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Identifying mentors for student employees on campus

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Abstract

Purpose – This exploratory research project aims to seek an effective process for identifying supervisors of part-time student employees who also serve in a mentoring capacity.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper is based on a review of literature and an evaluation process focused on established traits and functions of mentoring as applied to supervisors of student employees on a college campus.

Findings – Supervisors of student employees may have the desire and capacity to engage students on a higher level but are not viewed and supported to meet this need based on their position within the organization. Untapped resources are being overlooked that would develop the supervisor and the student while advancing the overall institutional mission.

Research limitations/implications – A study identifying mentors for part-time undergraduate student employees in higher education settings was necessary as a precursor to future research on the human resource development needs of professional staff in higher education.

Practical implications – The results of this study confirmed that the approach utilized for identifying mentors through specific traits is effective and that common barriers exist across the institution that negatively impact supervisors from serving as mentors. These results will be used to address future research related to the value of training and educating the supervisors of undergraduate student employees on college campuses.

Originality/value – Research exists on 360 evaluative processes, mentoring and the benefits of student development outside the classroom, but no research could be identified that addressed the opportunities of using this approach to potentially resolve organizational issues.

Keywords Human resource development, Informal learning, Resource allocation strategy

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The primary stakeholders for this study are the university administrators responsible for making decisions about resource allocation within their institutions. The overall study consists of three research articles focused on a specific group of participants consisting of staff members that serve as supervisors to undergraduate, part-time student employees working on campus. The intent of the study is to offer potential utility and application for university administrators as they make decisions regarding the allocation of available resources toward the accomplishment of the organizational mission.

Colleges and universities face difficult decisions in determining resource allocation that maximizes efficiencies and supports positive impacts on campus services. Boud and Solomon (2001) found that institutions of higher learning commonly utilize student employees to both reduce costs and assist those same students in meeting financial needs. Research on the benefits of mentoring undergraduate student employees by professional staff members may help with decision-making in areas such as resource

allocation, staff development and goal setting. The issue proposed for future inquiry is to identify the benefits and challenges to a campus associated with supervisors acting in the role of a mentor. The initial step taken is a process for identifying supervisors who display the traits and functions of mentors based on defined criteria.

Student employment
Often, universities employ students in a variety of roles. Student employment has been increasing steadily, and, today, approximately 80 per cent of all undergraduate college in the USA (public and private) are employed either on or off campus during their undergraduate education (Riggert *et al.*, 2006). According to Kuh *et al.* (2003), the prevalence of current undergraduate students in on-campus jobs is growing and that these positions support increased retention and engagement.

Many universities provide a staff dedicated to the life of the student outside of the classroom, commonly referred to as student affairs or student life. Historically, much less is known about the impact of student affairs practitioners and the activities and experiences they provide for students than about the impact of in-class activities and instructors (Love and Love, 1996), but a large body of assessment and research is identifiable since the mid 1990s. Stated by Banta and Kuh (1998) that if enhancing the quality of the undergraduate experience is an institutional goal, then merging the faculty and staff that spend most of their time with students in a way that prepares them for life both academically and socially is worthy of consideration.

If institutions lack common approaches to the overall philosophy of the student employment experience, a continuum of professional development experiences among student employees and the professional staff that supervise them can be found. The need for higher level systems thinking within organizations is evidenced by a tendency to focus on snapshots of isolated parts of the system and is the reason that our deepest problems never seem to get solved (Senge, 1990). Within higher education, systematically addressing professional development assists in establishing more global systematic thinking and, in the case of mentoring student employees, would address the issue Senge (1990) refers to as "fragmentation". Fragmentation occurs when an organization makes professional development an add-on to prescribed job descriptions. Fragmentation limits the effectiveness of an organization in several areas, including the effective allocation of resources. The intent of the article is to support a larger study that offers potential utility and application for university administrators as they make decision regarding the allocation of available human resources toward the accomplishment of the organizational mission.

Value of mentoring
Why should institutions of higher education commit time, energy and resources to developing professional staff as mentors of student employees? In a study of both student employees and their supervisors at the Northwestern University College Union, both groups reported that opportunities existed to promote learning in a co-curricular fashion through four workplace scenarios Lewis (2008, p. 56):

(1) increase opportunities for peer collaboration and interaction;
(2) create occasions for informal interactions among students, faculty members and administrators;

(3)　encourage more congruence between the curriculum and the co-curriculum; and

(4)　pair faculty and staff members in learning-focused research teams.

While the recognition of these workplace scenarios and the benefits they hold for student development are useful, the study does not address the importance of training supervisors to facilitate these scenarios. Additionally, conversations regarding the desirable outcomes from supervisors and why those outcomes matter may be beneficial. Bozeman and Feeney (2007, p. 731) define mentoring as:

[…] a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and the psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development; mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience and a person who is perceived to have less.

In addition to technical competence, mentors should focus on developing the adaptive capacity of their protégés to prepare them for future leadership positions (Blass and Ferris, 2007). Forming connections between part-time employment and academic programs, reinforcing positive habits and providing leadership opportunities may enhance the experience of both undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus and professional staff members.

Benefit to professional staff
Higher education institutions commit significant financial investments when employing large numbers of undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus. A lack of attention to articulating a desired role for the professional staff members supervising undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus can result in negative experiences for both parties. West (2001, p. 39) stated that:

[…] an important purpose of professional development coaching (mentoring) is to assist those in leadership positions to develop an awareness, perspective, clarity of thought and emotional responsiveness to occupy their roles authentically and creatively.

Identifying the benefits of the student employment experience to staff members may positively impact, among others, their job satisfaction and professional growth.

Universities and colleges traditionally support a division of student affairs (student life). The concept of the whole person typically includes programs and services that seek a balance of challenge and support for students that facilitate the development of social, psychological and ethical behaviors. Student government structures, residence life offices, service learning programs and clubs and organizations have provided the most common arenas for researchers seeking to study the development of students (Perozzi *et al.*, 2003).

The two most important influences on student learning and personal development are: (1) interacting in educationally purposeful ways with an institution's agents of socialization (e.g. faculty, staff, peers); and (2) directing a high degree of effort to academic tasks (Kuh, 1996, p. 135).

As supervisors, professional staff members have a structured opportunity to serve in the capacity of the agent of socialization for individual and groups of students. Training

and reinforcement of their roles as mentors is one aspect that is often missing in the strategic planning of campus activity and as an expected outcome in resource allocation.

Universities often utilize students to fill a broad variety of employment needs. The arrangement serves both entities, as part-time employees are readily available at lower wages than full-time staff and growing numbers of students need financial support in college. As institutions seek ways to provide needed services while preparing students for a career, a transformative approach to supervising the student employment experience becomes worthy of research.

Informal learning climate
As defined by Northouse (2013, p. 175), transformational leadership:

> […] is a process that changes and transforms people. It is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, long-term goals, includes assessing followers' motives, satisfying their needs, and treating them as full human beings.

For university administrators that espouse the philosophy of transformational leadership, the alignment between their preferred leadership style and an environment that supports learning inside and outside of the classroom may connect. As transformational leadership recognizes the whole person, all transformative learning philosophies involve the learner as a whole-being–body, mind, emotion and spirit (Zohar, 1990).

Student affairs practitioners are often charged with identifying measureable ways of developing the whole student in conjunction with the concepts of a transformative learning process. In Learning Considered 2 (Keeling, 2006, p. 6), it is stated that transformative learning is very likely to occur if a student is engaged in experiences that:

- are challenging, but not threatening;
- are complex and designed to demonstrate a process or phenomenon clearly;
- provide the opportunity to process the experience verbally, either in writing or in conversation;
- expect the student to describe what the learning means personally, in the context of his or her life experience; and
- allow enough time to reflect on all of those questions.

Within the appropriate organizational culture, part-time employment provides an excellent opportunity to deliver all of these elements to a student.

Within the context of informal learning on college campuses, transformational leadership models have proven to be highly successful (Komives, 2007). The models offer the identification of leadership within the professional ranks that support a developmental model for students, engage them in a community of learners and encourage a culture that acts as a village in the context of the student employee connection with the campus.

Higher education leaders face difficult decisions in the allocation of the resources available to an institution, including staff. Determining what role staff members have in the process of student development can be a valuable part of the discussion. Strategically aligning the resources available with the overall mission of the organization is an important process requiring global thinking. The inquiry is an initial

step toward research intended to provide administrators on college campuses greater insight into the value of providing resources for the development of full-time staff serving as supervisors of undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus.

The inquiry

The inquiry was conducted in support of a future research question regarding the value of allocating institutional resources to professional development opportunities for full-time staff who supervise undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus. The following discusses the purpose of the inquiry, the research questions, design, methodology, methods, data collection and analysis.

Purpose of the inquiry

Part-time employment among undergraduate students is common on campuses, but the professional and personal growth experience provided in the positions is not consistent. One reason for the variety of experiences is the knowledge, awareness of resources and training of the full-time staff member that supervises them. As universities utilize undergraduates to fulfill a variety of duties, the opportunity for informal learning is present if the supervisor responsible for undergraduate employees is prepared to recognize and deliver effective support. This inquiry sought an evaluation process to determine if a full-time staff member fits the profile of a supervisor willing to work with undergraduate student employees in a developmental fashion.

With a process in place that evaluates an individual on the criteria of mentoring, it may be replicated in future studies to consider the specific training resources recommended in support of developing these supervisors.

Similar to athletic coaches working with student athletes, the hours per week supervisors spend interacting with student employees may be greater than faculty or student life practitioners, positioning them to serve in a developmental role. The supervisor has the potential to recognize changes in a mood, behaviors and emotions. The developmental philosophies, awareness and the professional "toolkit" of these supervisors could enhance the experiences of students.

Research questions

The inquiry sought to establish an effective process for identifying supervisors of undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus with potential to serve in a mentoring capacity to their subordinates. The research questions for the inquiry addressed if the stated criteria for identifying mentors provided in previous research was applicable in a 360-degree evaluation process. The following research questions guided the analysis:

RQ1. How effective is the 360-degree evaluation tool in identifying supervisors who act as mentors to their undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus?

RQ2. Were the criteria chosen for identifying mentoring behaviors appropriate for supervisors of undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus?

RQ3. Do identifiable factors exist at the institution that positively or negatively impact the ability of supervisors trying to develop undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus?

The guiding research questions directly support the primary research question by analyzing the process used in the inquiry, as well as the effectiveness of measuring individual themes, traits and factors identified in prior research as most relevant to mentoring (Howard, 1999). In a review of prior research, the inquiry utilized both a set of criteria and a widely recognized evaluation process (360-degree evaluations) to gather data and the research questions to provide an evaluation of both the criteria and process. The third question was compiled to recognize other factors that may be influential in considering individual circumstances that were not revealed in the interview or questionnaire data. Supervisors, for example, may display all the qualities and traits of a mentor, but not have the opportunity to work with students as a result of budget constraints, staff shortages or other variables not known at the start of the inquiry that had an impact on the data. This potential scenario would require additional study beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Methodology
This study incorporated both qualitative and quantitative methods to gain insight into the primary participants of the inquiry, which are the supervisors of undergraduate, part-time student employees on a college campus. A mixed methodology combines both quantitative and qualitative research methods to fully understand a problem or issue (Creswell, 2004). The quantitative method was a survey design which is an interaction between a researcher and a respondent. According to Fowler (1993, p. 71), "in a self-administered survey, the researcher speaks directly to the respondent through a written questionnaire". A survey was used to collect data related to traits and functions of a mentor identified in prior research.

The instrument used for this inquiry was derived from prior surveys related to mentoring traits and functions. A well-established questionnaire developed by Sands *et al.* (1991) was the basis for the instrument. The framework for that questionnaire was integrated with the findings of Howard (1999) regarding the traits and functions of mentors in the development of the instrument.

In addition to the quantitative data collected through the survey, seven supervisors of undergraduate, part-time student employees were interviewed for a better understanding of their perceived role and responsibilities related to traits and functions of mentors. This qualitative portion of the study focused on "understanding something, gaining some insight into what is going on and why this is happening" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 16). The information collected was triangulated with the data from the questionnaire and researcher observations to inform the findings for the research questions.

The inquiry took place at a public state institution in the Midwest with a student population of approximately 23,000. The research conducted was an exploratory inquiry in the area of identifying mentors. As explained by Morse (1991), qualitative research is exploratory and is useful when the researcher does not know the important variables to examine. Pertinent to this inquiry, the selection of exploratory, qualitative research aligns with the topic of mentoring by supervisors of undergraduate, part-time student employees because it has not been done in the past with this group of people. Exploring how existing theory may or may not apply to this group of participants is of interest to the researcher.

Although the overall research inquiry is qualitative, elements of this article which supports a larger study were quantitative. A mixed-methods design in this application

was utilized as the best approach to capture the information of interest. As described by Creswell (2013), goals were established within a larger study to both generalize the findings to a population and develop a detailed view of the meaning of a phenomenon for individuals, where the collection of closed- and open-ended qualitative data is advantageous to best understand a research problem. The researcher sought greater understanding of the effectiveness of the process outlined as a 360-degree evaluation utilizing criteria established as indicators of mentoring.

Purposive sampling relies on the judgment of the researcher when it comes to selecting the participants who are to be studied. As expressed by Tongco (2007), the main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest in answering specific research questions. The choice made to utilize purposing sampling was based on the participant's similar characteristics which are all related to their role as supervisors of undergraduate, part-time student employees within a specific set of criteria.

Methods

Purposive sampling was utilized to identify supervisors within the population who met specific criteria. It is recognized that purposive sampling can be a limitation, as it may be limiting for transferability, but, with respect to this type of inquiry, the contextual nature of this type of inquiry required a specific criteria which is outlined below:

- Supervisors who had been employed in their role for more than three years at the institution.
- Supervisors who had a continuous and direct reporting line to their supervisor for at least two years.
- Supervisors who had responsibility for an undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus as a direct report for at least six months.
- All three individuals (student employee, the student's supervisors and the supervisor's supervisor) were willing to participate in the inquiry.

The rationale for criteria selection was based on time in the position and an established consistency of reporting lines for the supervisor so that each individual would have a familiarity with the work climate and values. Three years of longevity for the primary participant allowed for comfort with their role and an understanding of the organizational culture. Likewise, an established period of time for the primary participant's supervisor and their direct report provides familiarity that enables them to constructively provide feedback.

Data collection

Data were collected over a two-month period. Each of the 21 participants received an e-mail from the researcher outlining the inquiry and requesting them to consider participating. The 21 participants came from three different groupings:

(1) *Group A*: The seven primary participants were the supervisors of undergraduate, part- time student employees, and these participants were directly interviewed one-on-one.

(2) *Group B*: The seven participants in this group were the undergraduate, part-time student employees that reported directly to the members of Group A, and these participants completed a questionnaire.

(3) *Group C*: The seven participants in this group were the current direct supervisors to the members of Group A, and these participants completed a questionnaire.

No prior research was identified that utilized this exact approach. The inquiry, in support of the future research outcome, utilized the following procedures:

- After securing participation release forms from all participants, the researcher sought authentic accountings of current professional staff members who are responsible for undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus. Additionally, written feedback from the individual's direct reports and their immediate supervisor as seen in a 360-degree performance review was utilized to qualify them as a mentor, or strictly a supervisor to the student employees. The 360-degree evaluation is modified, as it does not seek input from the peers of the individual being evaluated. This was adapted after weighing the value of these observations versus the security and comfort of the individual being studied. The work environments and culture of the organizations did not provide for interactions with peers that would likely generate insightful data related to the mentoring traits and functions of the individual. The combination of self-identification from the employee and the observational reports from the individual's supervisor and direct reports was utilized to classify individuals into one of the categories described above.

- The researcher conducted a rigorous theme analysis of the experiences described by each supervisor's interview responses. Utilizing the text from the interviews provides a dataset used in the theme analysis process (Gibson, 2004). As prescribed by van Manen (1977), a selective reading approach was implemented to analyze data seeking key phrases and statements that are reflective of the phenomenon of mentoring. The process was iterative, at once looking at both the whole and parts of the whole in an effort to accurately capture the phenomenon. The interview questions were designed to be both closed- and open-ended, dealing with the approach, beliefs, style and outcomes taken in their role as a supervisor of undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus. As part of the process, the researcher recorded all interviews and maintained a journal of their reactions and feelings and utilized the support of themed analysis.

- The identification of central themes was important within the process of capturing the experience of serving as a mentor to undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus. Each theme and sub-theme needed to be supported by participant statements that demonstrate the validity of the data analysis process (Gibson, 2004).

The collection of central themes and an evaluation of the process used in categorizing individual supervisors into groups will be useful in future research related to the effect of a mentoring setting.

Interviews were recorded with supervisors. The responses were utilized as data and coded into themes that emerged from the responses. Previous research in the area of mentoring (Higgins and Kram, 2001; Harrington *et al.*, 2004) has identified the following as recognized themes for mentors in business and academic settings:

- *Self-focused*: The individual looks inward and is reflective about their roles and experiences with a goal of self-improvement.
- *Other focused*: The individual displays care and concern for the well-being of others, particularly those placed in their charge. In this case, student employees.
- *Self-satisfaction*: The individual finds gratification in the success of others.
- *Network building*: The individual maintains relationships with individuals that serve both the person and the organization over periods of time.

The researcher was open to the emergence of these or other themes upon analyzing the responses of participants.

A questionnaire was developed for distribution to the undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus and immediate supervisor of the professional staff member being interviewed. The interviewer submitted and received responses for this questionnaire from all seven undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus and all seven direct supervisors.

In an effort to identify specific traits and functions related to effective mentors, Howard (1999) reported the following items as common among academic, business and military settings as reported by protégés. Essential mentor traits consist of honesty, integrity, confidentiality, high moral/ethical standards and genuine. Essential mentor functions consisted of provides support, shares time, is accepting and serves as a positive role model.

To further identify traits of a mentor, additional literature was consulted related to the participants specific to this inquiry. Research involving the mentoring of graduate students by Romberg (1993) contributed that good mentors display strong professional attributes (e.g. professionally nurturing, professionally focused, interested, fair, available, flexible and generous), positive personal qualities (e.g. friendly, communicative, supportive and considerate), strong work and character skills (e.g. knowledgeable, creative, motivated, honest, organized, decisive and hard-working) and effective abilities within the area of communication (e.g. attentive, responsive). Additionally, Cahill (1996) identified that statements by college students revealed that a clearly defined mentor role was not as important as the traits of consistency, genuineness and respect.

Utilizing these traits as a basis for feedback from direct reports and direct supervisors of interviewees, the questionnaire gathered demographic data about the respondent and also provided a ratings sheet with space available for open responses related to the traits of functions of mentoring identified above. Data gathered from both the interview transcription and questionnaires were organized, and an analysis was conducted in an effort to qualify supervisors as mentors to undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus. Data from all three sources were cross-referenced in a fashion similar to a 360-degree evaluation process. The interview transcriptions and analysis were submitted back to the individual participant for member checking and verified by each as representative of their thoughts and feelings.

Data analysis

The resulting data were collected and organized by way of a data matrix. The matrix lists the identified traits and functions of a mentor that correspond to each supervisor. This information was derived from the one-on-one interview (self-identification) and the questionnaire process (360-degree evaluation process). Individual interviews, observation field notes and survey responses were used to triangulate the data.

The resulting information, displayed in Table I, was used to determine if a substantial amount of evidence existed from self-reporting, my observations and from 360-degree evaluation results to warrant a supervisor's classification as a mentor. The table was developed utilizing prior research that established the traits and functions of a mentor and how they related to the evaluation of each supervisor of undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus. Within the seven individuals that were the primary focus in this inquiry, Supervisor #5, at the time of the study, was identified as the only participant not consistently displaying a substantial percentage of the traits and functions of a mentor when supervising undergraduate, part-time student employees.

The research questions, design, methods and data collected were intended to support the overall purpose of the inquiry. To conduct future research in the area of professional development needs for the supervisors of undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus, an effective approach is desirable for the identification of full-time supervisors who may serve in such a capacity. The elements within the inquiry produced findings and implications for human resource theory, research and practice.

Findings

The final section of the article synthesizes the information developed within the inquiry. Included are the results of the inquiry, limitations and a discussion of the implications for theory, research and practice within the field of human resource development (HRD).

Results of the inquiry

Related to the research questions, the following analysis is submitted:

Supervisor							
Mentor trait/functions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Self-focused	•	□	□	×	×	□	×
Other-focused	□	□	□	•	•	•	□
Self-satisfaction	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Network building	×	×	•	×	×	×	×
Honesty	•	□	□	□	□	□	□
Integrity	•	□	□	□	×	□	□
Confidentiality	×	×	□	□	□	□	□
High ethics	•	□	□	□	•	□	•
Genuine	□	□	□	•	□	□	•
Supportive	□	□	•	•	×	•	□
Shares time	□	×	•	×	×	×	×
Role model	□	•	□	□	×	□	□

Notes: Table key: yes: □; at times: •; not observed: ×

Table I.
Reported mentoring themes, traits and functions of supervisors

- How effective is the 360-degree evaluation tool in identifying supervisors who act as mentors to their undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus?

  The method utilized provided data to identify supervisors. Due to the subjective nature of identifying mentors, it was productive to identify and focus on accepted themes, traits and functions of mentoring as identified in the literature. The focus of the evaluation tool on established traits and functions of mentors is beneficial to the field of HRD, as it allows for a focus on behaviors and perceptions of individual supervisors that correlate with leadership development. One-on-one interviews and questionnaires were helpful in providing feedback opportunities to each participant while the process was perceived to be viable; it would be desirable to obtain a larger sample of student employees whenever possible to assist in evaluating the supervisor from that perspective. This inquiry was limited by the time of year (summer) and the fact that some of the supervisors worked with a limited number of undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus.

- Was the criteria chosen for identifying mentoring behaviors appropriate for supervisors of undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus?

  The criteria utilized were determined so that the primary supervisor had enough time in service to be able to focus on student development within their position. New employees are often focused on acclimating, and time was necessary to allow for realistic evaluations. While further inquiry is needed for verification, it appeared that none of the supervisors in this inquiry had received developmental support in this area. The time spent with the student was required to be at least six months, as student staff turns over often for a variety of reasons. In reflecting on the inquiry, the criteria were reasonable.

- Do identifiable factors exist at the institution that positively or negatively impact the ability of supervisors trying to develop undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus?

  Throughout the interviews, two common threads came through with the primary participants that were also often supported in the questionnaire responses. First, time is the most limiting factor for the development of mentoring type relationships between undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus and their supervisors. As organizations seek ways to increase efficiencies, the potential for organizational goals to be sacrificed exists. Within the field of HRD, the implications of inefficient resource usage having negative impacts on organizational outcomes are possible.

Second, the consistent statement that working with undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus in a developmental fashion was not a formal expectation nor was it evaluated and rewarded in any way. While this did not prevent the professional staff from recognizing and attempting to take advantage of the opportunity to engage students, it did create confusion over their role and expectations as employees. In any organization, staff members typically spend time on activities which they perceive result in reward and recognition. If a critical outcome of an organization is not supported through evaluated reward and recognition, it may be ignored by staff members. Within the field of HRD, evaluating the goals of the organization and aligning the training, evaluation, recognition cycle with activities that support the outcomes is recommended.

Limitations

The inquiry had limitations that need to be recognized. The inquiry took place in the summer which limited access to a larger number of undergraduate students. This had an impact on the overall pool size of supervisors as access to one of their undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus was necessary for the 360-degree evaluation process. It would have also been preferred to obtain feedback from more than one student employee for each supervisor.

Purposive sampling was utilized to identify supervisors within the population that met specific criteria. It is recognized that purposive sampling may be limiting for transferability, but, with respect to this type of inquiry, the contextual nature of this type of inquiry required a specific criteria which has been explained within the methods section of this article.

An additional concern is the feedback provided by the direct supervisor of each primary participant with respect to mentoring traits. Essential mentor traits consist of honesty, integrity, confidentiality, high moral/ethical standards and being genuine (Howard, 1999). In organizations where the expectation and evaluation of supervisors does not recognize these traits as valuable in supervision of undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus, they may not have developed a basis for evaluation.

Discussion

Significance of findings

The significance of the findings from this study relate to both HRD practice for supervisors in the workplace and the effective use of employees in the field of higher education that supervise student employees. Within HRD, assessment of staff through the use of 360-degree evaluation processes is well documented, and the research on mentoring is extensive. This study sought to utilize the traits and functions identified in literature related to mentoring, as it applies to supervisors of student employees on a college campus. This approach was not identified in other studies but provides potential utility as universities seek to engage and develop students in and out of the classroom.

Further study on the potential impact for supervisors of student employees in areas such as job satisfaction, efficacy and positive workplace habits is worthy of consideration. This study has significance due to the rising concerns over organizational issues in higher education such as retention, satisfaction, co-curricular learning and preparation of students for the workforce and identification of signs of crisis in students attending college. As discussed in the article, supervisors often spend significant and consistent blocks of time with undergraduate, student employees and, in doing so, have the opportunity for positive impacts in many areas. The knowledge and skill to engage in developmental conversation has potential benefit for not only the student but also for the supervisor and organization.

Implications for research in HRD

The results of the inquiry provided several avenues for future research. As the analysis of interview data took place, the relevance to the field of HRD became increasingly apparent.

Individuals placed in supervisory roles on the front lines of any organization often set a tone for the environment and climate within the organization. These individuals have

direct and daily impact on how the organizational mission, vision and value are recognized and actualized.

As the individual supervisors within this organization discussed their experiences, it became clear that these individuals had the ability to influence students. Both the undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus being supervised and the rest of the student body being served by their work, the frontline supervisor has the potential to greatly enhance the functionality of the organization. While the setting for this inquiry was a university campus, the implications of effectively engaging staff in positively impacting the organizational mission and goals may be transferrable.

As an evaluation and development tool, the modified 360-degree evaluation process is beneficial, as it provides support for the individual employee to develop in a direction that supports the organizational goals. In the case of higher education, one of the goals is often to develop undergraduate students outside of the classroom. In support of that goal, this inquiry focused on the frontline supervisor in the role of mentor. Developing an evaluation tool that effectively evaluates their traits and functions within the scope of mentoring literature provides the opportunity to develop professional staff in a manner that influences the outcomes of the organization in a positive direction. As the field of HRD continually discusses effective evaluation processes for employees, this approach not only provides a framework for more intentional evaluations but also focuses the evaluation on the outcomes most important to the organizational mission.

It was clear from the interview process that many supervisors have a strong desire to work with students in a meaningful way. At the same time, barriers exist that prevent or limit their effectiveness toward these goals. Future research needs to be conducted on the impact of time management and the establishment of priorities for staff so that they may feel comfortable working with students within the scope of their duties. Additionally, it became evident that many supervisors were unaware of the resources available to them at the university to assist in managing concerns and trouble signs they noticed in their student staff members. Students showing signs of distress, approaching crisis or currently in crisis, identify confusion and other emotional wellness signals were mentioned in interviews but not addressed by the work place supervisor in an appropriate manner. In this case, supervisors were tasked with developing undergraduate, part-time student employees on campus, but they provided no training, orientation or education on the variety of topics that would be helpful when working with this population.

The overarching purpose and goals of the institution would be a further interesting subject for inquiry in relation to the messages sent to staff. As universities seek to develop co-curricular models of education and learning communities, the effective development of all the resources, particularly people, within the organization would be worthy of evaluation in support of higher-level systems thinking.

Practice implications for HRD

Recent literature has been identified that considers the culture and learning environments of an organization in relation to mentoring. As presented by Sheehan *et al.* (2012, p. 11), HRD practitioners, who are interested in innovative approaches with the field, require an openness to their approach, which the authors describe as organic, and be willing and available to "undertake unplanned interventions to support, coach and

mentor employees in their efforts increase knowledge productivity and to enhance social capital within their organizations".

The larger study this article supports provides the theoretical frameworks of Schein's (2010) embedded mechanism of organizational environment and Marsick and Watkins's (1993, 1993, 1999) informal learning model as pertinent to the discussion of supervisors of undergraduate, part-time student employees in the role of mentor. The research provided by Sheehan *et al.* (2012, p. 11) provide a connection with the following:

> […] not only do HRD practitioners working in organizations that have an objective of being highly innovative must ensure that a culture of learning and knowledge sharing is in place but that interventions must be regularly undertaken so that employees remain highly engaged and that spill-overs of this engagement are channeled at delivering innovative behaviors.

The connection point of innovative approaches within HRD and the development of mentoring associated with informal learning and organizational performance is an encouraging area for HRD practice. As provided by Fransson and McMahan (2013), limited research has been done, specifically on mentoring policy, but a major finding, to date, is that effective policy development should include not only the stakeholders who have the power to create it but also those who must implement it. This finding indicates that an organizational environment is needed for such an approach.

Within the field of HRD, the inquiry may provide further exploration in the areas of mentoring and organizational culture, particularly in the field of education. The implications for future HRD theory, research and practice, particularly in the area of developing supervisors of student employees within a co-curricular, experiential learning model as part of the institutional mission, may add value for practitioners and faculty seeking collaborations.

Related to the practice of HRD, organizations looking for connections for all levels of the organization to the stated goals and outcomes may find relevance. The application of a specific evaluation tool such as the modified 360-evaluation utilized in the study to focus on mentoring may provide utility. Further consideration related to the stated goals and the engagement of staff at all levels in meeting those goals has potential for both the organization and its membership to unify around common language and outcomes. The development of staff members to meet the stated outcomes by providing training and tools necessary again may help the organization and its membership.

In summary, the understanding of the resources, expertise, motivation and value of staff members in an organization toward things that are identified as important has a high value. Within the organization studied in this article, a clear connection was available but not being made by stakeholders that may potentially pay dividends for all members of the organization with a minimal investment. Most organizations seek those scenarios as highly impactful items to integrate into their approach as highly relevant practices and, in this case, potentially transformational for a campus culture.

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