrators feel the need to initiate large scale changes. Vaira (2004) explained that the task environment of higher education (across the world) has shifted significantly in the last 20 years as a result of a meta-myth that is “used at political, economic, cultural and even everyday-life to make sense of the occurring social transformation and to undertake actions in accordance with it”

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