Features of a Successful Group Experience:
A Reflective Learning of the Characteristics and Process Behaviors of a Diverse Committee

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“Don’t follow where the pathway goes,
Lead instead where there is no path,
And leave a trail.”
-Sun Tzu

“We learn nothing from experience.
We learn from reflecting on that experience.”
-anonymous

Introduction

The goal of this essay is to discuss characteristics and process behaviors of an intact group: the Campus Climate Survey Committee (CCSC) at Cal Poly Pomona. We will use reflective learning as a means of identifying features and characteristics of a successful group experience. Daudlin (1997) defines reflective learning as “… the process of stepping back from an experience to ponder carefully and persistently its meaning by developing inferences … to reflect on the learning that is occurring … “ (p. 13). Reflective learning helps surface insights, uncovers themes, promotes a sense of community, and helps synthesize learning in a way that makes it easier to share learning with colleagues and co-workers (Daudlin, 1997). This project was part of the WASC Self-Study, whose mission was “to create an account of our university that will be meaningful, inspirational, informative … [and that] will generate recommendations and new directions that have the potential to make our university a better place to study and work.” (Wills and WASC Self-Study Committee, 2000).

Diversity was an important dimension of the CCSC in two ways: the surveys themselves (of students, staff, faculty, and administrators) were being designed by the committee with a strong focus on diversity issues on campus, and the composition of the committee was highly diverse, in terms of members' ethnicity, longevity on campus, work role, sexual orientation, and gender. There was not a conscious effort to balance the representation of any particular ethnic or social groups, but the nature of the work and its anti-authoritarian process resulted in something close to proportional representation. Most of the conscious balancing was related to the recruitment of adequate numbers of students, staff, faculty, and administrators. There was a high interest level in the subject matter of the surveys, so the organizers could rely on networking to bring in participants rather than having to enlist people bureaucratically, which might not have produced as diverse a group.

The experience of designing and administering these surveys was both intense and pleasurable. By studying the processes and structures involved, we hope to be in a position eventually to foster change in the way university committees of all sorts do their business. We think some of the same learning can be applied to the continued development of multiculturalism on our campus.
Setting the Stage

Many of us have had the good fortune of working in and being part of a great team. The CCSC was an experience in which:

- Trust, camaraderie, community, and commitment were commonplace.
- Both the task at hand (product) and process effectiveness (community, relationships, the “how”) functioned side by side and at peak effectiveness.
- Members drew recurrently on the deep reservoir of individual strengths while mitigating and compensating for each other’s weaknesses.
- The sense of community extended beyond the project itself and where commitment to the larger goals and purpose was sustained through the life of the effort.
- Parochial and individual aspirations were subordinated to the larger effort.
- Collective group conscience (a deeper dimension of consensus) was achieved, and rich learning and insight were accessed.
- Members believed that they were carrying out a meaningful, original, and complex effort on behalf of the larger community, and one that would have a major impact.

In short, this was an experience that those involved wished could be bottled and repeated again and again in numerous other settings and with other projects and initiatives.

This has been the experience of a fluctuating group of some fifteen individuals from throughout the campus community, representing faculty, staff, administrators, students, who came together to work hundreds of hours, over an eight-month period to design an original research project on campus climate. This was the largest quantitative research project ever undertaken by the university. Over 5000 students, and the entire faculty, staff and administrators on the Cal Poly Pomona campus were surveyed, with the following response rates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses Groups</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000+ Students</td>
<td>(5000)</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>410 Staff</td>
<td>(1246)</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>304 Faculty</td>
<td>(1300)</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52 Administrators</td>
<td>(125 )</td>
<td>42%</td>
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The purpose of this essay is to examine the characteristics and group process behaviors perceived to be most effective in promoting peak experiences over the duration of the project. Secondarily, we are interested in what lessons we can learn from the committee interaction concerning the campus climate for diversity.

A Case for Reflective Learning

The recent American Council on Education (ACE) publication On Change, “Reports from the Road: Insights on Institutional Change,” (Eckel and Hill, 1999), offered the following insight “...institutions that were consistently intentional and reflective developed new behaviors and strategies that could be and were used again and again. Colleges and universities that learned...
from their experiences gained new ways to respond to the challenges of their environments and developed new capacities with which to face the future successfully” (p. 1). Similar sentiments are echoed in such management literature as The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization (Senge, 1990); Dialogue (Ellinor and Gerard, 1998); Fusion Leadership (Daft and Lengel, 1998), and Leadership and the New Science (Wheatley, 1994).

Why Reflect On Group Experiences?

The Campus Climate Survey Committee served as a group for a period of eight months (from August, 1999 to March, 2000), though planning meetings for the survey began at least a year earlier, in August, 1998. It serves as an important area of study and investigation for WASC as well as for the university itself. The university lives and breathes through the efforts of hundreds of various permutations of task forces, steering committees, groups, teams, committees, etc. It can be argued that since committees permeate the academy, they should be at the core of any transformational effort and therefore are worthy of study.

Why Campus Climate Survey Committee?

The Campus Climate Survey is a large scale, innovative and original project. It is original research, which uniquely reflects Cal Poly Pomona. It is not a canned product purchased from an outside source, or adopted from the efforts of other institutions, nor is it put together by outside consultants. It is an artifact, or manifestation of the complex interaction and dynamic forces of our unique culture. Bolman and Deal (1997) define culture as “the interwoven pattern of beliefs, values, practices, and artifacts that define for members who they are and how they are to do things” (p. 217). The Campus Climate Survey is one expression of the sum total of our Cal Poly Pomona culture manifested in four distinct questionnaires, one for each major constituent group (students, faculty, staff and administrators) on our campus. Since culture, according to Bolman and Deal (1997), is both a product and a process, the study of the process that created the product should be revealing. To an educator, product, it can be argued, is less interesting than process, since it is through process that products are created.

A meaningful reflection on group characteristics and process generates learning, which forms building blocks for what Peter Drucker (1985) refers to as “process innovations.” Process innovations, he suggests, can be far more transformative than technical innovations. Two such examples from the 20th Century are the GI Bill of Rights and the credit card. Each is an example of process innovation and both are, in part, responsible for fueling the greatest economic and educational expansion in the history of humankind. For example, Drucker observed that the process innovation leading to the explosive use of credit cards was the “thinking behind the thinking” - that most of the people are honest most of the time. This shift in mental models is a central feature of process innovations and an important dimension of what Senge (1990, 1999) calls the “learning organization.” This represents a shift that is fundamental to transformation and to co-creating new and innovative futures rooted in shared vision. A recent example of a process innovation in Cal Poly Pomona was President Bob H. Suzuki’s decision to formally appoint to his cabinet the elected Chair of the Academic Senate. This process innovation has far-reaching, positive, and transformative implications to the future of the academy and for the concept of shared governance and shared vision. There are many such examples, on all levels of the organization.

The goal of this essay is to move beyond the visible, the product, to uncover what Drolet (1995) suggests is the “power beneath the surface,” the norms, characteristics, and process behaviors of one diverse group’s experience at Cal Poly Pomona. Perhaps in the process, we might, as Sun Tzu commands, “leave a trail” for others to follow.
Successful Characteristics and Process Behaviors of the CCSC

This section will attempt to draw out key characteristics and group process behaviors of the CCSC, which contributed to conditions supportive of “peak experiences” and which may have exploratory value for others. More specifically, it seeks to invite the campus community to engage in a broader dialogue that includes further investigation of the features and characteristics of “peak experiences” within groups. There may be many models of peak experiences, each appropriate to the particular sub-culture or group. This section seeks to take a single step towards that vision.

In particular, we are interested in the following research questions over time:

- Can our findings find traction in other work groups and committees?
- How common are our experiences in the context of our campus community?
- Can peak group experiences (product and process) be replicated? In what groups, or settings?
- What kind and degree of diversity is integral to these experiences?
- Is it conceivable that over time, and with additional research across the academy, we can come to identify our own unique models of peak experiences, rooted in the shared experiences of Cal Poly Pomona?

The value of our study may be in providing a space for further testing, additional experimentation, and broader inquiry. Utilization of the reflective learning model can have transformational implications. James MacGregor Burns (1978), Bennis and Nanus (1985), define transformational leadership as a process in which individuals and systems raise one another to higher levels of understanding and conduct by bringing out the very best in each other. Reflecting upon experiences, mining its most potent findings, and replicating those features that bring out the very best in each other is the essence of transformation.

While the findings articulated in this paper reflect a detailed study of the experiences of a single group over an eight-month period, the authors believe that the findings can be generalized beyond the specific experience of the CCSC. The design and methodology used supports our belief that the findings do have generalizable value. Our reflective learning model followed four distinct phases: A sustained CCSC experience over time; intense reflection on that experience; mining and explicating key themes and findings; and grounding those themes and findings within existing literature. The authors deepened the reflective learning process by grounding the findings within existing literature, thereby testing for validity and generalizability. In so doing, we believe that our findings do have generalizable value beyond the experiences of the CCSC. Those who wish to promote and encourage “peak experience” opportunities within groups may wish to use our findings as a means of informing their own group design.

The CCSC worked together with intensity, and a sense of urgency, over an eight-month period to create four comprehensive campus climate surveys. The successful characteristics and process behaviors that were perceived to have contributed to our “peak experience” are grouped thematically and described in the sections that follow. There are thirteen themes, each heralded with the phrase “Successful Characteristic,” followed by an explication of that theme. Since diversity was a recurrent issue in the discussions of the committee, a major field of investigation in the surveys, and a ramifying characteristic of the CCSC, we begin with it.
A. Successful Characteristic: CCSC was a thoroughly diverse group.

The team membership included African-Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and whites, in leadership roles as well as member roles. There were unfortunately no American Indian or international-origin members. Their participation would have assisted the group in delineating the interest of these campus constituencies and would certainly have contributed to the vitality of the mix. The participants appeared not to be especially aware of their own internal diversity, in which no group was tokenized, none pre-dominated, and no individual was expected to prioritize the ethnic facet of his or her identity over the gender, socioeconomic, or other facets. There was no sense of self-congratulation at having achieved the kind of representativeness that eludes the majority of meetings on campus; it seemed entirely natural.

Though heterosexism and homophobia remain serious barriers to the achievement of a supportive environment and work parity in many quarters of the campus, the gay members of the committee were able to function openly in an atmosphere of acceptance. Men and women were about evenly represented, and the tasks and roles were not distributed differentially according to gender. Women did not do more work and receive less credit than men; the men did not dominate the women or the meetings. There was a considerable range in age, thanks to the presence of students on the committee (though there were some fairly young non-students, too).

Age refers not only to chronology but connotes an interesting feature of the diversity of our campus that has also been studied by Somers, Cofer, Austin, Inman, Martin, Rook, Stokes, and Wilkinson (1998) with relation to faculty alone, i.e., work generation, to coin a phrase (1998, p. 35-52). The Somers study focuses on the differences among four cohorts of faculty to be found at most universities today, defined by their approximate dates of entry into the academic job market (before 1960; 1960-1972; 1972-1982; after 1982) (Somers et al.). We might even want to add a fifth generation of faculty who began teaching at Cal Poly Pomona after the recession of 1992. Clearly, these four or five generations of faculty exist and exhibit major differences on our campus. We would argue that the generational differences apply also to staff and administrators. Attitudinal and methodological variations correspond to these generational differences; this is not surprising considering the cohorts' very divergent experience of life, their careers, and the nature of the campus. The CCSC membership included different generations of experience on the campus. This turned out to be one of the most valuable resources we had: a combination of institutional memory/history and fresh perspective.

B. Successful Characteristic: CCSC valued power of ideas over positional power.

Membership in the group reflected vertical, horizontal as well as diagonal representation from across the academy. It included student leaders, support staff, tenured faculty, a cabinet member, and several administrators of varying rank. Positional authority was rarely if ever considered as a source of influence or power in group discussions or decisions. From the outset, it was evident that ideas were the source of currency within the group. Members felt free to share their perspective(s), experiment with ideas and nuances, disagree, build on ideas, reject ideas, change minds, resurface and re-engage the group on “decided” issues. Group “norms” permitted it. The operating norm of valuing ideas over position power was never stated explicitly, yet was implicit; people “felt” it. It seemed to be in the character or the culture of the group.

C. Successful Characteristic: CCSC valued “collective wisdom” in making decisions.

Collective wisdom grew through the practice of dialogue. Dialogue, according to Ram Charan (2001) “…is a process of intellectual inquiry rather than of advocacy, a search for truth
rather than a contest, people feel emotionally committed to the outcome. The outcome seems ‘right’ because people have helped shape it (p. 76).” Senge describes dialogue as a “free flowing of meaning through a group, allowing the group to discover insights not attainable individually” (1990, p. 10). It is, observes quantum physicist David Bohm, the essence of creating shared meaning. Paradoxically, warns Danah Zohar (1997), dialogue does not necessarily mean reaching consensus. Dialogue can and does generate complexity as well as contradiction. To underscore this, Zohar relates a famous Sufi story about the Mullah Nasruddin. Nasruddin was a wise man or a fool, depending on your point of view. In this particular story, two men have come to the mullah with an argument. The first man puts his case, and Nasruddin says, “I perceive that you are right.” Then the second man puts his own contradictory case, and once again Nasruddin says, “I perceive that you are right.” A third man looking on objects. How can Nasruddin say that both men are right when they entirely disagree? To him Nasruddin says, “I perceive that you also are right.” The richness of the dialogue under conditions of complexity generated learning that elevated collective wisdom. Collective wisdom was an important dimension of the group experience.

D. Successful Characteristic: CCSC operated in a non-bureaucratic, interdisciplinary structure simultaneously mindful of the larger institutional structure AND operating outside of it.

Interdisciplinary, cross-functional, and seamless coordination of effort was a key feature in the CCSC’s effort. This was important for two reasons: first it promoted innovation both in process and product, and, second, in moving ideas into action. Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1983) and Boyer (1987) suggested that integrated cultures are more effective at creating climates conducive to change and innovation. Our experience was that the CCSC operated in a highly integrated, coordinated, seamless fashion, moving ideas and projects across divisional and departmental boundaries. Ideas did not get “stuck” or “caught” in unnecessary bureaucracy. The experience of this group was that ideas and decisions could move through the system with minimum loss of time and energy. The group’s efforts seemed focused on creating the best possible product, not on overcoming and circumnavigating turf, boundaries, and other bureaucratic impediments.

One implicit CCSC group norm, supported by research in the area of change and innovation, was CCSC’s willingness and flexibility to waive standard policies and procedures, bend rules, and encourage members to scan across organizational boundaries and structures (Taylor, 1990).

E. Successful Characteristic: CCSC “tin-cupped” its way to success, literally begging for support and involvement.

One of the key strengths of the CCSC was its recurrent use of tin cupping over the life of the group. Through the practice, metaphorically referred to by Kanter (1983), as “tin cupping” - literally begging for involvement (time, money, support, energy and resources) - the CCSC managed to gain necessary funds, support, staffing, and the involvement of many on campus. CCSC members were not appointed nor was the committee mandated to exist through formal hierarchical structures. It also had no formal budget for a project that would eventually cost upwards of $10,000 to bring on-line. Yet, through rigorous and persistent tin cupping, up, down, and across the organizational hierarchy, i.e. the President’s cabinet, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Institutional Research and Planning, Diversity and Compliance Programs, ASI, Academic Senate, Staff Council, and others, necessary funds were garnered. Tin cupping is among the most overlooked and most potent tools at a group’s disposal. Tin cupping is a bigger idea than garnering promises of “cold cash.” It includes:
• project sanctioning and cheerleading (publicly and privately)
• encouragement; access to ideas
• political support
• identifying potential land mines, resistance (organized or spontaneous) as well as resistors
• release time, as well as,
• the time honored promises of cash.

With each “yes”, tin cupping expands support; encourages buy-in; aids in institutionalizing change/innovation; models the way for others; gains support for a project incrementally, giving the culture time to absorb new ideas; reveals new insights not considered; suggests faulty thinking; and forces project members to hone their message, including project purpose and goals; and be accountable.

F. Successful Characteristic: CCSC operated in conditions of trust, community, camaraderie (esprit de corps), interdependence and joy.

A feeling of trust, community and interdependence was observed throughout the group’s experience. Members genuinely enjoyed each other’s company. Laughter flowed often and easily. Respect was demonstrated through active listening and “willingness.” For example, there was a willingness to change one’s mind, to be influenced, to consider the wisdom of “community elders,” to raise conflicting points of view, and to share personal experiences. There was a sense of potency and efficacy, a belief in each other’s ability and intellect as well as a shared passion in completing “the largest campus survey in CPP history.”

G. Successful Characteristic: CCSC utilized the “accordion process” to encourage feedback, gain political insight, educate multiple constituencies, reduce resistance and gain buy-in.

CCSC acted as a porous entity simultaneously influencing and being influenced by a multitude of constituencies throughout campus. Its decisions and approaches were informed through a process Harvey (1995) identified as the “Accordion Model.” He characterizes the accordion process as the closing and opening of bellows on an accordion. A small group works to breathe life into a project, then widens the process to gain input (collective wisdom, political insight, content, tone, gaps, faulty assumptions or weak underpinnings, missed opportunities, potential areas of support and resistance). The results are then brought back to the small group for more reflection, dialogue, re-conceptualization, analysis and re-write. Like an accordion, the process, once again, expands out to the larger audience for more feedback, insight, etc. The “accordion process” continues until sufficient evidence suggests that there has been effective, broad-based input and dialogue.

The accordion is an especially robust model in highly diverse organizations, mining the extraordinary advantages inherent in it. Adler (1997) observes that “diversity becomes most advantageous, when the organization wants to expand its perspective, its approach, its range of ideas... (p. 101).” The accordion takes full advantage of that diversity. Further, as noted in “Successful Characteristic” H, the accordion takes advantage of the “divergent” phase of group life, by exposing it to the full range of the multiple perspectives inherent in diverse organizations.
Two key features of the model were demonstrated time and again within the group. First, the group made a distinction between “breathing life” into the project (intellectual property) versus ownership of it. Breathing life suggests taking responsibility for creating something for others to react to and critique, with the expressed understanding that feedback can and will influence the evolution of the project. Ownership, on the other hand, implies a level of ego investment that introduces conditions conducive to group think and is characterized by defensiveness, boundary setting, “we know better,” rejection of new or discordant information, and negation of alternative perspectives. This fans the flames of resistance, leading to unintended negative results. Second, the accordion process invites feedback, and if used well and with wisdom generates support, goodwill and trust in both the process and the product. One of the strengths of the accordion process is that it permits a wide constituent base to “see” themselves reflected in the process and the project.

The accordion process was used within the group itself allowing the product to evolve and regenerate in iterative steps over several months. It was also used in the larger Cal Poly Pomona community, with great effectiveness. Its use increased commitment, trust, support, and camaraderie, and introduced large numbers of innovations along the way. Through many expansions to the larger community and contractions back to the small group for analysis and re-drafts, the final product is stronger, has broader support, and belongs to the larger community.

H. Successful Characteristic: CCSC incorporated three phases into its process including: 1) Setting the Stage Phase; 2) Divergent Thinking Phase; and 3) Convergent Thinking Phase.

The line of demarcation between phases or their sequencing is far less interesting than the fact that all three phases evidenced themselves throughout the life of the project. A single meeting or interaction could easily evoke one or all three phases.

1. Setting the Stage: This stage established the philosophical and scholarly base for our effort. While it occurred early in the process, it was re-visited often and in many forms. This phase included reading and discussing articles (e.g., Rendón, 1999); attending presentations on campus related to the research topic (Rendón herself, Milton Bennett, Carlos Cortez, Peter Rose, Riane Eisler, Joseph Johnston); and participating in a one-day presentation at Cal State Long Beach by Rendón and colleagues in October, 1999. In addition, instruments used by numerous other campuses to measure perceptions of campus climate were made available and discussed by the committee. Each of these efforts connected the group to a common base of information, rooted in research and literature, and served as a point of focus for the project.

2. Divergent Thinking Phase: The divergent phase was critical to the success of this project and is of particular consequence in multicultural work teams and highly diverse organizational settings. Notes Adler (1997), that the divergent phase takes full advantage of the diversity that exists particularly when “...the organization wants to expand its perspective, its approach, its range of ideas, its operations…(p. 101).” The divergent phase permitted group members to widen their inquiries, opened the door for raising difficult questions, allowed members to check and test assumptions, raise issues, “make speeches,” and engage in what might be characterized as desultory dialogue. Throughout the divergent phase dialogue moved in and out of disciplines, e.g., political science, sociology, anthropology, and organizational theory. Members engaged each other on issues of social justice, diversity and multiculturalism, campus culture and politics. This was an important step in the process, allowing the group to probe, test, risk and explore the “the thinking behind the thinking.” The very nature of the phase revealed complexity, introduced contradiction, and expanded collective wisdom – critical to the success of the effort.
3. The Convergent Thinking Phase: This phase brought coherence, focus, direction, and decisions to the groups effort. This phase prompted collective action. Time spent in the divergent phase paid off. Decisions were steeped in collective wisdom and trust in the process and the decision was evident. Too often groups jump to the convergent phase, bringing closure to issues and decisions with a perfunctory nod to the divergent phase or neglecting it all together. Group momentum supports a “Rawhide” let’s get the job done approach which acts as an antidote to good decision making and prevents accessing the collective wisdom of the group. Urgency may not have fateful consequences in highly homogeneous groups, completing relatively routine tasks or projects. However, the rapid adoption of the convergent phase, at the expense of a prolonged and productive divergent phase, particularly under conditions of complexity and diversity, can and often does have disastrous consequences in heterogeneous groups.

I. Successful Characteristic: CCSC literally “knitted” its way into a coherent and original fabric called “Campus Climate.”

The knitting metaphor is useful in that it aptly describes the slow, painstaking, deliberate, and persistent approach to creating the final surveys. CCSC gathered, analyzed, synthesized a significant number of strands of disparate and complex ideas and experiences knitting them into a coherent whole. An important feature of the CCSC was the person who took on the role of “knitting.” It is a person who has the skills to pull together vast amounts of information and disparate ideas, and knit them into a pattern of sorts, bringing it back for group inspection, review, and critique. This was followed by another painstaking knitting effort, creating a different and evolving pattern, and returning for a new round of inspection, review and critique. This accordion process (discussed earlier) worked extremely well allowing the pattern to change, evolve, and be remade. This person worked tirelessly behind the scenes knitting on behalf of the group. This person was not perceived as having any agenda other than ensuring that the group’s best thinking was knitted into the final product. She was highly respected and trusted. Her sole agenda was to assist the group in creating the best possible questionnaire for the four surveys.

J. Successful Characteristic: CCSC members were “self-appointed,” forming a coalition of like-minded individuals in response to larger institutional needs. The formation of the group was more synchronistic than bureaucratic.

An interesting feature of the CCSC is that members volunteered to participate in the project or were “recruited” by fellow colleagues. They were not officially appointed through the formal administrative structure. Members joined the team for many reasons:

- A personal passion for the subject under investigation
- The challenge of bringing to life the largest institutional survey research ever conducted
- To be sure no group was left out
- To be a part of something bigger than themselves
- To be in the company of a community of colleagues they respected across divisions and disciplines
- To fulfill a significant gap in the university’s knowledge about itself
- To contribute to a self-study that registered both as a challenge and an opportunity
There were many other reasons, but two central features were evident. First, participation was voluntary. Second, everyone who participated had a passion for the project, was committed to the project’s larger goals and purposes. In this case, personal passion and organizational needs came together in service to students, faculty, staff and administrators.

Another interesting dimension worthy of note is that while membership formed around existing institutional needs or gaps, finding expression in the CCSC, the formation itself was “spontaneous” not planned. This is perhaps what Daft and Lengel (1998) meant by “fusion leadership,” the coming together of forces in search of coherence and synthesis. CCSC formed around three distinct groups and needs finding expression in one project. They were:

- The WASC 2000 self-study
- Diversity and Compliance Programs
- Institutional Research and Planning

K. Successful Characteristic: CCSC engaged the full intellect and attributes of the group, and the larger campus community, over an extended time frame. There was adequate time to incubate and implement the project.

The Campus Climate Survey was a time intensive effort in which process and product were equally critical to a successful effort. Campus climate is a value-laden undertaking. People from all sectors of the community have a stake in or an opinion on the effort, some positive and, in fact, some hostile. Time intensive sessions in which important dialogue takes place was central to a successful product. In addition, the piloting, distribution, marketing of the instrument and the gaining of “approval” from very powerful constituents all take time, and energy. The CCSC spent eight months working with intensity and frequency completing and distributing the survey. Innovation takes time, and requires periods of incubation in which nothing much seems to be happening but is fertile ground for breakthroughs. CCSC seemed to have adequate time in which to engage the full intellect and attributes of the group and the university.

L. Successful Characteristic: CCSC appealed to members’ higher order beliefs and values through superordinate goals.

From its inception CCSC had a superordinate goal and purpose and its members believed in it and understood its implications. Superordinate goals appeal to higher order beliefs and values. They overarch personal, structural, parochial interests and serves as the glue that binds people and effort together. Superordinate goals are especially critical in initiatives that are highly value laden (Harvey and Drolet, 1995), as is the subject of “Campus Climate.” In culturally diverse teams, superordinate goals help team members transcend their individual differences providing direction and focus to its activities (Adler, 1997). CCSC members knew from the outset that they were engaged in a lofty, important and useful project. Superordinate goals combined personal passion and institutional need and captured the interest and imagination of not only those involved but also multiple constituencies. When superordinate goals are not present or well-articulated groups can quickly unhinge under conditions of stress. Further, when projects require large time commitments, people need to be sustained by an idea and a purpose bigger than their own self-interests.
M. Successful Characteristic: CCSC exhibited a bias for action and an “intrapreneurial” spirit, introducing both product and process innovations within an existing organizational setting.

A bias for moving ideas into action was among the most puissant characteristics of the CCSC. It is the culminating byproduct of all the previous characteristics evidenced and explicated in our findings. Ideas and creativity, while abundant in organizational settings, are insufficient to generate a bias for action. “Climate factors” are a necessary progenitor condition and the CCSC evidenced many of the climate factors that release creativity and energize the “dreamers who do” (Pinchot, 1985; Kanter, 1983; Perlman, Baron, Gueths, Weber, 1988; Osborne and Gaebler, 1993; Harvey and Drolet, 1994).

Pinchot (1985) coined the term “intrapreneur." In his book, Intrapreneuring: Why You Don’t Have to Leave the Organization to Become an Entrepreneur, he defined the intrapreneur as “Any of the ‘dreamers who do.” Those who take hands-on responsibility for creating innovation of any kind within an organization. The intrapreneur may be the creator or innovator but is always the dreamer who figures out how to turn an idea into a profitable reality” (Pinchot, 1985, p. ix). Harvey and Drolet (1994) define the intrapreneur as “the internal organizational version of the entrepreneur”(155). Kanter (1983) defines innovation as “the generation, acceptance, and implementation of new ideas, processes, products or services” (p. 20), within an existing organization. Intrapreneurs are considered innovators and produce innovations within existing systems. The work of the CCSC constituted an innovation, its members intrapreneurs with a bias for action, taking hands on responsibility for generating, gaining acceptance, and implementing an innovation within an existing organizational setting (Kanter, 1983; Pinchot, 1985; Harvey and Drolet, 1994). The pay-offs for creating group and committee climates that encourage intrapreneurship, leading to innovations are considerable. Mossaverrahmani (1995) identified seven pay-offs for creating intrapreneurial teams including increased ideas; increased energy; increased experimentation; increased teamwork, commitment, and ownership; increased integration; increased potency; and increased dominance.

Implications for the Future

Consciousness of diversity factors does not of course in itself create a smoothly multicultural process. Deliberate diversification of committees can overwhelm members of minority groups with work and occasionally stultify interaction, where relations appear to be too managed (from the top). However, the benefits of mixing diverse viewpoints, interactional styles, and cultures in teams are very powerful.

Groups may wish to consider experimenting with explicit as well as implicit norms that feature valuing the power of ideas over positional power. This may have a number of benefits, most of them related to learning, community, and willingness to take risks. Similarly, groups should try to incorporate open-ended dialogue throughout the tenure of their effort.

“Tin cupping” is a strategy fundamental to group life and is an especially powerful tool for groups that form spontaneously to emergent institutional needs and aspirations. It foments interdependency, mutuality, and reciprocity. Typically, appointments to committees, task forces, and projects are made based on roles and positional and or functional authority. However, personal interests and relationships should also be taken into account.

In considering bringing on-line highly complex, original initiatives that must satisfy multiple constituencies, it might be wise to consider the role of the “group knitter.” This should be someone who holds the group together, has a personal passion for the project, is a trusted servant of the group, and is preferably not in a position of formal authority.
Cal Poly Pomona is an extraordinarily complex system and the persistent use of the accordion model may be the essence of shared governance. The accordion model is frankly time intensive. Through its use, though, and through incorporation of the three-phase approach, decisions find more traction, gain greater ownership, and have greater probability of being institutionalized. The ultimate test is the degree to which multiple constituencies “see themselves” in a final product. The more constituents that see themselves in an effort, the more support, buy-in, community, and trust are generated. This is then, the essence of a shared vision.

Superordinate goals capture the imagination as well as the highest ideals of a group or community. Their importance is evidenced when group members transcend individual, departmental, divisional or parochial aspirations. Superordinate goals sustain the group, creating cohesion, and focus the efforts and energy of the group and the larger community over the long haul. They do not have the effect of submerging diverse characteristics of the population or subverting democratic process. Rather, the diversity dialectic is one of the creative engines for community growth.

Ideas and creativity, while abundant within groups and committees, are insufficient prerequisites for igniting “the dreamers who do.” Climate factors are progenitor conditions necessary to release creativity, move ideas into action, generate innovation, and ignite the intrapreneurial spirit.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the structure and operation of a successful group, CCSC, at Cal Poly Pomona. Not only was the experience of the meetings and other activities of the committee a positive one for members, but the goals of its organization (to draw up and disseminate a rigorous, comprehensive, appropriate campus climate survey that would elicit extensive input) were met in full. Through the process of reflective learning, behaviors perceived to be most effective in promoting peak experiences (process and product) within this committee were examined. Since the university lives and breathes through the efforts of many task forces, steering committees, and other groups, it can be argued that they are at the heart of any institutional transformational effort, and therefore worthy of study. Furthermore, since the issue of diversity and the need for cohesive action across divisions are of no small importance to the future of the university, we believe the CCSC experience of these matters will be valuable to many others.

The authors invite the campus community to consider a broader dialogue about groups and their behavior, particularly mining those features of group life and effort that are perceived to be most successful. The seeds of a very rich and unique process revolution are nested in documenting positive and effective group experiences. The use of reflective learning or what Senge (1990) refers to as “the learning organization” is a central feature of this process revolution. While the CCSC experience is far too narrow and limited to predict or even lay claim to having established a successful or collective model, it is a useful beginning. In fact, many models, each appropriate to the particular sub-culture or group, will and should emerge. Groups are invited to reflect on any aspects of their work and draw out features to be discussed, published, and replicated across the academy. It is conceivable that with additional research, we will identify unique models of peak group experiences, rooted in the shared context of Cal Poly Pomona, along with models common to many settings. True transformation occurs when successful features of an existing culture are honored, heralded and widely practiced. This reflective study in group effort attempts to engage the academy in that practice.
References


