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Hindsight is 20/20 with “Global Vision” – Case Two Analysis

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Case Studies in Educational Leadership

Summer 2011

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Facts

UMOH in Halesburg, Missouri, is a university with a bold initiative to rank first in the US News & World Report university rankings for international diversity. While admirable, this initiative is causing tensions affecting both the campus and the community. The campus can only house approximately 42% of their undergrads. International students from 80 different countries comprise 10% of the student body. Chinese students are a recent and significant addition to this population and they, as well as other Asian nationalities, have been feeling discriminated against by the community housing authorities and may be threatening a class-action suit against them.

Savvy business woman, Alesandra Cox-Steinberg, is a new player in the Halesburg rental real estate industry and is hungry to increase her market share in this diverse college town. She has capitalized on the new immigrant student population eager to leave university housing for a less restrictive alternative and has not only captured those renters (90% leave campus); she has also employed them, creating an inclusive workplace in this community.

North campus is a mixed-use area where clashes between international renters and locals have been increasing. Mayor Hank Samson and City Bureau Chief of Housing and Safety Jim Hammers are fielding complaints from the community and the realtors who are having trouble with the “Asian” students’ behavior.

Meanwhile, academic advisor Linda Dixon supports these students through the university’s International Student Affairs (ISA) office where recruitment is growing. However, she observes that the Chinese students are independent and don’t seek support from the ISA or Residential Facilities Office (RFO) which makes it difficult to address their special needs or

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acclimate them to life on an American campus. Recently, her friend Michael Overton from the RFO shared that during a recent fire department audit it was discovered that many Chinese students are switching rooms without permission or knowledge of the RFO which is a safety concern. Dixon's Director, Anders Noordsen, is unaware of these problems as he has been traveling frequently to China where the school is enjoying a rise in recognition and popularity. This is making President Dr. Brady and Dean of International Programs, Dr. Lindsey Lu, very happy as it is supporting the university's Global Vision for a Global Century Campaign.

Dr. Denise Jackson, university Vice-President of Government Affairs, also chairs the City and Campus Committee (CCC). She has been asked by the Mayor to add the international student rental issue to the next meeting's agenda and also asked by the President, via Dr. Lu, to "tell our neighbors that the world has come to Halesburg."

Leadership Issues and Tensions

First, there are two pivotal leaders that can affect this case and neither one is the President. Dr. Brady does have a role in resolving the conflicts, however, his seems a more "out on the balcony" approach. Whereas I believe both Mayor Samson and Dr. Jackson are in positions of most direct influence in this case. Mayor Samson has the community and its business leaders to appease as well as the responsibility for communicating with the university on behalf of these constituents to promote neighborliness. Dr. Jackson has the best interest of the university in mind when she coordinates the CCC and yet also has to be mindful of the community in which the university resides. However, acting independently, they lack a shared vision of how to integrate the international students into the community. Working together they

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can identify tactics that will help resolve the issues from both perspectives. They can become what Bugay (2001) describes as *transactional leaders*.

Second, Linda Dixon has the burden of serving the desires of her leaders, as in more recruitment, against the ethical responsibility of supporting the needs of her international students. She is feeling the tension between staff and administration when she shields her supervisor from the problems these students are facing. Johnson (1999) notes “leaders often face ethical questions related to honesty and the control of information,” (p. 7) and that “according to Taoist, the leader must answer these questions based on intuition, not on a formal code of ethics,” (p.8).

Last, the Asian student body is feeling discriminated against by both the university and the community at large. This is likely due to both parties needing to broaden their cultural awareness. In any case, it will be necessary for all involved to actively listen to and resolve the students’ concerns to try to head off legal action.

Next Steps

Both Mayor Samson and Dr. Jackson are well-respected leaders in their own organizations. They also seem to have established credibility with each other which leads to establishing trust. Starting there, the two need to use the CCC to begin a campaign to embrace diversity within the two communities and create a shared vision of how that would look. This shared vision might emerge if they used the communitarian model of responsive communities as outlined in Johnson’s (1999) *Emerging Perspectives in Leadership Ethic*. They would do well

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since “communitarians advocate acting at the local level whenever possible,” (p.10). Some elements of the communitarian view that address the dynamic here include:

Wholeness Incorporating Diversity: “The existence of community requires some vision of a common good or purpose. Yet, focus on wholeness should not obscure the fact that diverse groups within the system may have competing interests,” (p. 9). By having both leaders work together they would be able to represent competing interests.

Caring, Trust and Teamwork: “Healthy communities respect individual differences and foster cooperation and connection. Members feel both a sense of belonging and responsibility. Fostering this atmosphere requires recognizing the rights of minorities, effective conflict resolution, and working together on shared tasks,” (p. 9). However working together doesn’t necessarily mean a team needs to be created. For instance, perhaps Samson and Jackson could engage the past mayor, who is also a faculty member in urban planning, and the city bureau chief of housing and safety, and Cox-Steinberg to co-lead a “working group” to focus on housing tensions. Lencioni (2003) in *The Trouble with Teamwork* refers to a working group as “a group of executives who agree to work independently with few expectations for collaboration,” (p. 2). They do this in order to focus on the goal rather than the distractions team work can represent.

For Dixon, she could continue to avoid conflict and push the problems she has discovered under the rug. But as Licioni (2003) explains, “those unresolved issues transform into uglier and more personal discord when executives grow frustrated at what they perceive to be repeated problems,” (p. 3). Instead, she should engage her director, Anders Noordsen, to reveal what she has learned about the housing issues with the Asian students. Being Asian himself, Noordsen may be able to assist in preparing the international students for the expectations of American

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communities before they get here and encourage them to use the support of the ISA staff to resolve problems.

Also, once Noordsen is aware of the cultural tensions, he might engage his boss, the Dean of International Programs, Lindsey Lu, in ways they can proactively stop the problems before they arise by considering the development needs of staff as Kegan's adult development model explains, "to function effectively in the international arena," (p. 6). They should start with the resident hall staff who supervise students' living environment and the ISA office staff who function to support their success in all aspects of their university experience. As Offerman (1997) suggests, "what is needed is a radical reassessment of how to change organizations to make them more hospitable to the variety of individuals who populate them," (p.2).

One way they can accomplish this is through cultural diversity training. Johnson (1999) reflects that according to the Tao "true knowledge comes, not from reason or language, but through direct experience with reality," (p. 2). This means that the training must involve not just the staff in made-up scenarios, but involving the students in which they are engaging. Taken one step further, after some key student leaders have been through the training, each unique cultural group could form "self-managed teams" as explained by Wheatley (1997). The cohort of Chinese students due to their independent nature would do well in this arrangement.

In conclusion, in each of the contexts above there needs to be an effort to empower the players – whether leaders or followers -- to creatively resolve their issues and build empathy towards one another. Whether it is the group work to be done by the CCC, the ethical dilemma to be solved by Dixon or the cultural educational development of the university staff and students, as Vaill (1997) explains in *The learning Challenges of Leadership*, "empowerment cannot be the

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learning process of a single person; it is a mutual learning process of leader learning about followers and followers learning about leaders,” (p.5).

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