HRD Cohort Graduate Programs: An Approach to Creating a Sustainable Learning Community and Developmental Culture

Jerry W. Gilley
Colorado State University

Brenda Levya-Gardner
Sharon Korth
Xavier University

Jon Conbere
Sharon Gibson
University of St. Thomas

Ann Gilley
Colorado State University

HRD Cohort Graduate programs are a proven approach in developing a learning community among graduate students and creating a developmental culture, which foster learning transfer. During this innovative session, we will examine the characteristics of Cohort Graduate programs, discuss their advantages, discuss how they can be developed, marketed, maintained, and managed, discuss how they can facilitate the creation of a learning community and facilitate the creation of a developmental culture.

Keywords: Organizational Learning, Learning Communities, Developmental Culture

The purpose of this innovation session is to provide an opportunity to discuss the values and benefits of HRD Cohort Graduate programs in creating a learning community and developmental culture within an HRD Graduate program.

Goals

This innovative session will describe the characteristics of HRD Cohort Programs and examine how such programs help foster a learning community and developmental culture within an HRD Graduate Program. The goals of this session are for participants to:

1. Develop an understanding of HRD graduate cohort programs.
2. Examine the characteristics of learning communities and compare them to HRD graduate cohort programs.
3. Examine the characteristics of a developmental culture and compare them to HRD graduate cohort programs.
4. Examine the advantages of HRD graduate cohort programs.
5. Describe the components of a HRD graduate cohort program.
6. Identify ways to sustain a cohort program through developing, marketing, maintaining, and managing HRD cohort graduate programs.

Session Content

Marquardt (1996) suggests that the learning organization is an institution that learns powerfully and collectively, continually transforming itself to better manage and use knowledge for corporate success; empowering people within and outside the organization to learn as they learning, and utilize technology to maximize learning and production (229). This same description can be used to describe learning communities created in HRD Cohort Graduate Programs.

Learning Communities

The presenter of this innovation session believe that HRD Cohort Graduate programs produce a learning climate that encourages, rewards, and accelerates individual and group learning. Such a climate focuses on creativity and generative learning and encourages change. It is a climate where unexpected surprises and even failure are viewed as opportunities to learn. The climate is agile and flexible and all individuals are driven by a desire for quality and continuous improvement. Such a climate encourages the adoption of learning activities that are characterized by aspirations, reflections, and conceptualization. A climate that possesses the ability to continuously adapt, renew, and revitalize itself in response to the changing environment. Finally, HRD Cohort Graduate programs maintain climate where learning is a continuous.

As Senge (1990) stressed, "learning has very little to do with taking in information. Learning, instead, is a process that is about enhancing capacity. Learning is about building the capabilities to create that which you previously could not create" (p. 191). Quite simply, learning ultimately relates to action while information does not. The principle assumption of HRD Cohort Graduate programs, therefore, is: if the learning reservoir of our graduate students is improved, their performance capacity also will improve.

HRD Cohort Graduate programs and their faculty members:
1. alter the learning environment to support and encourage learning and its application on-the-job,
2. link learning to practical problems that student encounter daily,
3. communicate the importance of a learning community,
4. demonstrate their commitment to a learning community,
5. provide a learning environment that encourages continuous learning and improvement,
6. encourage individual involvement and group involvement,
7. embrace continuous, adaptive, improvement oriented learning approaches through out a student graduate's school experience
8. believe that principal objective of a learning community is simply to encourage and facilitate *learning*, which requires a climate for learning transfer (adapted from Marquardt, 1996, 180 – 191; Morris 1995).

When these characteristic are present in a HRD Graduate program, faculty members will demonstrate the importance of improving learning capacity as well as encouraging self-directed learning behavior on the part of all graduate students.

Developmental Culture

The primary purpose for creating a developmental culture is to provide a learning environment that encourages *change* within an individual. One way of creating this type of environment is by engaging in critical reflective activities (Mezirow, 1997). The outcome of such change is known as *new meaning,* which we define as reconfiguration and understanding of oneself. Morris (1995) contends that such revelations alter an individual to the point that he or she can never return to his or her original state. Thus, individuals desire to change the way they interact on a daily basis.

Another purpose of a developmental culture is to create conditions where c*ontinuous growth and development* is encouraged. Gilley and Maycunich (2000) suggest that continuous growth and development is a process of never-ending expansion, taking into account new and different things, the outcome of which is improved *renewal and performance capacity.* As a result, individuals improve their reservoir of performance capabilities, which can be drawn upon when needed.

In summary, creating a developmental culture requires HRD graduate programs to foster an environment where individual growth and development is paramount. It also encourages HRD graduate programs to create conditions where individuals are encouraged, rewarded, and appreciated for their individual growth and development. Furthermore, developmental cultures need faculty members who prescribe to a philosophy which demonstrate their appreciation for and value of individuals contributions - one that reveals a lifelong commitment to individuals and a dedication to their well being.

Outcomes of Adopting a Learning Community Philosophy and a Developmental Culture

There are two principal outcomes of adopting a learning community philosophy and a developmental culture. They include:

1. Overcoming Fear in the Learning Environments
2. Establishing Rapport with Graduate Students

Overcoming Fear in the Learning Environments

Learning environments that are full of fear are very unpleasant, full of tension, and anxiety filled (Ryan and Oestreith, 1998). Under such conditions, it is difficult for individuals to implement learning on-the-job. However, some faculty members do not think they have done a good job unless all of their individuals fear them, which is simply wrong (Gilley & Boughton, 1996).

Fear is one of the primary reasons that individuals do not successfully implement learning on-the-job (Jensen, 1998). Moreover, fear destroys individual morale, confidence, damages lives, destroys relationships, stifles growth or limits entrepreneurial spirit. To eliminate fear, faculty members need stop treating individuals with a lack of respect and with a cavalier, dismissive attitude (Ryan & Oestreith, 1998).

Establishing Rapport with Graduate Students

One of the best ways of creating positive learning environment is for graduate faculty members to develop unconditional positive regard for their graduate students. This is sometimes defined as rapport. It is not simply a superficial relationship but a deep concern for the well being of people. It is demonstrated when graduate faculty members are as interested in their graduate students as they are in the results they produce. In short, rapport is established through the sincere interest in, and acceptance of, individuals.

When rapport has been established, individuals feel free to express their opinions, ideas, beliefs, and attitudes. Once established, individuals are encouraged to engage in learning transfer activities without which many individuals may never attempt to apply new knowledge or skills on the job.

Description of Format

This innovative session will use a panel discussion format to discuss the following issues and topics:

Time	Topic	Approach
10 minutes	Introductions (chair and panelists)	Ice Breaker
50 minutes	1. Characteristics HRD graduate cohort programs.	Discussion
	2. Components of a HRD graduate cohort program.	Discussion
	3. Sustainability of HRD a cohort program through their development, marketing, maintenance, and management.	Discussion
	4. Advantages of HRD graduate cohort programs in creating learning community and developmental cultures	Discussion
30 minutes	Question and Answers	Questions/answers between panelists and attendees

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