
7-23-2018

Leadership from the Middle Pays It Forward: An Academic Administrator of Color's Career Development Narrative in Postsecondary Education

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Recommended APA Citation

Campbell, C. (2018). Leadership from the Middle Pays It Forward: An Academic Administrator of Color's Career Development Narrative in Postsecondary Education. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(7), 1702-1716. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2018.3361>

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Abstract

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Keywords

Leadership, Higher Education, Academic Administration, Career Development, Personal Narrative, African American

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Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Drs. Karri Holley, Edelma Huntley, and Sweeney Windchief for their help on earlier drafts of this manuscript.

Leadership from the Middle Pays It Forward: An Academic Administrator of Color’s Career Development Narrative in Postsecondary Education

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The ongoing underrepresentation of administrators of color in higher education suggests that traditional career pathways make racial equities in administrative leadership elusive. This personal narrative explores middle-manager educational and career experiences—some often-overlooked aspects of higher education administration. Using leadership and career development theories, I draw on qualitative approaches to examine my own career journey as one academic affairs administrator of color who has experienced a history of career change, lay-off, and non-traditional moves within and across diverse institutions. Through an inductive approach for analyzing data in my career narrative, emergent themes incorporate data references “calling,” citizenship, and cultural change in academic affairs administration. The analysis of this study has implications for interventions in succession planning and career development for administrators which would result in increased racial equity along the pathways toward academic leadership. Keywords: Leadership, Higher Education, Academic Administration, Career Development, Personal Narrative, African American

Introduction

As postsecondary institutions organize themselves for high performance in the global marketplace, universities compete to attract and retain the best administrative talent available. At the same time, the changing nature of the workplace, evolving employer/employee contract, expanded racial/ethnic representation in society, and increased globalization of work through technology and communications innovation have all led scholars to point to the need for research that incorporates race in career development (Alfred, 2001; Brooks & Cluris, 2007). In particular, Alfred postulated, “the study of career development . . . must incorporate the phenomena of race, identity, and culture to examine how they influence the developing career” (p. 112).

Attaining and maintaining full and representative racial inclusiveness remains elusive among postsecondary leaders—including executives in the “c-suite” such as chancellors, provosts, and vice presidents. The percentage of presidents of color¹ decreased a full percentage point between 2001 and 2006 to 12.6% percent, while only seven percent of chief academic officers during the same period were leaders of color, further indicating continued challenges for increasing the number of presidents of color (Cook, 2012; Miller & Bisbee, 2006). Overall, approximately 18 percent of executive administrative and managerial staff were racial or ethnic minorities in 2007, underscoring the reality that leaders of color are over-represented at the mid-level ranks (Snyder & Dillow, 2010). The persistent underrepresentation of faculty of color also presents challenges for advancing racial equity in academic leadership. African

¹ “...of color” Refers to individuals identifying racially and/or ethnically as Black/African American, Latino/Hispanic, and Native American, who are historically underrepresented in higher education.

American and Latino faculty at US postsecondary institutions have been employed at levels under 10% combined, even though those groups make up more than a quarter of the general population and higher education enrollments (Taylor, Apprey, Hill, McGrann, & Wang, 2010; Tierney, Campbell, & Sanchez, 2004).

The normative pathway for an academic administrative career is faculty, department chair, dean, provost, and president (Cohen & March, 1974). Jackson (2003, 2004) noted that little or no formal preparation exists for academic leadership among mid-level academic administrators and suggested further education including management, budgeting, and personnel supervision to further role development. Beyond the traditional movement up the organizational ladder, however, succession planning in higher education historically has been almost non-existent with future leaders installed just prior to entering office (Bisbee & Miller, 2006). The Jackson and Daniels (2007) study of Black academic leaders found that when compared to all races, African American administrators were largely from the faculty ranks; spent comparatively less time on research; worked at non-research-oriented institutions; and were overrepresented in certain disciplines or “caring fields,” including home economics, education, and social sciences.

Significance of Study

In contrast to normative pathways, protean career paths constitute non-traditional careers, are self-directed, include changes in employers, include lateral versus vertical moves, and include meaningful work that integrates with other life commitments (Reitman & Schneer, 2008). Although traditional, organization-directed careers still influence career development, attention to protean, subjective careers is increasing. Two developments evidence this shift. First, the increasing presence of graduate programs and the professionals produced in higher education administration is indicative of the evolving nature of the postsecondary workplace over the last several decades. Second, scholars have pointed to the importance of “T-shaped professionals”: managers with in-depth knowledge of a specific discipline combined with the ability to collaborate across multiple functions for organizational excellence in the knowledge economy (Hansen & Von Oetinger, 2001). Expanding the pool of leaders of color depends on greater understanding of career decision-making as well as its relationship to achieving the goals for creating a more pluralistic, representative leadership in higher education.

Because racial equity in academic administration persists, innovative approaches for the development of future academic administrators is in need of postsecondary professionals: faculty and administrators. One African American graduate school dean at a major research university made an enduring observation after working there for several years:

It is part of the accepted belief system in most major universities that the qualities needed to be an effective [academic] administrator can be learned if one has demonstrated one’s ability to perform the primary research and teaching functions of the university . . . [but] it is clear that the skills to be honed are not the same as those of the teacher and researcher and are rarely related to any specific discipline. (Solomon, 1999, p. 141)

This study brings attention to the making of the academic administrator via examination of the middle manager. The middle manager often gets overlooked in the literature, nonetheless, expanded understanding of the administrative experiences, knowledge, and skills used to qualify individuals for middle and upper administrators widens the prospect pool from which postsecondary administrators emerge. Increasing racial representation in leadership of

postsecondary institutions will become more important in the face of shifting campus contexts and external environments.

Literature Review

In what follows, I review the extant literature on career development and leadership concepts which are relevant to career and professional development for persons of color in academic administration. First, I outline components of social cognitive career theory (SCCT) and life designing that provide a lens through which to view career development from an individual perspective. Next, I offer multi-frame leadership as one way to understand organizational behaviors for academic administrators in postsecondary education. I then outline a model incorporating the intersection of both career development and leadership for academic administrators of color.

Theoretical Framework: Career Development and Multi-frame Leadership

SCCT and life designing. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) depicts how learning and resultant academic and career-related behavior occur through interactions between individuals and their environment (Lent & Brown, 2006, 2008; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). A central tenet of SCCT posits that academic and career-related interests, goals, and choices develop in part from relevant self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations (Byars-Winston, Estrada, Howard, Davis, & Zalapa, 2010). Self-efficacy, a key variable in Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, refers to people's beliefs in their ability to perform specific behaviors or courses of action. Career decision self-efficacy refers to the beliefs an individual maintains with respect to his ability to successfully complete tasks required in making career decisions (Taylor & Betz, 1983). The Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale (CDSSES) and its short form (CDSSES-SF) include five specific career choice competencies: self-appraisal, occupational information gathering, goal selection, planning, and problem solving. The intent of the instrument is to reveal perceived difficulties in completing certain career decision tasks and to develop interventions to enhance confidence and skills (Peterson & del Mas, 1998; Taylor & Betz, 1983). Existing research on the five-factor structure is inconclusive and includes problems in labelling of the factors, sampling selection, and other problems that complicate distinguishing one factor from another in decision-making (see literature review in Jin, Ye, & Watkins, 2012).

SCCT offers a potentially useful integrative theoretical base from which to understand the underrepresentation of persons of color in academic administration based on testable hypotheses regarding race and contextual supports and barriers in career behavior (Lent, Lopez, Lopez, & Sheu, 2008). Miller et al. (2015) noted that the majority of SCCT research lacks the use of qualitative methods to capture individuals' perspectives on her or his career adjustment. Researchers identified internal interventions as the most important factor in increasing racial diversity in engineering majors using content analysis on responses to open-ended questions about college major selection and enrollment challenges faced by engineering students (Miller et al., 2015).

Life designing (Savickas, 2012) is a career intervention model that complements SCCT and the psychology of career construction through prioritizing self and identity in career development. Identity in career constructivist perspectives involves how people think of themselves in relation to social roles. Self does not exist a priori, but self is an outcome of the individual constructing the self. The individual "builds a subjective career: . . . a story about his or her working life" (p. 14).

Savickas (2012) outlined the life design paradigm to include construction of career through small stories, deconstruction of those stories, reconstruction into an identity narrative or life portrait, and co-construction of intention that leads to action in the real world. Construction involves clients telling counselors their career experiences as chronological, small stories or “tools for building identities and careers out of complex social interactions” (p. 15). Deconstruction involves expelling confining assumptions or ideological biases that may inhibit meaning-making for the client. Reconstruction is the assembly of the small stories into a grand story—an identity narrative that includes the “occupational plot” and “character arc,” the client’s journey to certain careers goals, and an overarching theme that portrays how the client overcame career setbacks. Action involves the client moving forward with a career transition having gained more self-making capabilities from the preceding self-construction steps. Such purposeful action resolves career tension.

Multi-frame leadership theory. Higher education scholars have pointed to multi-frame leadership for some time to explain administrator effectiveness (Birnbaum, 1989; Bolman & Deal, 2013). The idea of a frame enables leaders to give greater attention to some aspects of organizational behaviors over others. In the multi-frame view, leaders select the style of leadership to use depending on a combination of factors including organizational culture, structure, human behavior, and power available to the administrator. Three leadership frames are germane to studying academic administrator career development: authentic leadership, citizen leadership, and transformative leadership.

Authentic leadership has emerged in the literature on leadership theory in explaining the relationship between leaders and followers and notes leader identification via self-reflection on identity, emotions, and motives. Sharing those values and common goals with followers in turn legitimizes the leader’s authority to lead (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005). In addition to external and internal factors that foster motivation to lead, a key cultural force in authentic leadership is a calling or a recognition and embracing of personal gifts, talents, and strengths to contribute to the good of humanity (based on self-reflection and external validation; Longman, Dahlvig, Wikkerink, Cunningham, & O’Connor, 2011). Scholars have noted, “As a motivator, awareness of one’s gifts and calling is known to promote self-efficacy and provide resilience in overcoming barriers to pursuing higher education leadership” (Longman et al., 2011, p. 257).

The citizen leadership frame views organizational life with a concern for the institutional culture. The citizen approach to leadership highlights the idea of academic deans balancing the administrator and academic roles and responsibilities with faculty colleagues in the home department, noted as *par e paribus*, or first among equals by higher education scholars (Birnbaum, 1989). Campbell (2003) noted the citizen leader is a “town-hall leader” and the leadership frame as “collegial and relational” in describing administrative skills among faculty senate leaders in research universities (p. 956). Administrators engaged in professional association activities exhibit citizen behaviors in their relational interactions with other professionals outside of their institution to advance best practices in the field.

Transformational leadership in higher education refers to the optimal administrator approach for promoting large-scale, long-term organizational and cultural changes associated with an institution’s “diversity agenda” or institution-wide plan for implementing recommendations for change toward a more inclusive, racially-diverse organization (Adserias, Charleston, & Jackson, 2017). Similarly, transformational change is the administrative paradigm incorporating organizational practices and leadership styles aimed at organizational culture change in “response to shifts in the external environment” (p. 317). Following an extensive review of the literature related to enhancing racial representation in higher education, Adserias, Charleston, and Jackson (2017) concluded that leaders opt for the transformational leadership approach but do so based on context to promote diversity agendas. However,

research on leaders other than presidents and chief diversity officers requires more attention. For example, Jackson's (2004) study on equity hiring of African American academic administrators found overall declines in the representation of African American administrators across all institution types—including four-year public institutions that enroll the highest numbers of Black undergraduate and graduate students.

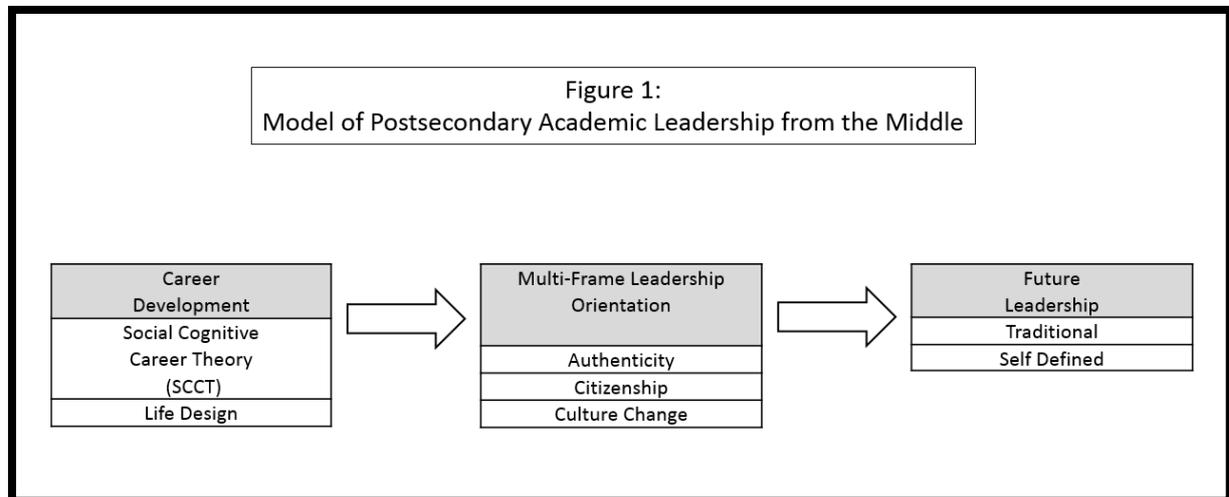


Figure 1.

This figure conceptualizes relationships among career development and leadership models for middle administrators in postsecondary academic affairs. The forgoing review of literature informs the following research questions to guide the current investigation:

1. How do higher education experiences shape career decisions to enter and persist in the academic administration for one African American?
2. How does one African American academic administrator make sense of career transitions and their contributions to his career development?
3. How do professional experiences contribute to expanding the pool of persons of color for academic administration leadership?

Individual-focused construction of protean careers for Black academic administrators contrasts with research approaches that emphasize sequences of jobs. The purpose of this study was to examine career development and leadership as contributing factors in the preparation of an academic administrator of color. I focused on the middle manager because such a position often serves as a stepping stone to future leadership, yet the position remains understudied.

Method

This section discusses the strengths of an appropriate research perspective and personal narrative and concludes by outlining the important data analysis considerations in the research effort. Given the scant literature on how Black academic administrator career development unfolds from the individual's perspective, a qualitative approach is appropriate. This study uses a narrative approach recounting career experiences to reveal other possibilities of meaning found in the relevant literature.

Personal narrative. Personal narrative allows a participant-researcher to document experiences for inclusion as analytical data. Narrative accounts represent the data because they

offer a powerful qualitative research strategy as they permit life-like accounts focused on “the lived experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, and Adler (2005) argue that the leader’s narrative is an important source of information that can inspire followers and potential followers. Telling the biography is itself an important leadership behavior. The narrative approach to the study of a leader’s life-story is a “meaning-making system that makes sense out of the chaotic mass of perceptions and experiences of life” (p. 17). In essence interpretative, narrative emphasizes meaning more than the strict re-telling of facts. Narrators “see themselves as telling the truth by legitimately selecting and emphasizing certain events and participants” (p. 17) to explain and justify one’s identity.

Narrative accounts also provide order and logic to leader experiences. Holley and Colyar (2012) consider plot and point of view to be key narrative components. Plot embodies the logic of a personal story organized in such a way as to give meaning to the reader. Chronology becomes important in plot such that the story unfolds over a specific period time. Point of view relates to the author’s relationship to the story; the first-person point of view gives readers a “sense of involvement . . . to tell a story from the inside with the use of the I pronoun” (p. 116). Citing research narratives, including those of underrepresented minorities’ experiences in higher education, they note that plot organization prioritizes process rather than product for the reader. Emotions of the subject are equally important as the resulting experience.

Narrative researcher. I sought to make sense of my career path having held the titles of director, assistant dean (twice), and associate dean. I moved across these positions into, out of, and back into, academic affairs over ten years at three institutions. I selected several middle manager experiences in postsecondary academic administration on which I had reflected consistently for classroom instruction while adjunct teaching adult education administration at the graduate level between 2015-2017. Many of the experiences fit within multi-frame leadership, and I often used the stories to illustrate materials used in the course text by Bolman and Deal (2013). Also, in those three years of teaching, my institution selected me to participate in a campus-based executive leadership program consisting of “up-and-comers” who may serve as future administrative leaders. The discussions with other middle managers, program readings, and assignments collectively re-enforced the relevance of administrative experiences I selected as teaching material. I also included leadership experiences that I have integrated into my administrative practice that resonate with my own understanding of leadership.

Data analysis. The narrative method of an individual’s professional life views individual descriptions, explanations, and interpretation of actions and events as lenses through which to access the meaning and which individuals attribute to their experience (Shamir et al., 2005). I undertook ordering significant career experiences through narratives using three levels of consideration. First, I included only educational, professional, and administrative experiences that related to the established literature on the study topic. This contributed to the validity of the study (Glaser & Strass, 1967). In selecting text, I used the idea of plot-guided inclusion of material to help the reader understand career and leadership development as a process, rather than an outcome. Finally, I ordered the narratives chronologically to allow sequence to drive meaning-making during the analytical stages and ultimately to better allow readers to draw their own inferences (Holley & Colyar, 2012).

Using personal reflection, I recorded in an electronic journal my higher education and administrative experiences from college to my present employment as a middle-level academic administrator—almost 30 years of career history. I extracted data which Savickas (2012) refers to above as “small stories,” or milestone events, for use in the co-creation of my career narrative. I summarize these milestone stories in Table 1. I then used qualitative analysis to search systematically for meaning in the data, particularly for information related to categories based on the literature. Typological analysis is optimal when initial groupings of data and

beginning categories are easy to recognize and justify (Hatch, 2002). For example, early in the project I created one typology, academic norms, because it was an important factor in the literature and because of my day-to-day academic administrator work experiences with faculty across the decentralized research university. I marked data for initial categories, went back to the marked data to look for patterns and relationships, and themes for additional marking. I formed themes and generalizations from sentences I wrote to explain the data mark-up in the first two stages for inclusion as themes and generalizations.

I drew upon qualitative research methods to explore career development and leadership in academic administration. Table 1 displays select data from the longer narratives I used for this report. The next section presents the findings from the data, followed by a discussion of implications the findings have for increasing racial representation in academic administration.

Results

This qualitative study conceptualizes career development based on my personal narrative as an African American academic administrator. Three themes are grounded in my career narrative: (1) Calling to academic administration through graduate education; (2) Citizenship in professional administrator communities; and (3) Culture change and transformation in the administrator pipeline. In addition, the model of leadership from the middle I proposed in the preceding section (Figure 1) informs these themes.

Calling to Academic Administration through Graduate Education

Calling relates to the extent to which one has confirmation academic middle management is where one belongs regardless of timing or circumstances. As I mentioned, the literature consistently indicates assistant and associate deans receive little professional preparation for administrator work or fall serendipitously into the middle management role (Jackson, 2004; Pepper & Giles, 2015). As indicated in the theoretical model above, the authenticity of calling is a function of alignment of personal values with those of followers as well as peers. Given not all professionals are leaders at the outset of their training, calling relates to the developmental nature of authenticity and how professionals prepare to lead from the middle.

The initial phases of my personal narrative (see above, Data Analysis) provide evidence that one pathway to middle management in academic administration includes calling based on purposeful career choices—some internally based, some externally based. Excerpt data from my personal narrative for the theme, “calling to academic administration through graduate education,” appear in Table 1 (see below). In the remainder of this section contains analysis of how the data evidences dimensions of calling relevant to the first research question.

I identified three notions from my enrollment in higher education: feeling integrated as a whole person, being true to myself, and external recognition to validate my uniqueness. Elements linked to these notions include: experiences leading by example as a student athlete, overcoming racial stereotypes, and navigating through unknown pathways within elite academic settings. For example, my self-imposed “imposter” label is one commonly-associated with Elangovan, Pinder, and McLean (2009) identified several key conditions necessary for discovering a calling. They define calling as a “course of action in pursuit of pro-social intentions embodying the convergence of an individual’s sense of what he or she would like to do, should do, and actually does” (p. 430). The antecedent conditions necessary, but not necessarily sufficient, for discovering a calling include: (1) an urge to find meaning in life; (2) attentiveness; (3) willingness to experiment; and (4) growing understanding of the self. My non-academic undergraduate experiences provided confidence for my graduate study

aspirations—even though I lacked information about academic careers and those outside of high-profile careers, including law, business, and medicine—common career fields for graduate of elite undergraduate institutions.

Table 1: Summary of Findings by Narrative and General Themes

Personal Narrative

*Undergraduate leadership at elite PWI
Prolonged career search
Career change to postsecondary administration
Graduate fellowship experiences*

Academic administrator at PWI

*Middle manager success and lay-off
Crossing PWI and HBCU boundaries as a manager
Finding the right “professional fit” through
administration, scholarship, and teaching*

Theme categories	Conceptual dimensions	Interpretive key terms	Personal narrative
<i>Calling to academic administration through graduate education</i>	Authenticity; leadership; gifts and talents; self-efficacy; experimentation;	Race; stereotyping; isolation; career-change; apprenticeship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I graduated an accomplished, all-conference honoree basketball player from an Ivy League institution . . . but I still felt like an “imposter”; was I an affirmative-action student? My immediate post-college life consisted of an exhausting seven-year career exploration. • After several years, I discovered non-faculty careers in higher education administration existed years and I career-changed. Working my first job in student affairs administration. I ultimately answered the burning question, “What’s my calling to be a leader?” • Immediately upon doctoral graduation, I received a job offer at my PWI doctoral alma mater as director in academic affairs for a program wherein I could leverage my scholarly knowledge of and administrator capabilities for increasing racial inclusiveness in doctoral education.
<i>Citizenship in professional administrator communities</i>	Academic culture; altruism; peers; service	Professional development; cosmopolitan; communities; networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It’s a lower position but having a job during a recession is a promotion!”: my mentor’s advice evaluating a job offer following my lay-off as associate dean. • I served as the regional association chapter president in which I led others to take on positions on the executive committee by actively recruiting qualified and capable colleagues to run for open positions on the leadership board. • I recruited the office’s graduate assistant—an African American male, also interested in higher education administration . . . to professional presentation and publication experiences from the project.
<i>Culture change and transformation in the administrator pipeline</i>	Social stratification; organizations; strategy	Context; resilience; innovation; protean career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking to keep some rebounding momentum in my career, I accepted a job at a larger HBCU graduate school—again taking a newly created assistant dean position. • Compared to teaching at the graduate level in the PWI context, the “feel” of the racial climate in classroom has been less isolating. • I share both successes and challenges of my managerial decision-making in the workplace with graduate students of color hoping to encourage them to pursue academic or administrative careers in higher education.

My self-directed career search resulted in my choice to enter higher education administration. During the seven-year period in which I was exploring the world of work, I was also attentive to what was meaningful to me from “introspection, reflection, meditation

and relational activities” (p. 434). The feedback I received on my work performance as a manager in several organizations, the personal energy I drew on, and positive feedback with workplace colleagues, as well as friends in my professional and personal networks, suggested to me that being a manager would be personally meaningful and productive. Once I found my calling, I took a job as a temporary worker in a private university’s student affairs office. This experience provided opportunities for “social discussions” (p. 434) with other individuals who attended or were considering graduate study in higher education administration.

Attending graduate school for my master’s and doctoral degrees were calling “tests” to see whether the calling was true. My receipt of fellowships at both master’s and doctoral levels was confirmation. Elangovan, Pinder, and McLean (2009) call willingness to experiment with new paths as an important antecedent to a calling. For me, doctoral study was the point at which I experimented with a career in academic affairs. The doctoral fellowship experience was one in which I trained like a future faculty—particularly via scholarly and research experiences and faculty mentoring but with the intent of entering academic administration. Moreover, many of my peers in the doctoral program did not quit their jobs for graduate studies full-time as I did. Elangovan, Pinder, and McLean (2009) call this “willingness to sacrifice some stability and embrace some uncertainty” (p. 434). In the three years of full-time work as an administrator, I found my sacrifice was worth it to become a student. This research assistant experience provided life-long opportunities in academic affairs administration I might not have otherwise had since many find it difficult to transition from student affairs to academic affairs administration. Some refer to these as micro industries and distinct employment markets with postsecondary administration (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007).

From my time as a doctoral research assistant, I developed a scholar/practitioner identity based in the study and practice of postsecondary administration. Elangovan, Pinder, and McLean (2009) refer to the “inner journey” destination as growing to understand one’s self. My assistantship experience did not change my mind to pursue an academic career, but it did foster “convergence of the ideal, ought, and actual selves” as a scholar/practitioner. This was the “self” or “professional” I wanted to grow into—the destination to which I hoped to arrive on my inner journey as a Black administrator.

Citizenship in Professional Administrator Communities

Citizenship relates to those behaviors, attitudes, and identities that define professionals and which professionals use to sustain their communities. Academic administrators as professionals and as leaders exhibit their special behaviors within select communities, including their home organizations and within their external communities of peers. Such organizations include the employing institution of the academic administrator internally and professional associations with their affiliated conferences and journal publishing houses externally.

The excerpt data from the narrative for the second theme, “citizenship in professional administrator communities,” appear in Table 1 above. The remainder of this section provides analysis of how the citizenship in professional administrator communities contributes to career and leadership development. The results align with the second research question, “*How does one African American academic administrator make sense of career transitions and their contributions to his career development?*”

The data in the narrative revealed three themes: mentoring aspiring professionals, serving the profession, and staying at the forefront of the profession. Organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) refer to those behaviors employees engage in that go beyond the assigned role/duties without expecting any kind reward. OCB do not result from supervisor enforcement but go beyond the formal stated role requirements and are aimed at helping others present in

the organization (Organ, 1988). OCB leads to overall satisfaction with one's work as well as higher levels of productivity (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009). Organ's (1988) OCB model includes five dimensions: altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, civic virtue, and courtesy. Similarly, association participation is akin to Organ's (1988) "conscientiousness" behavior in that my commitments exceeded the role requirements of my position. The opportunity to take a formal leadership position as founding chapter president was fraught with ambiguity since the organization was unstable and without formal leadership. I could not qualify to serve as president without first having a formal role as HBCU graduate administrator. However, working through change was not unusual for me as I had worked across private and public institutions, predominantly White institutions (PWI) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), and had lived on East and West coasts, etc. The enthusiasm I had to serve as a change leader, I imagined, would inspire others to demonstrate citizenship on their own as executive cabinet members.

I sought participation in professional administrator associations because I opted to forgo pursuit of a tenure-track faculty position following graduate school. For me, I saw volunteer work in associations to give back to the profession in ways that would benefit my institution—particularly by giving visibility to the graduate HBCU—in unconventional ways. Organ (1988) calls "civic virtue" being present at voluntary functions, which also equates to having a presence in scholarly and/or professional publications. I utilized professional connections I had established during my time as an administrator at the PWI to connect with editors and publishers within the professional associations but did so as an HBCU administrator.

Altruism defined my service on the dissertation committee for my colleague, the HBCU graduate assistant. Advising graduate students was not part of my formal role. Because the dissertation related closely to the research project on which we collaborated, I felt it was a natural way I could help the student to complete his degree program efficiently. He had relayed that he wanted to pursue a career in graduate administration. Having myself navigated the dissertation experience, and having interviewed scores of graduate students of color on the pitfalls and successes of navigating the PhD, I felt I could help a single student.

Culture Change and Transformation in the Administrator Pipeline

The third theme evident in characterizing leadership from the middle relates to working toward change from the inside out. The pipeline for academic administrators, not unlike many other age-old traditions in higher education—including use of academic regalia in commencement, homecoming football games, Greek organization ceremonies—is enduring. As I mentioned in the introduction, the needle has moved only slightly toward greater racial representation of persons of color in academic leadership. Efforts to change the pipeline from within for persons of color involve hurtling the tenure process to enter administration with little professional preparation. The excerpt data from my personal narrative for the theme "culture change and transformation in the administrator pipeline" appear in Table 1 above. The remainder of this section is an analysis of how the data evidences dimensions of culture change relevant to the third research question, "*How do professional experiences contribute to expanding the pool of persons of color for academic administration leadership?*"

For the final research question, the data reveal three dimensions in the theme of culture change: understanding higher education race politics, the importance of self-confidence, and administrative experience structured by race. A protean view of career development is of particular importance given the ongoing need to increase racial representation in graduate education and the pipeline for the professoriate. I indicated that I, an African American male, had developed an ability to rely on my own judgement in navigating several higher education

contexts. This dimension is consistent with the levels of self-confidence other high-achieving Black males in higher education rely on to succeed (Alston, Guy, & Campbell, 2017). Some of my confidence results from a decade long experience in navigating change across HBCU and PWI contexts; some from managing change within organizations undergoing renewal. Other sources of confidence stem from my own experiences in publishing and managing activities that center on producing things that result from using academic skills. Thomas and Gabarro (1999) assert that self-confidence in executives of color mitigates against self-fulfilling, negative stereotyping effects in higher education.

Race structured several transition points in my administrative experience—largely through the study of race and ethnicity in postsecondary education. Though not all of my scholarship focuses on race in higher education, the writing of this current article and others, and racial-inclusiveness work at the PWI (and less so the HBCU) are examples. Like other Black administrators, my identity as a Black male has also affected my ability to be a key administrative player; at times it was beneficial to advocate for students of color through positions directing inclusion programs. Conversely, there have been times my identity has been an impediment when confronting racism and discrimination—namely being able to advocate for others or myself in isolated PWI settings when challenging the status quo without compromising confidentiality (Lindsay, 1994).

Discussion

This study offers three propositions about leadership from the middle. First, investment in the identification and cultivation of “calling” in professional life buffers career development from forces outside the manager’s control. In my case, alignment of personal values and interests in the study and practice of higher education administration provided motivation and satisfaction across career transitions. Second, maintenance of professional networks through citizenship behaviors fosters “fit” between employing institution and academic administrators. Individual sacrifices to practice collaboration skills and institutional sacrifices to promote leadership development contribute to longevity in a single organization—longevity important to career success. Third, navigation of the career pathway to senior academic leadership for persons of color includes individuals pursuing subjective, non-traditional career trajectories.

The career path described in the foregoing narrative suggests that non-linear administrator socialization is at work in career development among persons of color. Professional socialization, or the transitioning process, one undergoes to commit to professional life, points to non-unitary ways in which individuals take on the role of professional administrator (Campbell & Smith, 2014). For example, academic tenure remains, in many instances, the entry-level, qualifying experience for administrative leadership positions. While tenure represents a key milestone in the linear succession planning “pipeline” model, it remains unclear whether tenure’s absence is a barrier to leadership skills development. Unclear alignment between faculty and administrative work, and pipeline “blockages” wherein highly-demanded, but low numbers of faculty and administrators of color cycle through only a select handful of elite institutions are among the shortcomings of the conventional linear socialization framework (Sethna, 2011; Gasser & Shaffer, 2014). A premier higher education administrator fellowship program, The American Council on Education’s (ACE) Fellows Program, recently noted that “higher education is trending toward hiring individuals external to the enterprise with non-academic backgrounds for senior leadership positions” (Crandall, Espinosa, Gangone, & Hughes, 2017, p. 20).

The study has implications for the study and practice of leadership in academic administration. T-shaped professionals create horizontal value in their organizations via transfer of best practices and use peer advice to increase quality of decisions or cross-

pollination of ideas (Hansen & Von Oetinger, 2001). Each of these activities is evident in active participation in professional association committees, publication activities, and conference networking. This study also suggests the need for further research on the relationship between leadership and career development theory. Emerging leaders, including middle managers, may gain new perspectives on thinking about possible career advancement through exposure to recent research on calling. Leadership curriculum that provides opportunity for incorporating personal reflection may enhance self-awareness and alignment of personal values with career values (Hunter, Dik, & Banning, 2010; Longman, et al., 2011).

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The author wishes to thank Drs. Karri Holley, Edelma Huntley, and Sweeney Windchief for their help on earlier drafts of this manuscript.

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Article Citation

Campbel, C. D. (2018). Leadership from the middle pays it forward: An academic administrator of color's career development narrative in postsecondary education. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(7), 1702-1716. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol23/iss7/15>
