

Chapter 20

The Cost of Success for BRMI Leaders

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ABSTRACT

Black, racialized minorities, and Indigenous leaders (BrmI) in higher education are part of an elite group of educators. Less than 5% of full professors are Black and Hispanic, and it is typically from this pool that academic leaders (e.g., Provost, Dean) are selected. This research aims to understand one potential reason for lack of ascension into positions of power for academic leaders of color: the cost of that success. This study hypothesizes that academic BrmI leaders consider the interpersonal and intrapersonal time-based cost of their career success to be greater than their white counterparts. It also anticipates the support that BrmI academic leaders accumulate—social, capital, and institutional support—may be perceived to lessen that overall cost. Over 100 tenured-track BrmI leaders in higher education were surveyed to evaluate their perception of the cost of success, and 26 completed the survey. The results can assist in encouraging interventions to these costs to increase the number of BrmI leadership roles in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.

—Helen Keller

Success reflects the accomplishment of a goal or purpose. Leaders are often considered pillars of professional success given the tournament-style competition to achieve promotions at work (Connelly et al., 2014). That said, “winning” this competition to transcend into a leadership position is a costly pursuit as cognitive and emotional resources are exhausted to obtain and retain a level of success (Yukl, 2012). For example, leadership in the corporate space has its own challenges, including things such as being

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-2314-1.ch020

beholden to a Board of Directors, as well as meeting the demands of the clients, employees, and organizational operations. These demands are magnified for leaders in higher education, where leadership can be particularly personally costly due to the human capital demands and expectations, such as responsibilities for student learning outcomes relative to shifting job market demands, coordinating complex curricula, and management and evaluation of a highly specialized, empowered personnel, such as faculty (O*NET, n.d.). In addition to the financial demands in the business of higher education, there is also great pressure on leaders to create and deliver a customized educational product that meets the needs of the consumer in a context where consumers are highly attuned to return on investment (Blaschke et al., 2014).

Given the intricacies of these demands, many have said that there is a cost to successful accession into and through leadership roles in a professional space (Baez, 2000). When you intersect race and professional leadership, there are new layers of demands that BrmI in leadership positions must bear, especially in a context where, in large part, organizations are playing catch-up with respect to creating progressive, inclusive policies to combat racism (Trenerry & Paradies, 2012), and where effective strategies to counteract bias and restriction of economic opportunities for BrmI are hard to come by (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). More pointedly, the cost of ascending to leadership positions for BrmI may be greater than for white counterparts, considering the adage that a Black person must work “twice as hard for half as much” (DeSante, 2013) (This adage is often shared by Black parents to their children.) Research evidence offers some initial support for this idea: research from a recent National Bureau of Economic research shows that Black employees received laser-like surveillance from supervisors, which negatively impacted performance reviews and wages, which, over time lead to larger racial gaps in the workforce (Cavounidis & Lang, 2015).

Applying an evidence-based lens to the “twice as hard for half as much” adage within the context of higher education leadership, this research study will first establish if the time-based cost of professional success for BrmI leaders in higher education is, in fact, perceived to be greater when compared to white counterparts. For instance, this research study will examine if the additional effort required of a BrmI, who strove to attain a top academic leadership position may come at the sacrifice of time spent on their interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships (Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group, 2017), such as family time, health, community investment, and the like. A second aim of this research is to evaluate attributes that predict the relative time-based costs of success for BrmI leaders in higher education. Stress occurs when you overtax personal resources, and that overtaxing of resources is a direct personal cost. Conservation of Resources Theory suggests that the costliness of leadership ascension for BrmI may be mitigated by having enough resources to devote to the mobility’s challenges (Hobfoll, 1989). Specifically, social support (Cohen & Wills, 1985), capital support, and institutional support are three forms of resources that may mitigate that costliness by replenishing a BrmI’s resource coffers. *Social support* reflects interpersonal support, such as mental, spiritual or sponsor/mentor support. *Capital support* reflects the political skill that a BrmI leader may have deployed to navigate their upward leadership trajectory more efficiently. Finally *institutional support* reflects the climate of inclusion that a BrmI worked in during their ascendancy, and includes the dimensions of equitable employment practices, integration of differences and inclusion in decision-making. In examining each of these forms of support, this research will examine the extent to which BrmI leaders in higher education perceive that the time-based cost of their career to their intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships was less, equal, or more costly when directly compared to their white counterparts, relative to the capital they accumulated. Because of extensive research on the stigma and discrimination costs incurred by the BrmI (Mekawi et

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