

A Counselor's Tale: The Need for Cultural Awareness

Culturally responsive (CR) leadership permeates all leadership practices and consists of several domains including developing critical consciousness, supporting cultural knowledge development, and advocating for social justice within and outside of the school walls. This case focuses on the need to ground CR leadership in critical self-reflection and cultural consciousness by exploring the relationship between a White principal and his first leadership team member of Color who brings a different, bi-cultural perspective to his work. Assumptions that fill the void left by a lack of cultural knowledge lead to damaging effects including tokenism and stereotype threat.

Keywords

Counselor role, tokenism, hiring practices, cultural awareness

Case Narrative

Skyline Fine Arts Academy is a six-year-old private secondary school for grades 7-12 in the U.S. Southeast launched initially by a large endowment from a local philanthropist who made millions of dollars in the technology industry. Disappointed by the lack of diversity in her industry, Val Reynolds began Skyline Fine Arts Academy to grow a new generation of skilled students from all parts of her community, particularly the underserved neighborhoods. Reynolds, one of three women on the seven member Board of Governors, serves as Chair. All the members are long-time friends of hers with backgrounds in technology businesses. One board member is Latina, one member is African American, the remaining five, including Reynolds, are White.

Skyline sits on the edge of a large urban center, a city boasting a population of just under 800,000 and growing rapidly. Most recent counts show that in 10 years the average age of area residents has dropped from 35 to 32.5 and the portion of White residents has shifted from 52% to 45%. During this same period the African American population remained steady at 20%, and the LatinX and Asian populations have grown.

The school has seen similar changes in its student demographics. Each cohort is larger and more racially and ethnically diverse. The current school population of 211 is 47% African-American, 12% Latinx, 19% Asian, and 11% White. Each year Skyline Fine Arts Academy has added a new grade level and this year sees their first graduating class, an event watched by the local media and community at large. The city is waiting to find out if all the promises that accompanied the founding of the school will be fulfilled

Current Leadership

Rob Barnett, Reynolds's nephew, has served as Principal of Skyline Fine Arts Academy since the school's opening and has felt pressure to show the community an outstandingly successful first graduating class. As a White former public school math teacher and football coach, Barnett largely owes his leadership style to his athletic experiences. Reynolds and the board have contributed the consistent growth in student enrollment to Barnett's effective leadership, though he has had some missteps in speaking with the press and public. He is representative of many of the school's faculty, 95% of whom are White and most of whom come to Skyline with at least some professional public school experience. When the race of the all Black cafeteria and custodial staff is considered, the percent of the school's faculty and staff who are White is reduced to 81%. This is the statistic the school provides in press releases and flyers to potential funders.

Reflecting the growth of the student population, administrative demands at Skyline have exploded. Barnett knows he needs help on the administrative team, particularly with public speaking and press demands, but he worries about adding someone to the staff and disrupting the collegiality he enjoys. In his public school work experience he developed the opinion that having too many principals muddies the vision and complicates the chain of command. Currently he serves as the school's only principal with leadership support from two teachers who have the additional title of Dean of Students, and one counselor, all White women with whom he has developed a very comfortable working relationship.

Recently the board has been presented with the opportunity to grow Skyline's endowment with a substantial contribution from a private donor, contingent on the school moving toward creating a faculty that matches the racial profile of its student population. As they consider how this might be accomplished, they recognize that expanding the leadership team to include a person of color would be a visible signal of their commitment. Speaking for the board, Reynolds has instructed Barnett to find a place in leadership for a person of color. After consulting with the Deans of Students, Barnett determined that a second school counselor would help relieve some of the administrative workload without disrupting their current leadership practices.

The Candidate

Of all the applicants considered, one stood out, Hammad Zardari. Zardari's strong academic credentials first drew Barnett's notice. Reference check phone calls further built Barnett's confidence in Zardari, and Zardari's ability to bring cultural diversity to the leadership team was key to his fitness for the position.

Having grown up a first generation American of Pakistani descent educated in America, Zardari developed two sets of value orientations, one from his parents and one from the public schools he attended. This bicultural lens gives Zardari the ability to navigate in spaces Barnett doesn't feel comfortable in. On the other hand, holding two value systems has meant that Zardari sometimes has had to reconcile conflicting norms. For example, as a teen he challenged some of his parents' decisions, something neither his mother nor father did in their youths but that many of his school friends did with ease.

Hammad Zardari was excited about interviewing for a new position as counselor at Skyline Fine Arts Academy in the summer before the school year began. After teaching literature for four years at a public high school, Zardari, Mr. Z. to the students, discovered that what he loved most about his job was connecting with students one-on-one, counseling them through problems, and encouraging them in their plans for the future. He returned to school, earning a master's degree in school counseling at night. In alignment with his degree program's strong focus on serving the affective needs of individual learners, Zardari prepared to respond to and support the needs of each learner. During his studies Zardari developed a passion for addressing the needs of students of Color. Through reading, discussing, and thinking about the model minority myth, he has come to recognize the damaging effects this bias can have on Asian students, including those from South Asia, such as Pakistani, Indian, and Bangladeshi, in the school system, particularly those who have an undiagnosed learning disability or emotional concern. As an American of Pakistani decent, he has found himself the victim of stereotyping and biases, both positive and negative, and he is determined to look out for the needs of all students and treat them as the complex individuals that they are. Researchers have found that teachers and school leaders tend to overlook the needs of Asian students believing that they have

inherent qualities, for example intelligence and perseverance, that make them successful in school without the school having to accommodate them.

At the interview, Barnett was impressed with Zardari's enthusiasm and professionalism. In fact, as he continued to listen to Zardari, Barnett thought to himself, "I'm glad to find those qualities in a Pakistani applicant." Having had trouble in the past developing comfortable working relationships with African American colleagues, he was not eager to bring a Black counselor on the team, but he had found Asian co-workers to be hard-working and cooperative. When Zardari asked about what percent of his time would be available for direct student interaction, as opposed to the administrative duties many counselors are assigned, Barnett assured Zardari, "No worries. We don't always do things the standard school way here. We all pitch in - it's a team effort here. We put a high price tag on job flexibility. How do you anticipate that flexibility fitting into your job as counselor?" In response, Zardari spoke about the priority he placed on serving each student's needs continuing, "There is no doubt that flexibility is key in school counseling. We must be prepared to accommodate the variety of student needs we see and assess and reassess on a near constant basis the best approaches and use of resources." He chuckled, "It's invigorating to know I'll get to exercise so many skills, wear so many different hats, in service of students." Before concluding, Barnett asked Zardari if he had any questions. Zardari asked, "I know this year is Skyline Fine Arts Academy's first graduating class, but also its largest 7th grade class. Those two student populations will need very different kinds of support, and of course there are so many more needs in such a diverse population. How do you envision the counseling department most effectively distributing its time and other resources?" Barnett answered that he had a hands-off leadership style, "I think everyone works best when they know what is needed and run with it. You are the counselor, you

know better than I do what the students need from you.” Leaving the interview, Zardari felt assured he would have the space to design his counseling job the way that would best serve students.

Before the school year begins

Upon being hired, before the new school year began, Zardari dedicated hours to designing his office to be a place where students felt welcomed and comfortable to express themselves. Zardari was most passionate about connecting with the students and demonstrating to each that they were seen and heard - it is why he became a counselor. During the teacher workdays that preceded the start of school, he was not surprised to notice that once again he was working with a predominantly White faculty and knew, from past experiences in schools, he would have to be hyper vigilant of his words and actions. Like was standard practice in every American school and work environment he has experienced, Zardari introduced himself to his new colleagues as Hammad. Still, most of his co-workers quickly took to addressing him as Mr. Z. like the students did. He likes when students call him Mr. Z.; it feels warm and respectful, but more importantly it is the first step in establishing a counseling relationship. But when his colleagues use “Mr. Z,” he feels distanced and wonders if their reluctance to use “Hammad” is a sign of discomfort with his heritage.

Meeting his colleagues

Zardari took pride in being a student-centered educator, an instructional practice highly emphasized in his education and counseling preparation. Thus, he always worked to put his students first, even if it meant at times skipping lunch and working late hours to get his other duties completed. His fellow counselor Alyssa had twice invited him to join some of the teachers after work at The Wagon Wheel, a predominantly White country-and-western-styled bar

just a few blocks from the school, but in addition to working late, that wasn't a place in which he felt particularly comfortable. When Alyssa mentioned his invitation declines to her colleagues at the bar, someone suggested that in her experience Pakistanis and Indians like to socialize in their own group. Another teacher said that he knows that Pakistanis are Muslim and refuse to drink alcohol. They agreed that they shouldn't continue to extend happy hour invites. Skipping the teacher lounge at lunch and missing after work socials were building Zardari a reputation of aloofness among some of his colleagues. Over time, fewer and fewer efforts were made to help include Zardari in faculty events.

Zardari was happy, however, to attend the kick-off faculty breakfast held at the end of the first month of school in the teachers' lounge. At the event, several faculty members were praising Kate, a teacher from a small re-decorating committee that had worked hard over the summer to stretch a meager budget into a transformed teacher's lounge. The new lounge had a shabby-chic country theme with distressed painted wood furnishings, washable slipcovers, and throw pillows made from mattress ticking and old scraps of quilts. Kate noticed that Zardari didn't say anything about the space and mentioned this to her fellow committee member Alyssa.

The problem

As the school year unfolded, Zardari found himself spending more time on tasks such as key club sponsor, field trip chaperone, and lunchroom monitor, but at least those duties kept him in direct contact with students. A large amount of his time was also spent on student scheduling, academic grade checks, and preparing for school-wide standardized testing, tasks which he had understood to be the purview of the Deans. Recently, Barnett required him to help with publicity and fundraising events, responsibilities which were not mentioned during his hiring process and typically were not the role of the school counselor. Barnett and the board viewed

Zardari as a fantastic representative to the community, essentially serving as the face of Skyline Fine Arts Academy. In Barnett's eyes, Zardari was well-spoken, if not completely comfortable with public speaking, and the board was happy to be able to counter the narrative that Skyline was emblematic of predominantly White faculties serving mostly students of Colors.

Zardari helped raise \$50,000.00 for Skyline Fine Arts Academy in six months. It did not escape his attention that the majority of funders he met with were of South Asian origin interested in supporting Skyline Academy's increasing Asian student population. When meeting with the powerful local chamber of commerce and rotary club, both with predominantly White memberships, Barnett did not request Zardari's participation. Zardari recognized that he had been selected for certain speaking engagements strictly because of his ethnicity, and although he did not share his disdain for this racist practice with Barnett, he was growing very weary of it. He also noticed that the only times students' racial/ethnic backgrounds were a central part of leadership discussions were in relation to fundraising and publicity.

In response to the demanding schedule of fundraising events, Zardari had to limit his one-on-one time with students, and he could carve out no time to socialize to help forge relationships with fellow faculty members. Students complained that Zardari was never in his office and always off campus. Furthermore, even when Zardari was on campus he sometimes had to keep his door closed in order to meet deadlines with administrative paperwork.

Frustrated, Zardari scheduled time to bring his concern about the lack of true counseling time to Barnett's attention, "I'm hoping this is a temporary solution, but I have had to severely restrict the amount of time I am available to meet with students one-on-one because my non-counseling duties are very time intensive right now." Barnett's response was, "I'll bet you did! I'm so impressed with how hard you work. You know, not all of our students come from homes

that value education like yours did, you can really set an example for those kiddos. Just remember your fundraising efforts are benefiting every student here. You are key to this team's success! Fundraising is my top priority for you, and we always have Alyssa in the office too, so students can always get help when they need it." Zardari walked away from this meeting unsure if Barnett understood the problem that was so apparent to him. Even more defeating was the impression that his work with students wasn't valued. Maybe that wasn't the personal strength he thought it was. In any case, Barnett was clear about his priorities for Zardari's time.

Ineffective solutions

The next time Zardari spoke to Barnett about his limited counseling time was in response to an assignment to represent Skyline Fine Arts Academy at a press event off campus. Barnett responded, "I'll tell you what. I'm out of the office Friday, if it is helpful, draft Carol to your team for the day? She can help with that office work." Carol, the principal's secretary, was unfamiliar with the scheduling software the counselors used and without more preparation Zardari wasn't sure she could help. Also, when Carol came to the counseling office at Barnett's request, it was clear there was not a good workspace for her in the counseling wing. Zardari suggested to Carol that she might as well stay in her office doing her own work. Both Alyssa and Carol were taken aback by this suggestion and thought that Zardari overstepped his authority by not collaborating with them in this decision and failed to consider how they felt.

Zardari tried handing off his time-sensitive paperwork tasks to his colleague when he left the office for fundraising and press events. "Alyssa, my portion of the report is almost done. It will be easy for you to finish and add it to your bit and get it in today since I have to be away." It was clear to Zardari that as a team he and Alyssa had very different demands on their time and

their duties should be distributed accordingly. Alyssa, however, did not expect to take marching orders from a new hire with her same title and took umbrage at his presumption.

A Student in Need

Aside from attending classes, Ahmed, a senior high school student of Pakistani descent, has not significantly participated in Skyline activities. Due to his parents' divorce, which precipitated the sale of his childhood home and subsequent move to apartments for both parents, Ahmed was forced to transfer schools in his senior year. He struggled to form relationships with his peers or staff on campus. Mr. Z. was the exception. Ahmed has grown to enjoy their interactions since he arrived on campus.

At Skyline Fine Arts Academy each senior concludes the year by presenting about a yearlong personal project that combines research and volunteerism. Zardari felt honored that Ahmed chose him to serve as his faculty advisor. He was impressed with Ahmed's ability to persevere through his personal struggles to present this project. Ahmed had investigated the problem of stray animals in the city and worked with a local shelter to develop a program for neutering/spaying feral cats. However reticent Ahmed was to forge connections on campus, he had definitely connected with the animals at the shelter. Having worked closely together in the weeks leading up to the presentation, Zardari knew how passionate Ahmed was about this project. It was unclear if Ahmed's parents would attend the presentation, but Ahmed did not doubt that Zardari would be there to support him through this final milestone of his high school career.

Crisis of Priorities

As Zardari gathered his walkie-talkie to attend Ahmed's presentation in the school's auditorium, Barnett called for Zardari to come to his office. Zardari attempted to explain that he

was on his way out, but Barnett insisted “it should only take a minute, but we need a full court press on this thing.” Having had no warning about this meeting, Zardari assumed that his presence couldn’t possibly be needed for long, but when he entered Barnett’s office, he found a room full of board members and potential financial donors. Simply appropriately greeting each would take some time. When he tried to excuse himself from the meeting promising to return after his prior commitment, Reynolds subtly insisted he stay, “but Mr. Z., before you escape you must tell us more about the new seventh grade initiative. How is it going so far? Will we be able to expand it to the rest of the middle school?” Unable to leave without being rude, Zardari was forced to engage in solicitations of funding on behalf of Skyline for the next hour. As Zardari finally arrived at the auditorium hoping to make it for the end of Ahmed’s presentation, he found he had missed the entire presentation.

The next morning, Zardari waited for Ahmed by the bus loop for his opportunity to apologize and explain that he was pulled into a meeting just before Ahmed’s presentation. As Ahmed stepped off the bus and began to walk toward the school doors, Zardari called out to him. Ahmed continued to walk, changed directions, and ignored the calls of his counselor. Visibly upset, Ahmed entered the school, letting the door slam behind him.

This was Zardari’s breaking point, he could no longer tolerate not being allowed to serve students the way he felt he needed to. It was in that moment, that he began marching towards Barnett’s office determined to make his concerns clear. Things would have to change if he was to continue working at Skyline Academy. As Zardari formulated his argument, his pace increased with each passing reason. Bypassing secretary Carol who he did not allow the opportunity to gatekeep, Zardari walked into Barnett’s office determined to speak his mind. Before he could begin, he realized Barnett was not alone. The Chair of the Board, Reynolds,

was sitting across from him, surprised by this unannounced entrance that was so unlike Zardari. Noticing Reynolds, Zardari remembered how she insisted he stay in the funder meeting and miss Ahmed's presentation. "If she wants to be so involved in school operations, she should be the one talking to all these funders and let me do my job," he thinks. Zardari decided not to let her presence deter him from his mission of conveying his desperation for change.

"Mr. Barnett," Zardari began, "you have to find someone else to take on all these fundraising duties."

"Hammad," Barnett responded calmly, "Sure. We can reschedule tomorrow's lunch if we need to. Maybe we could set up a golf time - what do you think Val? You do play golf, don't you, Hammad? Anyway, what is going on?"

"I missed Ahmed's senior presentation yesterday and he won't even speak with me today."

"Ahmed? I wouldn't worry about that. He has never caused a problem; he's a good kid. I'm sure he will come around."

"I'm not so sure about that. But truly, it's more than just Ahmed. As I've mentioned before, I simply don't have the time I need to meet with students. They need my support, after all that's what counseling is all about."

"I don't understand, Hammad. When you have mentioned this before we always figured it out one way or another. The team is here to help, and you are here to help the team. You know how vital funds are to helping the students."

"What I can provide the students, what I was trained and hired to provide the students is counseling. I have to be with the students, not off talking to funders. I have not been able to do my work and frankly the "team" that you speak of doesn't support me. Why do I alone have

these duties? If we are a team, why isn't Alyssa helping? Students like Ahmed are suffering. Just because he hasn't been a discipline problem or failing student doesn't mean he doesn't deserve support."

Before the conversation could continue, they were interrupted by a voice over the walkie-talkie, "*We need an administrator to the auditorium IMMEDIATELY. It's Ahmed. Hurry!*"

Both Barnett and Zardari rush to the auditorium where they meet the school security guard, custodian, and a panicked Ms. Greene, Ahmed's English teacher. She explains that Ahmed was unusually friendly and at ease before class that day. She had chalked it up to relief that his project presentation was done, but then she realized he had come to class without any books, paper or pen, and found that he was chatting with classmates about giving away his watch. Alarm bells started ringing for Ms. Greene and she was determined to talk to Ahmed after class. She hadn't been able to catch him on the way out, but as it was now her off period, she decided to track him down in his next class. However, he wasn't there, and now after searching he can't be found on campus at all.

Teaching Notes

On the heels of two decades of research about the urgency of culturally responsive (CRP) pedagogy, culturally responsive school leadership is newly understood to be vital to fostering a school culture that supports CRP (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). Leaving cultural orientations, and the ways they inform professional practices, unexamined risks creating school environments that do not support all faculty, as in the case of Zardari, a bicultural individual. This lack of awareness of invisible culture can in turn create school environments that don't equitably support students either. Through this case, superintendent and campus level leaders can

explore some often hidden conflicts that lead to racial tensions, stereotype threat, and tokenism. These topics are explored in the following literature.

Tokenism

Tokenization occurs when people from marginalized groups are put in positions by people from dominant groups to be highly visible (Wingfield & J. Wingfield, 2014) or when through a lack of numerical representation people from marginalized populations find themselves working in glass offices (Kanter, 1993). The phenomenon of tokenism is nuanced and cannot be measured by numbers alone, for example men in traditionally female fields, including teaching and counseling, can find that their relative singularity is often beneficial (Wingfield & Wingfield, 2014). However, numbers and representation matter, especially for women and racial/ethnic minority employees; work environments that lack a “critical mass” of people from one’s group heighten threat vigilance, an automatic psychological response that itself takes a toll on tokens (Emerson & Murphy, 2014). Individuals who fear being singled out for their identity keep on constant guard monitoring both their self-presentation and others’ responses. Zardari was placed in this token position when he was asked to speak on behalf of the school to South Asian funders as a brand-new hire with very limited authority.

One effect of tokenism highlighted in the case is role entrapment (Kanter, 1993; Kelly, 2007). Zardari’s job is increasingly defined around his identity as a South Asian American. Zardari becomes a visual symbol for the school and his bodily presence is used to protect the school from criticism around issues of race and diversity. When jobs are circumscribed by group identity, for example when tokens are treated as “unofficial deans of multiculturalism,” they are forced to wrestle with the weighty experience of being instrumentalized agents of integration (Kelly, 2007, p. 249).

Tokens also experience performance pressure as they sense that perceptions of their job performance will be attributed to their identifying group (Kanter, 1993; Kelly, 2007; Pollack & Niemann, 2014). In part, this pressure stems from the high visibility of being a minority “because tokens are so visible, their words and behaviors are easier to recall” (Niemann, 2016, p. 216) and often result in more criticism than their non-tokenized peers, as when Kate pointedly noticed Zardari’s silence about the teacher lounge renovation and other colleagues made judgements about his not attending happy hour (Wingfield & Wingfield, 2014).

Stereotype Threat

When faced with otherwise identical environments, out-group members, like Zardari, can still have vastly different experiences from in-group members, like Alyssa and his other White colleagues. The historical legacy of prejudice and stereotyping one’s group has received, and a lack of critical-mass of in-group members in an organization, can influence an individual’s vigilance to cues indicating threat or safety. Social identity threat theory, posited by Steele and Aronson in 1995, makes explicit some of the hidden effects of stereotyping on the experiences and performance of members of non-dominant social groups in the workplace including “negative psychological and behavioral outcomes...disparities in job and career satisfaction...as well as increased turnover and absenteeism” (Emerson & Murphy, 2014, p. 509).

In addition to numerical minority status, other environmental cues could have activated stereotype threat for Zardari at Skyline. Situational cues in institutional settings, even when “communicated by well-meaning, largely unprejudiced” co-workers can signal devaluation and disrespect (Emerson & Murphy, 2014, p. 509). When his colleagues insist on calling him Mr. Z without asking permission, they send a subtle signal that his identity, and by extension he, is not respected. The Skyline teacher’s lounge is decorated in a way that signals welcome to the

dominant group but doesn't welcome others as generously. In these hidden ways, Zardari was placed on continuous alert in his new workplace.

Employing even so-called positive stereotypes also cues stereotype threat (Emerson & Murphy, 2014). Asian-Americans often find themselves the victims of the model minority myth, the belief that Asians as a group have achieved parity in American society, accessed the American dream, and can "take care of their own" without needing institutional support (e.g., counseling, learning supports) (Yu, 2006, p. 328). The stereotype attempts to erase ethnic identity, just as the term Asian, which defines well over half the world's populations and includes at least 46 national identities, can be used to dismiss the more specific needs and concerns of Asian-Americans (Emerson & Murphy, 2014; Yu, 2006). Furthermore, the "core message of the model minority concept" comforts those in the dominant culture as it promotes the idea that "individual efforts matter more than structural change" absolving institutions of any obligation to foster inclusivity (Yu, 2006, p. 330). Barnett demonstrates that he is operating under the myth of the model minority when he focuses on Zardari's being "well-spoken" rather than his discomfort with speaking. Barnett also anticipates that an Asian new hire will be more diligent and easier to work with than a Black employee. Additionally, his dismissal of Zardari's concerns about Ahmed might well stem from his belief that 'scholarly and behaved Asian' is all there is to know about the student. In fact, suicide is the second leading cause of death for Asians and Pacific Islanders, ages 10-19, in the U.S. according to the CDC, and researchers postulate that a thwarted sense of belonging maybe a key component of suicidal ideation in Asian American youth (Heron, 2017; Wang, Wong, & Fu, 2013). Both Zardari's difficulties and those of the student Ahmed were at times dangerously ignored by Skyline as a result of the expectation that they would achieve on their own.

Cultural Differences in the Workplace

Though the idea and definition of culture can be ambiguous, workplaces that experience diversity in the cultural values that participants bring to their jobs must find ways to recognize and include diverse perspectives. Neglecting this conscious and conscientious work risks silencing voices by assimilating divergence into the dominant culture (Halverson & Tirmizi, 2008). Frameworks of cultural values and descriptors vary, however based on Hofstede's (2010) work and subsequently devised frames, the concepts of individualism/collectivism (I/C) and power distance (PD) are two of the most dependable and robust terms informing culture research (Khilji, Zeidman, Drory, Tirmizi, & Srinivas, 2010). In general, Pakistani culture is grounded in collectivism, relies on high context communication, and measures much higher on a power distance scale (Hofstede, 2010; Lui & Rollock, 2017). In contrast, American culture is individualistic, relies more heavily on low context communication, and tends to reduce power distance (Hofstede, 2010; Lui & Rollock, 2017). Researchers have marked rapid and recent shifts in Pakistani workplace culture; however power distance, collectivism, and high context communication are thought to endure relatively unchanged (Khilji, 2004; Memon, Syed, & Arain, 2017; Nawab, 2011). Through the process of acculturation immigrants combine the values of their culture of origin and their second culture resulting in the rejection of some values, protection of some values, and blending of others (Miller, 2007; Vargas & Kemmelmeier, 2013). This acculturation is pointedly noticeable in bicultural individuals like Zardari who no doubt brings many Pakistani cultural values to his workplace behavior, expectations, and interactions, along with values derived from his American upbringing. For example, Zardari attended all American schools, which are based on an individualistic value orientation Barnett and most of the faculty enjoy a workplace culture that reflects their own – that of the dominant society.

Collectivism. Collectivism values group loyalty in exchange for protection, while emphasizes personal responsibility and achievement (Triandis, 2001; Hofstede, 2010). Through a collectivist lens, the well-being of the group and social responsibilities take precedence over personal fulfillment and individual choice (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2010). Zardari's willingness to speak on behalf of the school to press and funders even though it does not support his individual aims and preferences, speaks to his valuation of the collective. Barnett's appeal to the school community's financial needs, intentionally or not, were perfectly pitched to quiet Zardari's aggravation about his duties. A collectivistic worldview also encourages "fitting in" over "standing out," an especially tough prescription for Zardari who stands out as a brown skinned Pakistani among of sea of White co-workers (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, Quiroz, 2010, p. 5).

Power distance. A perspective that reflects high power distance would expect great differences in the distribution of power and respect a rigid hierarchical structure (Hofstede, 2010). In contrast to Pakistani culture, American culture values a low power distance with looser workplace hierarchies and a more even distribution of authority. Communication is not as carefully defined by the power relationship between co-workers. Zardari's reticence to defy or even question Barnett's leadership directives likely reflects a high power distance value, however he is less deferential to women in authority including his more experienced co-counselor Alyssa and board chair Reynolds. Often, the hierarchical rigidity of high power distance limits the "cross-gender" comparisons that sociologists note contribute to challenging traditional gender roles and instead that rigidity supports comparisons that "can be shaped to justify the discrepancies in [gender] group outcomes" (Glick, 2006, p. 284).

High Context. Aside from the influence of hierarchical relationships described by the power distance variable on communication, the styles and means of communication themselves can vary based on the measure of a culture's context measure. Hall (1976) describes high context cultures as those that depend on relationships and non-verbal cues and the context around communication to imply a message rather express it very directly verbally, as would be common in low-context cultures. As a high context culture with a high power distance, Pakistani communication between supervisor and subordinate would be constrained by the importance of their hierarchical relationship and rely on implicit messages over explicit. Zardari's hesitation to be very direct in his deep desire to focus his job tasks on counseling and Barnett's failure to understand or acknowledge Zardari's high-context messages point to a cultural difference that posed problems at Skyline.

Discussion Questions and Activities

Written to reflect the complex layers of personal, cultural, and professional considerations that color the real-life interactions of administrators and counselors in practice, this case offers many audiences learning opportunities. Current and future principals can reflect on how critical hiring and employee management are to cultural inclusivity, and ultimately to student success. All future education leaders can find it a useful case for exploring the signs and ramifications of tokenism and the nuanced effects of cultural value diversity on relationships among staff members. Additionally, this case will help leaders recognize stereotype threat, understand how it is manifest, and explore ways to disrupt its presence in schools.

Questions

1. In what ways did stereotyping and stereotype threat impact Zardari's experience at Skyline? How can school leaders recognize and minimize this phenomenon on their campuses?
2. Consider all the tasks and duties that encompass Zardari's job as counselor. How should the tasks be prioritized and by whom? Evaluate how cultural values like C/I might impact these decisions.
3. Tokenization grants individuals from marginalized groups access to White dominated spaces which can be perceived as beneficial to a person of color, however it also has negative implications for both the individual and organization (Delgado, 2016; Flores, 2011; Gent, 2017). In what ways is Barnett's interest in Zardari's ethnicity positive? In what ways is the focus on ethnicity negative?
4. Reading through the narrative, identify places where cultural dissonance between Barnett or other faculty and Zardari surfaced in sometimes hidden ways. How did this dissonance contribute to misunderstandings or conflict? In what ways was Zardari expected to conform to the norms at Skyline? How are the cultural norms at Skyline sustained? How could the culture at Skyline be shifted to include Zardari's and others' voices?

Classroom Activities

1. Without an on-campus Human Resources department, principals can find hiring counseling staff to be a challenging, but sporadic job task to prepare for. Even school leaders in a larger system will be responsible for contributing to a systems-wide hiring protocols. Alone or with a partner, devise a campus hiring and onboarding plan.

Consider how each part of the process can be designed to welcome and speak to a culturally diverse range of candidates.

2. Think about the hierarchical structure of Skyline or your own school. Compose your own memo that communicates to faculty and staff how to report and discuss job concerns. Consider how to best make employees feel safe and confident in surfacing issues.
3. With either Skyline or your own schools in mind, in small groups or as a whole class brainstorm and refine a list of best practices for creating a school workplace environment that welcomes non-dominant cultural values and prevents stereotype threat.
4. Imagine that Zardari is the new principal and Barnett as a veteran counselor. Role play how their interactions might be different. How can communication style change the substance of decision-making? How does culture? How do years of experience on a campus?
5. Given that schools across the country are becoming increasingly diverse, as a future leader, discuss in small groups ways you can develop knowledge of your cultural identity and those of other individuals and the influence these value orientations (i.e., individualism or collectivism) have on leadership/followership, decision-making, communication, and power. Synthesizing with the larger class your small groups' ideas, what are the commonalities and conflicts among the small group reports?

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