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THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MANAGERS IN THE
LEARNING ORGANIZATION

A Thesis in

Adult Education

by

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ABSTRACT

There has been much discussion in the fields of human resource development (HRD) and adult education on workplace learning. HRD's focus has been on learning and performance and one framework that has received considerable attention is the learning organization. The empirical literature on the learning organization has primarily examined the performance of the learning organization and the managers' role in implementing it. However, there is never a mention of the race of these managers; further, the issue of race has been largely invisible in the learning organization literature. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of African American managers within companies that have been identified as learning organizations, with particular attention to their career development in these contexts.

Qualitative research was utilized, with a basic interpretative approach, to explore this phenomenon. Thirteen managers, seven females and six males, who were employed by a learning organization were interviewed. Critical Race Theory and the learning organization guided the theoretical lens for this research. The data collection utilized in-depths interviews that were tape recorded and transcribed. Data were then analyzed utilizing the constant comparative method to uncover emerging themes.

The findings of this study revealed that the learning organization impacted various aspects of the career development of these African American managers. First, the career entry of these managers was either influenced by the historical context in which they entered the workplace or the cultural capital they possessed. Second, these managers engaged in learning opportunities that would further their careers. Formal

learning including graduate degrees and management development programs and the informal learning activities focused on mentoring. Third, these managers reported that the race relations in their organizations were positive. However, there were several indications that race did impact their careers, such as the lack of African Americans in management and the types of positions that were available to them. Lastly, the managers were unfamiliar with the framework of the learning organization, but certain elements of this framework did resonate with them, such as team learning, personal mastery and systems thinking.

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CHAPTER I

The first chapter of this dissertation presents the introduction, purpose of the research study, conceptual/theoretical framework, methodology of the study and definitions of pertinent terms. It provides the necessary background and rationale for this research study, which focused on the exploration of race as it relates to the learning organization, specifically the experience of Black managers within this organizational framework.

INTRODUCTION

Diversity has received growing attention and become a topic of interest for many in adult education and human resource development (HRD). One reason that this has become an important topic is because of the changing demographics in America. The Workforce 2000 report indicates that more women and people of color are entering the workforce and are represented in a variety of positions (Cox, 2001; Cross, 2000). Further, Aronson (2000) suggests that there will be a continued increase in certain minority groups between the years of 1998 and 2008, and that "white women will account for 29% of the workforce, Hispanics will account for 16.2% and Blacks 16.5%" (p.49). In addition, there is a greater presence of Asian and Asian-Americans in the workforce as well as immigrants from all parts of the world. Thus, it is clear that there is growing diversity in the American workplace.

In the past decade, diversity has become a multibillion dollar industry (Hansen, 2003). This growth has caused some division in the human resource field because there has not been consensus on how to define diversity. Joplin and Daus (1997) note that "diversity encompasses any characteristic used to differentiate one person from others...

and includes differences across gender, race, age, physical ability, sexual orientation, religion, skills, and tenure in the organization" (p. 3). This definition is vague, and broad; it includes a wide variety of social groups. While inclusion of a wide variety of groups is positive on the one hand, it has become problematic because of the confusion surrounding this term. Diversity has come to encompass anything that can set an individual apart (Cox, 2001; Cross, 2000). As a result, diversity has become an ambiguous term and individual organizations dealing with diversity tend to define it for themselves.

Specifically within the field of adult education that focuses on learning in adult higher education and community-based education, the dominant discourse on "diversity" entails trying to challenge power relations based on structural factors of race, gender, and class (Cervero & Wilson, 2001; Guy, 1999; Sheared & Sissel, 2001; Tisdell, 1995). However, for the most part, in the HR literature, structures of power and oppression are not discussed or dealt with directly (Bierema, 1998; Fenwick, 2000) because HRD's main focus is on learning and performance. In fact, Bierema (1998) argues that the experiences of ethnic and gender minority groups, in the research, are ignored; yet these issues "have the most impact on organizational dynamics" (¶16). Therefore, the position that an organization takes in reference to incorporating ethnic groups or women will influence the interaction among its members.

Cox (2001) states that there are three positions that an organization can take towards diversity, which would include racial diversity. Monolithic, the first perspective, is when organizations show little interest in diversity and the majority group, White people, establishes the values while the members in the minority are expected to conform

to their values. The second perspective, Pluralistic, includes members from diverse backgrounds (people of color and women) in their organization and creates programs through affirmative action that seek to remedy the lack of minority representation in their organization. The last perspective, according to Cox, “managing diversity” can enhance creativity and innovation, decrease turnover and absenteeism and improve decision making and problem solving abilities. Managing diversity entails developing practices in organizations that will enable persons from diverse backgrounds to work together effectively. Moreover, there are several benefits for the organization when they can deal effectively with diversity or manage diversity.

Cox (2001) argues that managing diversity has been beneficial in four areas. First, diversity improves the problem solving and decision making in work groups. Second, creativity and innovation is enhanced which means that diverse groups are able to develop and create profitable ideas. Third, talent is valued and there is a decrease in turnover and other costs associated with dissatisfied employees. Of course, workplace satisfaction can be manifested differently for different groups but because of the confusion of the term “diversity”, the remainder of the discussion will be specifically on racial diversity. The case of AT & T provides an example of an organization that has successfully managed racial diversity.

Since the mid 1980’s, AT & T has recognized that since they are an international company they need to have diverse perspectives. They have established effective policies and procedures that assist in the recruitment and career development of racial minorities and women (Sherman, Bohlander, & Snell, 1999). For instance, they have a career development program that mentors minority talent and provides them with the

training and career resources that they need to guide their career development. In fact, AT & T has been recognized for incorporating diversity within their management ranks and was called by *Black Enterprise*, one of the best companies for African Americans to work (1992).

Watkins and Marsick (1999) recognized AT & T as a “learning organization”, a term developed by Peter Senge (1990). In *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge defines the learning organization as an “organization where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (Senge, 1990, p. 3). Senge (1990) also suggests that there are five disciplines that are integral to the learning organization: systems thinking, personal mastery, shared vision, team learning and mental models. According to Senge, the learning organization helps combat the challenges that an uncertain environment can bring. AT & T was deemed a “learning organization” by Bencivenga (1995) and Watkins and Marsick (1999) because top management uses system thinking principles to deal with complex problems; they have found that taking a linear approach to problem solving is a slow process. These authors argue that within the framework of the learning organization, employees are able to respond more effectively (Bencivenga, 1995) using the five disciplines that assist the learning organization in effective operation.

A major premise of the learning organization is that learning in teams is integral to creating and learning within the organization through a collaborative process; “if teams learn, they become a microcosm for learning throughout the organization” (Senge, 1990, p.236). Senge argues that the learning that these teams will engage in has the ability to

transform the organization because it can serve as a model for how tasks will be accomplished. Another component for the learning organization is that there is a vision that drives the members of the organization. Therefore, if the vision compels the incorporation of diversity, its members seek to realize its fulfillment.

More specifically, Marquardt (1996) has stated that learning organizations that are diverse, which would include racial diversity, are able to compete more effectively in the global market and this sentiment has been echoed by others (Iles, 1994). Even though this argument has been made, there is a lack of empirical literature to support it. As Cox (2001) points out, there is literature that has concluded that diverse groups are more effective problem solvers and better decision makers; however, this data was based on research "studying the effects of minority opinions and not differences of social or cultural group identity" (Cox, 2001, p. 15). This means that the research did not necessarily include diverse individuals but, individuals that held differing views; the conclusion that had been drawn from this is problematic because it assumes that diverse individuals and individuals with differing opinions are similar.

At first glance, Senge's (1990) discussion of the five disciplines of the learning organization with its emphasis on team learning and Marquardt's discussion of the importance of diversity might suggest an espoused ideology of the learning organization that might support diversity. However, how to implement a process that would enable one to incorporate diversity within the learning organization in light of the vagueness of this framework is questionable. There has been research done on the managers in learning organizations and their role in facilitating the learning of their subordinates; this learning occurs within mentoring relationships and other relevant career development

experiences. An abundance of the empirical literature has been on the role of management within the learning organization (Coad & Berry, 1998; Ellinger, 1997; Ellinger, Watkins & Bostrom, 1999; Hodgkinson, 2000; Johnson, 2002). For instance, Ellinger, Watkins & Barnas (1999) examined the role of managers and how they facilitated learning in the learning organization. Their research was important because it discussed the specific behaviors that managers engaged in that identified themselves as learning organizations. This research utilized four organizations that had been identified as learning organizations and interviewed 12 managers in senior or middle management, who were noted as outstanding facilitators of learning. They found that managers who facilitated learning in the learning organization empowered others and that these managers encouraged problem solving, feedback and solicited their employees' input with regard to barriers to learning. However, the race of these managers or their subordinates was not revealed; thus it is likely that most of the managers were white. Further, Dirkx (1999) critiqued this study because it did not take into account sociocultural and political contextual factors. Specifically, sociocultural factors would include exploring race, gender and class and the impact that it had on the interaction between these managers. Thus far, there is a lack of research that attends to the sociocultural factors that impact the workplace.

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

The purpose of this study was to explore how the learning organization impacts African American managers. This study is significant because it will address several gaps in the HRD and adult education literature. First, there has been a lack of research in the field that addresses how the learning organization has impacted the Black manager.

The learning organization has empirical literature in three main areas. The first area discusses the manager's role in creating the learning organization whereby the role of managers in the learning organization can be described as the driving force of the learning organization (Coad & Berry, 1998; Hodgkinson, 2000; Johnson, 2002) or facilitating the learning of their subordinates (Ellinger, 1997; Ellinger, et. al. 1999). The second category of research looks at the performance of the learning organization and argues that typically learning organizations are better equipped to learn from their mistakes and utilize their past errors to make more informed decisions (Simonin, 1997; Terziovski, Howell, Sohal & Morrison, 2000; Voss, Ahlstrom, & Blackmon, 1997).

The last category explores how to effectively implement the learning organization (Barker & Camarata, 1998; Bell, Taylor & Thorpe, 2002; Bierema & Berdish, 1999; Elkjaer, 2001; Griego, Geroy & Wright, 2000; Thomsen & Hoest, 2001). But nowhere is there a description of the African American manager. Therefore, there is a gap in the literature that needed to explore the impact of the learning organization on the Black manager. This study is important to the field of HRD because it gives voice to Black managers and provides an understanding for how the learning organization impacts them. Insights were also gained on how to incorporate racially diverse populations into workplace organizations.

A critique of the HRD literature has been that it focuses on learning and performance (Bierema, 1998; Fenwick, 2003) and "it fails to address issues related to women and minorities, diversity, power relationships, social context or social and political change" (Bierema, 1998, ¶4). Bierema (1998) challenges HRD researchers to explore issues that have the most impact on the organization such as racism and sexism

while using research that utilizes a critical perspective. An appropriate critical perspective given the sample was critical race theory (CRT) because it explores the development of structural components that foster racism in the workplace and impede the progress of African Americans. In addition, CRT prescribes that these structures that promote racism in American society need to be challenged. Similarly, like Johnson-Bailey's (2002) research with Black re-entry women, this study was important because it gave an appropriate voice to these participants and CRT was important to understanding the data gathered from the participants.

In addition, there have been several critiques on the learning organization that highlight the inadequacies of the learning organization as a framework (Fenwick, 1998; Mojab & Gorman, 2003; Symon, 2003). For instance, Mojab and Gorman (2003) specifically argued that the learning organization includes a select segment of the organization, management, and that the concept of the learning organization "is only one of a set of strategies that organizations employ to attract and keep elite information workers who are a tiny minority of the workforce" (¶12). They also concluded that the learning organization was exclusive because marginalized individuals remain mostly at the bottom of the hierarchy, which means that the learning organization supports a structure where those in the majority of decision making positions are typically White males. Thus, building on the insight of Mojab and Gorman about the learning organization, one might conclude that because the emphasis is on a limited segment of the organization, largely White people and males in the organization, there is really little direct consideration of structural systems of race, gender and class issues. Therefore, there is a greater concentration of certain populations, such as people of color and

women, that remain primarily at the bottom rungs of the organization, and a population of White people and males in the higher levels of the organization. Providing some statistics on the trends in the workplace will illustrate the significance of this issue. In 2002, there were only three African American CEOs of the Fortune 500 companies (Daniels, 2002, ¶17). While African Americans comprise 12% of the U.S. population, in the workforce, African Americans hold fewer than 5% of executive, administrative and managerial jobs in all private sector industries, and only 0.6% of senior executive slots (Hayes, 1998, p.107).

While it is true some women and people of color are hired into the higher ranks of the organization, they are not hired in proportion to their presence in the general population. One might wonder how a learning organization can truly "manage diversity" and at the same time fail to include greater proportions of marginalized persons into greater positions of power and influence. The question remains, how does the learning organization incorporate racial diversity?

There are insights offered by the literature dealing with race and racism in the workplace which suggest implications for the development of the learning organization. One could mistakenly assume that the problems that African Americans in the workplace have experienced, such as the lack of opportunities for career advancement and placement (Brief, Buttram, Reizenstein, Pugh, Callahan, McCline & Vaslow, 1997; Cavers & Liver, 2002; Collins, 1989, 1997; Jones, 1986; Thomas, 2001) would not be a problem within a true learning organization. A true learning organization fosters the career development of its employees through mentoring and other learning opportunities (Marquardt, 1996; Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993). The claim that the diverse

learning organization can positively impact the organization needs to be explored (Iles, 1994; Marquardt, 1996). But given that thus far, issues of dealing with racial diversity or the specific experience of African Americans in learning organizations have not been explored, it is clear that research needs to be done in this area since the learning organization literature tends to focus on the role of the manager.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore how the learning organization impacts one marginalized group, the Black manager. This research was significant because business and industry has not been successful with managing or incorporating diversity into organizations and there needs to be an understanding of how the learning organization impacts a member of a marginalized group.

Guiding Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study: 1) How has the learning organization impacted the career development of Black managers? 2) What types of opportunities are there for these Black managers in the learning organization? 3) As a result of the learning organization, what key contributions have these Black managers made?

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

There were two main theoretical frameworks that guided this research. In this section of the paper they will be briefly described to illuminate how they guided the research; however, in Chapter 2, these theories will be discussed in greater detail. This research was guided primarily by, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and applied to the second framework the learning organization.

CRT is the more prominent framework because it provides a means to examine race in relation to social and historical components that are integral to understanding the perspectives of the participants. CRT prescribes that racism is a part of American society and needs to be challenged. The goal of CRT theory is to "interject minority cultural viewpoints, derived from a common history of oppression..." (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p.15). My discussion of the CRT framework will be mostly based on the work of West (2001) and Ladson-Billings, (1999). West (2001) contends that the "discussions on race should not begin with the group but with the flaws of American society- flaws rooted in historic inequalities and longstanding cultural stereotypes" (West, 2001, p.3). Therefore, the problems that Black managers are facing in the workplace today are due to a culmination of issues steeped in the fabric of America and seen throughout the history of race in the workplace. West (2001) also adds that "glass ceilings have been pierced- not smashed- by extraordinary persons of color" (p. viii). As a result, CRT added to this research because of the significance that it places on the social and historical implications of the participants in this study.

How CRT was applicable to this study becomes more obvious when one considers some of the literature about the African American experience in the workplace. While Blacks have made great strides in the modern organization, there are still problems that have emerged. The manner in which Blacks are only granted limited access in organizations is problematic. "Blacks, in fact, do not proportionally occupy certain kinds of positions, particularly those above the very bottom level of organizational hierarchies....[and they] make up less than 5 percent of management ranks and considerably less than 1 percent of senior executives" (Brief, Buttram, Reizenstein, Pugh,

Callahan, McCline & Vaslow, 1997, p.60). Furthermore, there are several barriers that have been documented in the literature, such as the lack of career advancement in organizations, (Brief et al., 1997; Cavers & Liver, 2002; Jones, 1986; Thomas, 2001) and placing Blacks in “racialized” jobs, such that these positions are not integral to the daily operation of the organization (Collins, 1989; Jones, 1986; Thomas, 2001). Therefore, these issues are integral as they relate to the learning organization and CRT was utilized to inform the research.

The second theoretical framework was the learning organization; the learning organization is a framework that assists organizations with the ever changing environment. While there are several conceptualizations of this framework, Senge's (1990) conceptualization has been the most influential. As previously stated there are five systems to the learning organization, systems thinking, personal mastery, shared vision, team learning and mental models. These systems guide the organization about how they should interact to manage knowledge and share it throughout the organization. When organizations are able to learn collectively and use that knowledge then they will become more competitive and effective. A major weakness of Senge's (1990) framework has been that it does not incorporate diversity. Therefore, in theory, a learning organization can become potentially way more effective if they begin to attend directly to racial (and other) issues of diversity in the workplace.

Overview of the Research Design and Methodology

The goal of qualitative research is to understand the meaning of a phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). The specific phenomenon that will be explored in this study is how the learning organization impacts the Black manager. "Qualitative research is an effort to

understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there" (Merriam, 2002, p.4). Therefore, the impact that the learning organization as a framework has had on African American managers needs to be examined from their own perspective. In order to accomplish obtaining the meaning from the participants, a basic interpretive approach was utilized.

According to Merriam (2002) the goal of basic interpretive research is to develop an understanding that is constructed from the interaction between the researcher and the participant. Therefore, this study followed the goals of Basic Interpretive research which include: a) examining how people interpret meaning; b) understanding how they construct their worlds; and c) understanding how they make sense of their experiences (Merriam, 2002). In addition, the researcher ensured that the stories of the participants were a collaborative process, between the researcher and participant. This includes the participant as integral to making sense of the data and as Fine (1998) has stated that research can yield subjugation of marginalized groups. Therefore, as a researcher, I took Fine's recommendations and examined my role in reference to the data.

Social critical analysis informed my research perspective and its goal was to "critique and challenge to transform and empower" (Merriam, 2002, p.327). My goal in using this perspective was to critique the learning organization as a framework. Unfortunately, the main objective of the HRD literature has been a focus on learning and performance, without any consideration of contextual factors in the workplace (Bierema, 1998; Fenwick, 2000). Contextual factors, such as race and gender, can have a great impact on the dynamics between groups. Furthermore, the critical perspective aligns

nicely with CRT's goals of bringing the minority viewpoint to the forefront and giving voice to the participant's reality (Ladson-Billings, 1999; West, 1999).

Participants for this study consisted of thirteen African American managers within learning organizations. In order to select an organization that meets the criteria of a learning organization, the researcher reviewed the mission and vision of the organization and also utilized organizations that have been previously identified in the literature. These organizations had been identified by Watkins and Marsick (1993, 1999) and Marquardt and Reynolds (1994) in their research. A purposeful sample was utilized and the criteria included: the participants were employed within a learning organization for at least three years, they were African Americans manager in the organization and they were willing to meet with the researcher for an interview.

Primarily, data was collected through face-to-face, in-depth interviews. The interviews provided the opportunity to explore components that were meaningful to the participants. The use of a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions served as a resource for the researcher to inquire about key points and also kept the interview focused. Information about the participant was collected as well as information about their career prior to working for a learning organization. Second, information about the organization that employed the participants was also collected. This information included, documents from the organizations such as organizational charts, career development resources and articles on the organization. In addition, I utilized field notes to provide the research with information about the context in which the interview was conducted. Lincoln and Guba (1998) concluded that field notes as a technique help with the accurate interpretation of the data.

These interviews were tape recorded with the obtained consent of each participant and ultimately transcribed by the researcher. Data were analyzed according to the constant comparative method, and themes emerged from the data via an inductive process. According to Maykut and Morehouse (1999) the data are not grouped in pre-determined categories but through the process of data collection and analysis themes emerge. In congruence with the basic interpretative approach, I analyzed the data and identified recurring themes (Merriam, 2002).

Significance of the Study

This study is significant to the HRD and adult education fields because of its implications for each. The learning organization has been a topic of interest for both fields, yet it has failed to produce empirical research that discusses issues of race.

Marquardt (1996) concluded that the learning organization would be able to harness the diversity within and utilize it for the organization's effectiveness in the global market place. However, this had not been proven in the empirical research and needed to be explored. Therefore, this research was important to the learning organization because it was among the first to explore race as it relates to the framework of the learning organization. Specifically, what types of career development activities are there for African Americans? Moreover, the literature on African Americans in the workplace has painted a restrictive picture for the careers of African American managers. Several researchers have shown that there is a lack of career progression and ability to gain access to key positions in the organization. The career development literature has not provided an accurate account of their experiences. This research gives voice to a group that has been marginalized.

As an adult educator, the findings of this study were important to me because of my aspirations to impact racial diversity in the workplace. As an adult educator, I wanted to know what impact the learning organization has on diversity; specifically if and how racial diversity interacted within this framework. This information was gathered based on the perceptions of these African American managers: how they see the learning organization impacting their career development? The findings of this study will assist my efforts as an adult educator in being able to help organizations understand the role that the learning organization as a framework can have on racial diversity.

In this age of increasing diversity, as an adult educator, I think it is important to understand how specific frameworks that organizations choose to adopt will impact specific groups. When diversity is not properly managed, organizations will spend more money on absenteeism and turnover (Robinson & Dechant, 1997). Since organizations are trying to deal with retaining and utilizing their minority talent, it was important for me to know if this can happen within the framework of the learning organization. Moreover, it is important for organizations to understand if this framework is effective with managing diversity and how this framework is viewed by some of its minority members.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made concerning this study at the outset:

1. One implied assumption of the learning organization is that racism does not need to be discussed, given the fact that it is virtually absent in the learning organization literature. However, on the contrary, racism does exist and manifests itself in the workplace.

2. The participants will welcome the opportunity to talk about their experiences in the workplace and the impact that the learning organization has had on racial diversity. They will provide personal accounts of their experiences in the organization and as a researcher I will be able to establish a rapport with the participants and engage them in a manner that will prompt them to share their stories.
3. Participants will be able to recall experiences clearly that demonstrate the impact that the learning organization has had on them.
4. I will be able to understand the lived experiences of the participants and be able to report their stories in a manner that accurately reflects their experiences.

Limitations of the Study

1. Since this study utilized a qualitative approach, it is not possible to generalize the findings of this study to other populations. However, it provides an understanding of the meaning that these participants attach to the learning organization. Furthermore, it is up to readers in similar situations to determine if it is applicable.
2. In qualitative research, the researcher is the main instrument of data collection and my experiences within work settings and racial diversity informs this study. Furthermore, all research, qualitative and quantitative, is the result of the interest of the researcher, which some might see as a limitation. Thus, the use of member checks were conducted after the data analysis so that the participants could assure the accuracy of the analysis and ensure that their story is illustrated in a correct manner.

3. Blacks make up less than three percent of the executive managers in Fortune 500 companies. Therefore, it was somewhat difficult to recruit persons from this group.
4. This is a purposive study and will not resemble all learning organizations; therefore, the results can not be applied to all learning organizations (that do not utilize a similar conceptualization)

The empirical research on the learning organization has been descriptive for the most part and has failed to capture its impact on the individual. One of the premises of the learning organization is that a diverse learning organization can operate more effectively in a global market place. Therefore, they presume that these organizations utilize their minority talent to produce effective business decisions. Since there is a lack of research that has been compiled in this area, this study specifically examined the impact that racial diversity had within the learning organization. It was significant because it was one of the only studies of its kind to address the African American experience within the learning organization.

Definition of the Terms

Learning organization- An “organization where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (Senge, 1990, p. 3).

Critical race theory (CRT)- It prescribes that racism is a part of American society which can be best understood when examining the historical and social underpinning of

this society. The goal of CRT is to challenge the structures that impede the progress of African Americans.

Dominant culture- Elite White men are the holders of power and individuals that are not part of this group function to serve their interests. Their worldview fosters subordination of “outsiders” such as other races, classes and genders, which serves as an interlocking system of oppression (Collins, 1990).

Organization of the Study

This first chapter briefly outlined this research study and included, the purpose, theoretical perspective, methodology and research questions. Chapter two includes the literature that was reviewed including the theoretical framework and the research that had been done on the learning organization and African Americans in the workplace. Chapter three provides the methodology that will be utilized for this study and an explanation for the sample used, data collection and data analysis. Chapter four introduces the participants and gives some background information on each. Chapter five presents the main findings. Lastly, chapter 6 covers the discussion of the findings along with conclusions, implications for the fields of adult education and HRD and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will discuss the literature that guided this research study. The focus of this research was to understand how the learning organization impacts African American managers. The exploration of the literature that informs this study is divided into four parts. It begins with a consideration of the theoretical underpinnings of the learning organization including three frameworks that discuss how to develop it. In the second section the empirical research that has been conducted about the learning organization thus far is presented. The third section of literature provides an account of the experiences of African Americans in the workplace as well as the research that has been done on Black managers. Because some authors and people of African descent use different terms to identify themselves and population groups, the terms “African American” and “Black” is used interchangeably in this paper. Lastly, the theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory (CRT), is discussed; CRT informs the research because of its understandings of the social and historical implications that have impacted the participants in this study.

The Learning Organization: Theoretical Underpinnings

The literature that will be reviewed in this section will include three conceptualizations of the learning organization as well as the empirical literature that has

been completed. The learning organization, as a concept was developed during the 1990s in the business field and became important in the modern organization. As will become evident in the discussion below, the learning organization is seen by its proponents as an approach that helps to combat the turbulent environment of the modern organization.

A distinction will be made between the learning organization and organizational learning. Gnyawali & Stewart (2003) state that organizational learning encompasses “engag[ing] in discussion and dialogue to develop shared understanding in organizations” (p.64). Some have conceptualized the learning organization and organizational learning as identical concepts (Easterby-Smith & Arauo, 1999; Heraty & Morley, 1995), yet others have emphasized that organizational learning encompasses the learning that goes on in the learning organization (Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993). Therefore, this study will deal with the learning organization, which includes the structures that define this framework rather than focusing on organizational learning as the process of engaging in learning as Gnyawali & Stewart (2003) describe it.

There are several authors that expound upon the learning organization (Marquardt, 1996; Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993) and there is also a great deal of overlap between the various definitions of the learning organization. However, the most integral definition of the learning organization (Bartell, 2001; Bierema, 1999) has been taken from Senge’s (1990) *The Fifth Discipline*, who initiated discussion of the learning organization in the early 1990s. He defined it as an “organization where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free and

where people are continually learning how to learn together” (Senge, 1990, p. 3).

Similarly, Marquardt (1996) defined the learning organization as, “...an organization which learns powerfully and collectively and is continually transforming itself to better collect, manage and use knowledge for corporate success” (p. 19). In addition, Watkins and Marsick (1993) defined the learning organization as "one that learns continuously and transforms itself...Learning is a continuous, strategically used process-integrated with and running parallel to work" (p.11).

While there are minor variations in definitions of the learning organization all authors agree that collective and continuous learning is needed in the organization. Learning becomes a resource that will promote the organization into a more effective operating mode. The definition that I will utilize of the learning organization will be that of Senge’s (1990). His definition is precise and provides clarity for the goal of the framework, explaining how it will be established. The next section of this paper will expound upon the varying frameworks of the learning organization and discuss the structures that they utilize to create it.

The Disciplines of the Learning Organization

As previously stated there are several authors who discuss the learning organization that promote different frameworks. Among the many choices, three were chosen that are well documented in the field. First, Senge’s (1990) framework was chosen because it was the first to document a viable conceptualization for implementation. Watkins and Marsick’s (1993) framework was also chosen because it is integral to the field of adult education and lastly, Marquardt’s (1996) because of its recognition in the training and development and business field.

In the first framework, Senge (1990) identified five disciplines of the learning organization: systems thinking, personal mastery, shared vision, team learning and mental models. An analysis of these five components or disciplines to Senge's framework within organizations helps the organization deal with the forces that impede their ability to learn, such as thought processes that hinder the manner in which businesses learn. Each discipline is defined in Table 2.1 on the following page, and provides a summary of the disciplines.

Table 2.1 Senge's Components of the Learning Organization

Discipline	Defined	What needs to change	How to put in practice
Systems Thinking	Seeing the whole picture and the interrelatedness of events in the organization.	Placing blame on any specific individual.	Everyone shares responsibility for the problems and everyone has the responsibility to create a solution for the problems identified.
Personal Mastery	It is an approach to one's life as a creative work. It entails the learning of the individual for their betterment.	Living life from a reactive viewpoint	Developed through a series of practices and principles which include: 1) Having a vision that emanates from the desires and the purpose of the individual. This vision causes one to strive for the best and make things happen even in the face of adversity. 2) Finding a sense of pleasure in one's work and having a connection to one's work.
Mental Models	The process of identifying, testing and improving our internal pictures of how the world works.	Examine the thought patterns, theories or assumptions used in life. These impact how one will view the information that affects our organization.	Learn new skills and implement innovation. The skills include: 1) Recognize 'leaps of abstractions' - noticing our jumps from observation to generalization 2) Expose the left hand column- articulating what we normally do not say 3) Balance inquiry and advocacy- skills for honest investigation 4) Face up to distinctions between espoused theories and theories in use-the implied theory in what we do.
Shared Vision	It is the common goal that pulls the members of the organization together. It is shared and developed by as many individuals from all levels of the organization as possible.	The upper echelon of the organization creates the vision.	Incorporate many members of the organization to create the vision. A vision should include: 1) The picture of the organization's future 2) The answer to the question: "why do we exist?" 3) The answer to the question "how do we want to act?" 4) The use of positive and proactive statements in order to create an effective vision.
Team Learning	Provide purpose through shared vision and understanding of how to utilize teams. Collective learning and collaboration with dialogue.	Explore complex issues and uncover viable solutions.	Teams engage in dialogue and discussion. Inconsistencies in thought patterns are examined and people begin to see how these inconsistencies guide their ineffective behavior and actions.

The first discipline is systems thinking, and it is about seeing the whole relationship of how things are interrelated rather than cause and effect relationships. Therefore, systems thinking creates an atmosphere where there is an understanding of how the subsystems in the organization are interrelated. Additionally, everyone shares the responsibility for problem solving and creating solutions.

The second component is personal mastery and it embodies the learning of the individual. According to Senge (1990) personal mastery involves “approaching one’s life as a creative work, living life from a creative as oppose to reactive viewpoint” (p. 141). It is a focus on the learning activities of the members of the organization and clarifies what is important relative to first the goals of the individual and then the organization. In the midst of a problem, personal mastery helps to ensure that individuals will focus on what is important.

The third discipline focuses on helping employees uncover mental models. Mental model is the “discipline of managing mental models- surfacing, testing and improving our internal pictures of how the world works- it promises to be a major breakthrough for building learning organizations” (Senge, 1990, p. 174). He describes mental models as simple generalizations or complex theories but overall they are the theories or assumptions used in life. These are powerful because they impact how one will view the world and how information will be dealt with that affects the organization.

Shared vision is the fourth discipline. Senge (1990) describes the power of shared vision and states “when people truly share a vision they are connected, bound together by a common aspiration. . . [and] derive their power from a common caring” (p. 206). The

shared vision becomes that common goal that pulls the members of the organization together to achieve that goal.

The fifth discipline, team learning is integral to the learning organization because, “if teams learn, they become a microcosm for learning throughout the organization” (p. 236). Senge (1990) argues that the learning that these teams will engage in has the ability to transform the organization because it can serve as a model as to how things will be accomplished in all areas. Teams provide a “commonality of purpose, a shared vision and understanding of how to complement one another’s efforts” (p.233). Therefore, teams are integral to the learning organization because of the collective learning that it produces. The process of dialogue that occurs within these teams helps to explore complex issues and uncover viable solutions.

The Various Frameworks of the Learning Organization

Senge’s (1990) framework uses theory taken from the business and management realm and develops a philosophical approach. However, it is not without limitations, there are concerns with how to effectively implement a learning organization. First, in reference to the system perspective, Senge provides little guidance on how to develop this in the organization. As an example, in the business environment, management typically operates based on a cause and effect mode, whereby when performance decreases, the employees within are blamed. In contrast, Senge cautions against placing blame on the individual. However, he does not provide concrete examples of how systems thinking becomes a reality and because this concept is foreign to many in the business world, it is difficult to put into practice.

Second, a great deal of responsibility is placed on the individual because they are expected to conform to the disciplines of the learning organization. Personal mastery requires individuals to find a sense of pleasure in their work. This pleasure, Senge argues, will help build a connection between the individual and work. However, this notion of finding pleasure in one's work is problematic because not all forms of work can be pleasurable. Within this concept, Senge seems to be referring to a certain group of people in the organization, managers.

A more striking difficulty is the idea that the individual's vision must align with that of the organization. Aligning the vision of all employees, is not the norm as this is unrealistic, along with the idea that various levels in the organization will develop as one. Steiner (1998) highlighted this in his study on trying to create a learning organization at a manufacturing plant. The learning organization was unable to flourish because of the differences in power between management and front line employees. Management's interest drove the intervention while the front line employees remained powerless and did not understand what this endeavor meant to them; they did not share in management's vision.

The second framework was developed by Watkins and Marsick (1993). They agree that particular strategies are needed to create and understand the learning organization. Their conceptualization of the learning organization contains several structures that organizations must implement. These structures include: creating continuous learning opportunities, promoting inquiry and dialogue, encouraging collaboration and team learning, establishing systems to capture and sharing learning, empowering people toward a collective vision and connecting the organization to its

environment. More importantly, they purport that continuous learning is an integral part of this framework and suggest that promoting learning involves continuously examining various facets of the environment and using this learning to improve the organization.

According to Marquardt (1996) the learning organization is a framework that provides an organization with an approach to dealing with the rapidly changing environment. He has incorporated Senge's five disciplines: systems thinking, personal mastery, team learning, mental models and shared vision. A sixth discipline that Marquardt has added is that of dialogue and he defines this as, the "intense, high-level, high-quality communications, listening and sharing" (p. 46). The learning that the members of the learning organization will perform is integral to enhanced performance. Therefore, the members of the organization need to be able to share this learning throughout the organization through dialogue.

There are several similarities between the various frameworks of the learning organization. Overall the frameworks agree that the intent of the learning organization is to create a more effective and responsive organization. Furthermore, these similarities are most readily observable in the structure of the organization such that there are structures that support the learning organization.

It is Senge's framework that subsequent researchers have built upon primarily, yet Watkins and Marsick (1993) and Marquardt (1996) have developed their own method to developing the learning organization. While Senge's framework is more about changing cognitive processes, Watkins and Marsick (1993, 1996) and Marquardt (1996) provide concrete examples of how to create structures that will build the learning organization.

First, all of the frameworks assert that leadership is integral to the learning organization. Leadership is seen as the force in the organization that can make or break an organization wide transformation. Leadership must change the manner in which they have performed their duties; traditional management styles, such as exerting positional authority or pursuing individual objectives, cannot work within the learning organization (Marquardt, 1996; Senge, 1990; Watkins and Marsick, 1993). Therefore, leaders need to provide employees with more freedom on how the work is carried out and extend trust and support to them. Senge (1990) argues that leadership's new role is that of designer, teacher and steward. As a designer, they are responsible for creating structures that support learning; as a teacher they are responsible for creating an environment where the employees can dialogue and learn. Lastly, as a steward, they are to be role models who empower their employees. Furthermore, the other frameworks support this conceptualization of the leadership in the learning organization.

A second component that each of the frameworks assert as important is the vision. The vision is important because it outlines the main objectives of the organization and a shared vision is seen as a force that can unite the members of the organization. The vision should come from all levels of the organization and this can create the motivation to actively pursue it (Marquardt, 1996; Senge, 1990; Watkins and Marsick, 1993). This concept of shared vision is espoused, though how it is really implemented and what employees really share in the espoused vision is of some question.

Third, team learning is integral to the learning organization and is a tool that will further the learning organization. Team learning is a process of collective and collaborative learning among members in an organization; it allows for better decision

making and this comes about as a result of dialogue among the team members. Dialogue is a process of sharing learning and listening with the intent of making the most appropriate choices. While Watkins and Marsick (1996) also value team learning, because of its ability to foster collective learning and create new knowledge, they emphasize learning habits that will enhance learning.

Fourth, an element that is key to the learning organization is critical thinking in order to promote learning. This also encompasses dialogue at the level of teams and individuals with the goal of sharing learning which also becomes an ongoing process throughout all the organization.

Fifth, the most important component of the learning organization is creating a culture of learning. The culture of the organization needs to align with the principles of the learning organization. Moreover, the principles that Watkins and Marsick (1996) support are “continuous learning, a collaborative mindset, and increased autonomy, participation and empowerment to increase the potential for flexible” (p.9) and Marquardt (1996) also espouses adopting these components. These processes will support the learning organization and are integral to the transformation and maintenance of the learning organization.

In conclusion, the structures that the learning organization must possess include leadership that is willing to take risks, the creation of a shared vision, decentralized decision making, systems for shared learning, and opportunities for learning. What is emphasized in the literature is that knowledge is stored inside the individuals and teams share this. Through dialogue organizations are able to explore their options and make more informed decision. In order to become a learning organization, the organization

provides a climate and structures that encourage learning such as, employee empowerment and communication across the various departments (Ortenblad, 2001).

The differences in emphasis among the various frameworks have resulted because authors recognized that Senge's approach was abstract with no precise direction for implementation. First, Watkins and Marsick (1996) argue that Senge's framework cannot produce change because its "focus is primarily cognitive; he wants to develop personal and organizational visions, while changing mental models to a more critical and systems perspectives" (p.9). They conclude that in order for a learning organization to result, more skills and structures need to result that will foster learning, yet Senge's model does not provide this. The components and structures that Watkins and Marsick (1993) and Marquardt (1996) support are integral to creating the learning organization and include: empowering employees with a collective vision, systems to capture and share learning.

One major difference is that Watkins and Marsick (1993) want managers to be more compassionate towards families and working mothers. They argue that managers must be knowledgeable of issues that can enhance an employee's ability to deal with the demands of having both a career and a family.

Another major difference among the various frameworks is that Marquardt (1996) recognizes the impact that globalization has on the modern organization. For instance, he states that organizations are hiring workers from outside the U.S. because there is a shortage of qualified applicants. Therefore, organizations have to deal with the influx of diverse employees. The manner in which he conceptualizes diversity encompasses ethnic and racial groups. He states that a goal of learning organizations is to "encourage/

expand diversity. . . and global mindsets” (Marquardt, 1996, p.64). However, Marquardt provides little guidance for how organizations should best incorporate this diversity goal. He states that “different and various views and ways of doing things are a source of richness rather than a problem” (p.64).

Table 2.2 provides a guideline to how the frameworks view diversity. Marquardt reasons that when organizations operate in a global marketplace, they need to understand the people in that environment. Encompassing a diverse workforce will assist in sharing the knowledge that is within and constructing informed business decisions. While Marquardt notes the impact of diversity, it is done so in two paragraphs. Furthermore, with respect to gender diversity, Watkins and Marsick (1993) highlight aspects of gender diversity but none of the authors engage the issue of racial diversity. More specifically, none of them deal with race in particular; thus more research needs to be done in this area.

Table 2.2
Learning Organization’s views on diversity

Framework	View on racial issues	View on gender issues
Senge (1990)	One paragraph discusses race consciousness and its impact on shaping one’s beliefs (p.366).	There is a chapter on balancing family and work life and there is a discussion of the challenges. But there is no plan for dealing with these issues.
Watkins & Marsick (1993)	There is a two paragraph section entitled, Affirmative practices, which addresses justice in the organization. This justice pertains to fairness and correcting unfair practices. “Whenever possible, they ensure that job hiring, placement and promotion at all levels equally reflect percentages of different groups in society (p.233)	There is a chapter on balancing family and work life. They want organizations to be accommodating to women, especially mothers, and the dilemmas that they face. “Advocate that organizations implement supportive policies, teach managers ways to reach collaborative solutions and integrate public services into the workplace” (p.218).
Marquardt (1996)	He asserts that diversity is important especially in a global market place but provides no plan of how to effectively incorporate diversity.	

Empirical Studies of the Learning Organization

This section of the paper will discuss how the empirical research has been done on the learning organization. The following databases were utilized to search for material, Proquest, ERIC, Dissertation abstracts and ABI Inform. The following key terms were used: learning organization, organizational learning, learning and organizations and knowledge management. Literature was included from 1995, which was the start of the Learning Organization Journal, to 2003 and the studies were screened for several criteria. First, the study had to explore the structures or concept of the learning organization as a system; studies that discussed concepts related to organizational learning were not included. There had to be a defined method section, and the study had to have taken place in a business setting. I found studies that fit these criteria and then did a hand search of several journals in adult education, management and organizational development fields to complete a more thorough review of the literature.

There is a distinct pattern to the empirical literature that has been done in the field. Several studies addressed the role of management in the learning organization, these studies looked at managers and their role in the learning organization (Coad & Berry, 1998; Ellinger, 1997; Ellinger, et. al., 1999; Hodgkinson, 2000; Johnson, 2002). The second set of studies addressed the performance of learning organizations (Benabou, 1999; Ellinger, Yang & Ellinger, 2000; Simonin, 1997; Terziovski, Howel, Sohal & Morrison, 2000; Voss, Ahlstrom & Blackmon, 1997). The third category addressed how to effectively implement the learning organization (Albert, 1998; Barker & Camarata, 1998; Bell, Taylor & Thorpe, 2002; Bierema & Berdish, 1999; Elkjaer, 2001; Griego,

Geroy & Wright, 2000; Thomsen & Hoest, 2001). The last category includes one study that examined diversity and its impact on the learning organization. The majority of the research was done in an organizational setting, however, there was one study (Benabou, 1999) that surveyed graduate students about their work experiences. This study was included because participants responded in reference to their experiences in their organization.

The discussion of the studies will be based on the themes highlighted in these studies and that are particularly related to this study. These include: management's role in the learning organization; performance and the learning organization; studies on how to implement it; and diversity in the learning organization. These themes are discussed below.

Management's Role in the Learning Organization

The various learning organization frameworks (Marquardt, 1996; Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993) concluded that management has a significant role in developing the learning organization. Managers within the learning organization are seen as a designer, teacher and steward. This means that managers take a more proactive role in the creation of this endeavor.

One study that put forth a strong method section and contributed to the literature was conducted by Ellinger et al. (1999). This study examined the role of managers and how they facilitated the learning of their subordinates in the learning organization. They utilized four organizations that had been identified as learning organizations and interviewed 12 managers who were noted as outstanding facilitators of learning. During the interview process they asked these managers to describe critical incidents where they

made a difference in the employees' learning. These 56 critical incidents were analyzed for content.

Ellinger et al. (1999) found that managers who facilitated learning in the learning organization empowered others and provided feedback to their subordinates on their performance and also served as a source of encouragement to them. Second, these managers wanted their employees to succeed so they sought to remove barriers that would restrain their learning in the workplace. Third, these managers were effective communicators and engaged in systems thinking to get their employees to see the big picture.

The research studies in this section discussed how managers should interact with their subordinates to create the learning organization or what management needed to do to build and maintain the learning organization (Coad & Berry, 1998; Ellinger, 1997; Ellinger, et al.,1999; Hodgkinson, 2000; Johnson, 2002). There were similar findings in the other research. First, the role of managers in the learning organization could be described in two divergent manners. Top management, as a whole, needs to be the driving force in the learning organization (Coad & Berry, 1998; Hodgkinson, 2000; Johnson, 2002; Morrison & Terziovski, 2001). In the literature this was described as management which created a climate that facilitated learning. Since management holds the key to unleashing the resources that are needed for the learning organization their support is integral to developing and maintaining the learning organization.

A second common finding was that managers who interacted with their subordinates had an impact on the facilitation of learning within the learning organization (Johnson, 2002; Morrison & Terziovski, 2001). This occurred when managers

empowered their employees. Empowerment loosened management's control and provided the flexibility needed to operate as a learning organization. The climate created encouraged them to utilize new learning in the workplace and the managers provided constructive feedback to heighten the employee's performance (Ellinger, 1997; Ellinger et al., 1999).

There were several limitations of this empirical research. First, self-report measures can yield self-report bias and this can skew the findings of the study. The respondents may have the desire to present a favorable picture of themselves and their organizations. Second, there is no generalizability because of the lack of diverse settings used and this becomes problematic when trying to transfer the findings to other settings. Another problem was that no demographics were revealed. The race of these managers or their subordinates was not discussed, thus it is likely that most of the managers were White. One researcher who noticed this as problematic was Dirkx (1999). He critiqued Ellinger et al's (1999) study because it did not take into account sociocultural and political contextual factors. Specifically, sociocultural factors would include exploring race and gender and the impact that it had on the interaction between the manager and employee. This is important because research needs to attend to the sociocultural factors that impact the workplace, such as race. Race is important in the workplace because it influences how employees will be treated. Therefore, research needs to be done that will look at various organizational settings and consider if the findings could potentially pertain to those settings.

Performance of the Learning Organization

The learning organization frameworks (Marquardt, 1996; Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993) agree that the learning organization has a positive impact on the performance of the organization. This section will discuss the empirical research concerning the impact that the learning organization will have on performance (Benabou, 1999; Ellinger et al., 2000; Jashapara, 2003; Simonin, 1997; Terziovski et al, 2000; Voss et al., 1997). This occurs because there is more learning that results which will affect the challenges that these organizations face.

Ellinger et al's., (2000) study contributes to the literature by exploring the performance of the learning organization. Ellinger et al., (2000) was one of the first to provide empirical data on this measure and felt that it would provide more credence to the learning organization. This study has a strong method section and conceptualized the learning organization in accordance with Watkins and Marsick's (1993) learning organization framework. Ellinger et al., (2000) argued that organizations should perform better because it is a learning organization. This quantitative study utilized self-report measures and data from business databases. They sent out surveys to middle managers in U.S. manufacturing firms and collected data on various performance measures. An analysis of the data found that there was a positive correlation between the learning organization and the firm's performance.

Several similar findings resulted from a comparison of the various studies. First, the data supported that organizations performed better because of its adoption of the learning organization framework (Ellinger et al., 2000; Jashapara, 2003; Simonin, 1997; Voss et al., 1997). In the literature this was described as organizations improving their

performance; these organizations utilized various resources to gain a competitive advantage. For instance, organizations engaged in benchmarking with their competition, and the knowledge gained allowed them to create and develop better products.

How to Effectively Implement the Learning Organization

In the learning organization, the most integral concept is that the knowledge within it will enable the organization to become more effective. This section will discuss the structures that are needed to support the learning organization and its members.

Of the several studies in this category, there was one that had the strongest method section and expounded upon the findings most effectively. Bierema & Berdish (1999) utilized a case study approach for a division of Ford Motor Company that supplied automotive components, Electrical & Fuel Handling Division (EFHD). In 1992 EFHD voluntarily began to transform themselves into a learning organization in order to become more effective and customer-oriented. Bierema & Berdish interviewed 25 employees from various levels in the organization after they had completed an introductory course on the learning organization. They also collected data through observations, surveys, emails and journals. As a result of the analysis several themes emerged around individual learning and collective learning.

They found that what helped the learning organization become implemented successfully was management support. Management needed to support the learning organization as a voluntary process and employees efforts need to be supported. This would include implementing changes so that employees could be empowered to perform their work in a more effective manner. In addition, when the participants were supported, they were more motivated to engage in self-directed learning which also translated into

shared learning. A second finding was that there was more of an understanding of the big picture. This systems perspective was integral to the connection among those in the learning organization. The components that were seen as restraining the learning organization were the lack of management and peer support, along with the lack of resources.

One particular study stood out because the findings were much different than the others. Steiner (1998) examined a venture at a manufacturing organization to implement the learning organization and he utilized Senge's (1990) framework to guide the analysis. He concluded that the learning organization would be difficult to create because of the power differential between management and the front line employees. For instance, when creating the learning organization, both groups had to attend meetings, while management was accustomed to this, the operators were less interested and wanted to concentrate on their work. Additionally, management held the power and the operators' lack thereof, resulted in competing interest, thus a true learning organization was never realized.

When comparing the research, there are several similar findings that are worth noting. First, a few studies found that the role of systems thinking was integral to implementing the learning organization; this included changing the manner in which the organization's members interacted with one another (Armstrong & Foley, 2003; Bierema & Berdish, 1999; Smith & Taylor, 2000). In the research, there was more communication between the departments and an understanding of how the various departments were interrelated.

Second, an overwhelming number of studies found that there was more of a focus on learning and that creating systems within the organization enhanced learning (Armstrong & Foley, 2003; Barker & Camarata, 1998; Bell, Taylor & Thorpe, 2002; Griego, Geroy & Wright, 2000; Thomsen & Hoest, 2001). This was observed when, trainings were provided and employees could participate to increase their skills or when there was access to resources that would help the self-directed learner.

A third finding from the literature, that yielded mixed results was that the implementation of the learning organization was a process that had the members in agreement and the intervention was not forced upon them (Bierema & Berdish, 1999; Elkjaer, 2001; Smith & Taylor, 2000). This process was described as the inclusion of openness and giving the employees access to information that would help them make informed decisions. Two researchers also found that this aligned with empowerment and was integral to the implementation of the learning organization (Barker & Camarata, 1998; Elkjaer, 2001). The findings concluded that if openness and trust were not achieved then the learning organization endeavor would be met with skepticism (Barker & Camarata, 1998; Bell, et al., 2002; Elkjaer, 2001; Smith & Taylor, 2000).

Lastly, there needs to be a reward and recognition system that values the contributions of the learners' in the organization (Barker & Camarata, 1998; Griego et al., 2000; Thomsen & Hoest, 2001). This component influenced employees in a manner so that they would know what behaviors were valued in the organization.

In conclusion, the process for collecting the data included both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. There were four findings that supported the implementation

of a learning organization. These findings supported some of the guidelines prescribed by the various learning organization frameworks.

Diversity and the Learning Organization

Diversity is addressed inadequately in the various learning organization frameworks (Marquardt, 1996; Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993). Diversity can encompass many aspects of difference. Marquardt (1996) is unique in his perspective because he recognized that diversity is important in an organization. It is especially important in the global marketplace because organizations need to be able to communicate and operate within an international realm. However, thus far, the research literature on diversity in learning organizations is severely limited.

The only research that has been done thus far on the learning organization and diversity's impact on members of an organization, was a Master's thesis on how different cultures experience the learning organization. Sellge (1998) did a quantitative study that examined how the learning organization would be perceived by three different ethnic groups, the United States, Israel, and India. She drew the participants from a consulting firm that operated in each country and the consultants were the participants. Multiple dimensions of the learning organization were extracted from reviewing the literature (i.e. empowerment, problem solving and charisma). This research shed light upon why culture should be considered within the concept of the learning organization. Sellge (1998) concluded that there were differences in what appealed to members from these different ethnic group. More specifically, these groups differed in what they valued in the various dimensions of the learning organization. However, the quantitative

methodological approach and the components that were identified from the literature review fail to provide an adequate understanding of the participants' perspectives.

It seems that this was the first endeavor to study the role of ethnic differences in the learning organization. Sellge (1998) was the first to engage in empirical research that highlighted the importance of exploring diversity within the learning organization. She wanted to provide an understanding of how various cultural groups view the learning organization. One problem with this research was that it had a weak method section. The fact that the participants were born and educated in the U.S., likely influenced their responses on the surveys even if they were working in different countries. In addition, this empirical study was weak and the quantitative data provided little understanding to how the cultural differences impacted them. Thus far, this, however, is the only study found that dealt with diversity in the learning organization.

In conclusion, there needs to be more empirical literature on how the learning organization impacts those that are culturally different. In turn, this data will provide a greater understanding of the impact that the learning organization can have on the modern organization.

Summary and Implications for Further Study

It seems clear that there can be benefits to implementing the learning organization such as the organization performing better (Ellinger et al., 2000; Terziovski et al., 2000; Voss et al., 1997) and the organization being able to learn from its past and transfer that learning to new situations (Simonin, 1997). Other benefits that were mentioned in the theoretical frameworks have not been tested. For instance, Marquardt (1996) argues that learning organizations support diversity by utilizing the knowledge of its members and

helping them become more effective in the global market. Therefore, diversity of all types, as it relates to the learning organization needs to be explored with empirical research, including research dealing with race.

Second, there has been several critiques on the learning organization and its lack of inclusiveness, which indicates a need to be explored (Fenwick, 1998; Mojab & Gorman, 2003; Symon, 2003). For instance, Mojab and Gorman (2003) argued that the learning organization includes a select segment of the organization, management, and that the concept of the learning organization "is only one of a set of strategies that organizations employ to attract and keep elite information workers who are a tiny minority of the workforce" (¶12). They have also concluded that the learning organization was exclusive because marginalized individuals remain mostly at the bottom of the hierarchy; this means that the learning organization is an organization where those in the majority of decision making positions are typically White males. Therefore, there needs to be research that examines the marginalized employee and their role in the learning organization.

Third, in general, I would argue that the methodologies for these studies tended to be weak. Several of the studies utilized did not include detailed information about their research design. This is problematic because the method section is integral to providing information about how the study was conducted. Another problem is that most of the data were collected via self-report measures, interviews and surveys, and respondent bias was not addressed. Respondent bias can impact the study because participants may report information on themselves or their organization in a more favorable light. This becomes problematic for the researcher that does not include a manner in which the data

can be triangulated. For instance, Johnson (2002) utilized managers' account of implementing the learning organizations but also utilized two respondents who worked with that manager. In contrast, Ellinger et al. (1999) utilized critical incidents that were supplied by the managers on how they facilitated the learning of their subordinates. Since, the managers only were questioned, there is no way to know if the incidents that they described were true or if their subordinates learned as a result of the encounter. Therefore, stronger methodological approaches need to be utilized so that the findings can be taken with more credence.

Fourth, I would also argue that there needs to be more clarification in the literature on how to create a learning organization. Senge's (1990) work has provided the main conceptualization for the learning organization (Bierema, 1999; Johnson, 2002; Stewart, 2001). Moreover, there are similarities within the various frameworks and these similarities can help to build a solid foundation for creating the learning organization. These similarities include: a climate for learning, continuous learning, management at the forefront of this endeavor, effective teams and teamwork, valuing critical thinking and learning, and creating a vision that guides this process.

Lastly, the differences that were outlined by each framework can be important to individual organizations. I would argue that organizations need to consider several conceptual frameworks and what would be integral to the implementation of the learning organization for their specific organization. The elements that appear integral to creating the learning organization are having a structure that supports ongoing communication and a learning culture. For instance, hierarchical structures usually have many layers of management and this tends to impede communication. Therefore, organizations that are

devoid of this characteristic tend to communicate better. Another integral component is the ability to learn from mistakes and challenge the status quo; if an organization can change the manner in which it learns then it is possible that new learning will occur. Overall, the learning organization must be seen as an endeavor that will benefit all in the organization and this can only be done when the members are involved in all aspect of the organization.

In the future, there needs to be more empirical research done on the learning organization, research that will pursue an appropriate methodology utilizing either quantitative or qualitative measures. Furthermore, this research needs to augment the theoretical work that has been imparted to the field. For example, the claim that diverse learning organizations compete more effectively within the global market place (Iles, 1999; Marquardt, 1996) needs to be explored. Given the lack of focus on diversity in general, and race in particular, in the learning organization literature, it is important to focus on the wider literature that deals with race in the workplace. This will be taken up next.

Race and its Impact on the Modern Organization

This section of the paper will discuss how race has impacted the opportunities for African Americans working in America. This literature emanates from the fields of adult education, sociology and business. First, it is important to review this literature because it will provide some historical background on the experiences of African Americans within organizations. Second, I will expound upon issues and insights that have been uncovered in the literature. Thus, this section will be divided into two parts: first, some

historical background on African Americans in the workplace; and second, the empirical literature on African American managers.

African Americans in the Workplace: Some Historical Background

In America, before the civil rights era, the Black middle class was composed of Black dentist, physicians, lawyers and business owners etc. catering to their own community. Collins found in her research that 92% of the Black participants that entered the labor market before 1961 interacted primarily within Black markets. Overall, the career opportunities for Black Americans were very limited and access to better paying jobs was not granted, even for educated Blacks. According to Collins (1997) this exclusion of Blacks from economic attainment was prevalent. "Until the 1960s the absolute gap separating the earning of Black and White men actually increased as their amount of schooling increased" (p.48). This meant that even educated Blacks were not provided the opportunity to progress. Major corporations did not recruit for entry level management positions at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) which could have supplied qualified applicants for these positions. In addition, there was not only discrimination in corporate America but also within the federal government.

The post civil rights era. It was not until the civil rights movement made demands to have access to better career opportunities that the government made changes. In the 1960s and 1970s after the unrest caused by the fight for civil rights "Blacks increased their visibility in job markets that had been closed to them...[they] emerged as professionals and managers in both government and in major White corporations" (Collins, 1989, p.321). What accounted for this shift in employment was the organizations' response to civil rights demands and compliance with government

regulations, such as affirmative action. Affirmative action is a “policy that goes beyond equal employment by requiring organizations to comply with the law and correct past discriminatory practices by increasing the numbers of minorities and women in specific positions” (Sherman, Bohlander, Snell, 1998, p.75). To achieve compliance with affirmative action, organizations recruit, select and promote employees that are part of underrepresented groups.

In order to understand the essence of racism in America before the passage of affirmative action, the story of Elsie Cross, founder of Elsie Cross & Associates, captures this well. As an African American female, she does realize that her story is a powerful tool to illuminate the oppression and discrimination that she experienced prior to affirmative action and equal employment opportunities (EEO) (Cross, 2000). Cross earned an undergraduate degree in business education, but it did not provide her with any opportunities in corporate America. "The best jobs that I could get were low-level dead end positions... [she also] earned two masters' degrees and became a Ford Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania. Never during all those years- before the passage of EEO and affirmative action legislation- was I able to secure an interview in the corporate world..." (Cross, 2000, p.23). As Cross so precisely puts it, affirmative action was more about giving citizens of a society the opportunity to participate. This story is typical of the mistreatment that African Americans, even highly educated African Americans, experienced prior to EEO and affirmative action; however, after the passage of this legislation, there was access to better paying jobs.

While affirmative action has been a form of integrating the workforce, it has not been the answer to the numerous obstacles that hinder Black Americans in the workplace.

The next section of this paper will discuss how some organizations have tried to move beyond complying with affirmative action regulations to fully integrating Blacks into equal status within their organizations.

Current discussions of managing diversity. What has occurred with affirmative action is that organizations have utilized it to create programs that seek to remedy the lack of minority representation in their organization. There are numerous flaws in this approach, primarily that members from minority groups need to adhere to the dominant culture's values to fit in. As a result, some organizations have gone beyond affirmative action to pursue an approach that will incorporate the diverse experiences of all its members.

Organizations that have opted to incorporate the diversity of its members believe in managing diversity (Cox, 2001; Cross, 2000). Managing diversity is about developing "theories and practices that help organizations reduce discrimination and enable employees who are increasingly diverse by race, gender, and sexual orientation...work together" (Cross, 2000, p.138). As a term, managing diversity flourished following the Workforce 2000 report from the Hudson Institute (Cox, 2001; Cross 2000). In addition, according to Kochan, Bezrukova, Ely, Jackson, Joshi, Jehn, Leonard, Levine and Thomas (2003) diversity became a business case after the former CEO of Hewlett Packard developed an argument to persuade his colleagues that managing diversity effectively was a business necessity. He argued that diverse workers could produce more effective business results. While there are varying definitions to this term, it mainly subscribes to utilizing the difference in organization's in order to work together more effectively.

Similarly, Gilbert, Stead and Ivancevich (1997) concluded that "diversity management is a voluntary organizational program designed to create greater inclusion of all individuals into informal social networks and formal company programs" (p.62).

Therefore, organizations attempt to create and develop opportunities that will ensure the inclusion of difference that may call for a change in processes that will ensure diversity within (Rasmussen, 1996). Organizations will look at hiring and promotional practices as well as policies and procedures. The perspectives that these diverse employees bring are incorporated into all aspects of the business including product development. In return, the organization benefits because of the value that these diverse employees add.

Diversity, however, is conceptualized according to the desire of the individual organization. Therefore, if an organization wants to emphasize racial diversity, they may place a Black manager in a highly visible position. According to Moss-Kanter & Stein (1980) this can be risky because of the close scrutiny that this manager will experience and in fact this can result in the manager leaving the organization.

In summary, diversity is important to the modern organization because of the demographic changes in the workforce. These changes are dealt with differently depending upon the organization and what they want to achieve with diversity. Specifically, racial diversity has impacted the modern organization such that certain groups that were excluded from corporate America have been ushered in with the insistence of legislative efforts. Even with this legislation, some organizations have begun to realize that effectively managing diversity maybe the best way to incorporate diversity and become a successful organization. While this is discussed in the literature,

in order to reveal if organizations are making racial diversity an imperative, the literature on Black Americans, as a specific racial group will be reviewed.

Empirical Literature on Race in the Workplace

The empirical literature that will be reviewed in this section includes literature from the fields of business, sociology and adult education. The literature utilized, explored the experiences of Black employees and managers in the modern organization. The key words that fueled the search were: African Americans, Black Americans, minority, managers, executives, employees, organizations, corporate America. Empirical studies were located through a search of various on-line research tools with ERIC, Proquest, Dissertation Abstracts, JSTOR and EBSCO host. The research studies had a defined method section and was written after 1990.

1990 was chosen as the beginning point for the research because Cox and Nkomo (1990) examined the literature in the field on race and its impact on organizations. Their literature review utilized 20 leading academic journals in the organizational behavior and human resources management field (OBHRM) and covered the research written between 1964 and 1989. They found that there was a lack of research on race and its impact on organizations.

The research from this period included such topics as career development, group dynamics, staffing issues and performance evaluation. Furthermore, the process of data collection was limited because surveys were mainly utilized which provided a limited understanding of the findings. Therefore, as a result of these weaknesses, Cox and Nkomo made an appeal for more research that integrated theories or models about racial

differences: “papers presenting well-developed theoretical arguments and epistemological discussions of race effects are rare” (Cox & Nkomo, 1990, p. 423).

The literature reviewed in this section is broken into two categories. The first category explores the impact that race has had on the career development opportunities for African Americans (Barrett, Cervero & Johnson-Bailey, 2003a, 2003b; Corsun & Costen, 2001; Freidman, Kane, & Cornfield, 1998; Page, 1994; Palmer, 2002) more specifically factors that hindered and helped their careers. These studies looked at issues that plague the careers of Blacks and their well-being within the work environment. Lastly, the literature on Black managers will be discussed (Charles & McCleary, 1997; Collins, 1989, 1997; Davidson & Freidman, 1998; Durr & Logan, 1997; Fazio, Jackson, & Williams, 1995; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990; Knights, Hebl, Foster & Mannix 2003; Thomas & Gabarro, 1999; Tomkiewicz, 1998; Wells, 1998) which explores how race impacts their ability to perform in the workplace along with the burden that they shoulder.

The career development of Blacks. Studies about the career development of African Americans utilized both qualitative (Barrett et al, 2003a, 2003b; Palmer, 2002; Reid, 1998) and quantitative methodology (Freidman et al, 1998; Page, 1994). Career development refers to “a lifelong process of getting ready to choose, choosing and typically continuing to make choices from among the many occupations available in our society” (Barrett, Cervero & Bailey, 2003b, p.2). In the modern organization, career development is essential for the advancement or promotion of one’s career.

The findings concerning the career development of Blacks suggest that their experiences are significantly different from their White counterparts. These differences

were attributed to the impact that race has had in this country. According to Corsun and Costen (2001), in the business world, White males understand more readily the rules of the game. Moreover, “White men possess the capital that defines the chances of success in business and particularly in management” (¶12). When they speak of capital they rely upon Bourdieu’s conception which refers to the dominant group’s possession of economic, social and cultural capital.

Furthermore, in corporate America, White Anglo-Saxon, Protestant males establish the rules and “the vast majority of the powerful in American have White maleness in common” (Corsun & Costen, 2001, ¶42). Therefore, Blacks come into the business environment at a distinct disadvantage because they have not created the rules or structures in this realm; consequently, in order for Blacks to progress they have to adopt White male characteristics (Corsun & Costen, 2001).

An indicator of the problem that exists in organizations is the phenomenon of the glass ceiling. This term speaks to the lack of racial and gender minorities within the upper ranks of the organizational hierarchy. Within organizations, there has been the recruitment of minorities into entry level positions; however, there is often a lack of career progression beyond their entrance point. The manner in which Blacks are only granted limited access in organizations is problematic.

In fact, Brief, Buttram, Reizenstein, Pugh, Callahan, McCline & Vaslow (1997) stated that “Blacks, in fact, do not proportionally occupy certain kinds of positions, particularly those above the very bottom level of organizational hierarchies....[and they] make up less than 5 percent of management ranks and considerably less than 1 percent of senior executives” (p.60). Since Blacks make up 12% of the U.S. population, these

numbers should be greater. The findings in the research revealed that the glass ceiling operates in various work settings (Barrett et al., 2003b; Brief et al., 1997; Page, 1994). In the literature this was described as an obstacle that many could not surpass no matter how much effort they exerted. There was more dissatisfaction among the Black managers that felt that the glass ceiling had blocked their career progression (Freidman et al., 1998; Greenhaus et al, 1990; Page, 1994).

These studies utilized in-depth interviews to explore the factors that facilitate and/or inhibit the career development for Blacks. Their findings addressed a gap in the literature because career development had previously been conceptualized in terms of White males. These qualitative studies (Barrett et al., 2003a, 2003b; Palmer, 2002; Reid, 1998) explored issues that impacted the careers of Blacks. In addition, they reported the magnitude of the challenges that impact the careers of Blacks. The quantitative study (Freidman et al., 1998) utilized self-report measures with surveys and focus groups and focused on issues that impact career development.

One study that had a strong method section and contributed significantly to the research, was done by Palmer (2002). Palmer utilized a qualitative approach and interviewed African Americans in the field of training and organizational development. This exploration of their career development utilized male and female participants that served in this field for an extensive period of time. Specifically he wanted to examine structural, attitudinal and personal factors that inhibited and/or facilitated career development.

There were several factors that the participants identified as being detrimental to their career development. The participants stated that the following hindered their ability

to progress in the organization: 1) lack of diversity within the organization, 2) the good old boys network, 3) lack of mentoring, 4) inadequate career development programs, 5) prejudice against African Americans, 6) lack of networking or support systems, 7) lack of education or training, and 8) lack of self-management.

The participants' inability to become a part of the important social supports was detrimental to their career development. Palmer (2002) described this as 'the good old boy network' which "is comprised of White males, the traditional power base...[and becomes] a conduit for the recruitment and promotion of younger White males" (p.157). According to Palmer, this foundation has control over who will advance in the organization as well as maintain the status quo. This network also selects individuals who resemble themselves in order to preserve a comfort level and promote a certain image of the organization. Therefore, this network influences factors that impact career development such as mentoring opportunities and access to high profile assignments, which enables an individual to become a front runner for better career opportunities. All of the studies reported that there are structures that facilitate the career development of Blacks.

Second, mentoring was an effective means to facilitate career development; according to Sherman et al., (1998), mentoring provides guidance and support from a manager or executive to develop one's career. For example, Reid (1992) found that Xerox was able to utilize their minority talent more effectively when they had a formal career development program. This program included a formal mentorship with a more senior person in the organization. Mentoring is important because it serves two functions. First, it helps with career development through, sponsorship, gaining exposure

in the organization, coaching and challenging one's skills and abilities. Second, mentoring serves a psychosocial function whereby the mentor offers friendship and counseling and serves as a role model for the protégée. Therefore, mentoring becomes a way to socialize and help less experienced persons become accustomed to the norms and expectations with the intent of facilitating one's career.

A finding that was different was noted in the Barrett et al. (2003a) study. They explored the exclusion of race from within the organization and likened it to an outsider status. This outsider status according to Barrett et al. (2003a) can be exemplified when Blacks have to work in unfavorable racial climates and as a result develop strategies to deal with racial problems in the work setting.

In conclusion, the literature exemplifies that the career development literature is based on the experiences of White males (Barrett, et al., 2003a, 2003b; Palmer, 2002; Reid, 1998). What is missing from the literature are the experiences of African Americans; moreover, because of the experiences of African Americans in this country, their career development will be different. This difference results from the challenges that African Americans experience, and these challenges occur inside as well as outside the organization. The challenges within the organization "are structural and environmental barriers, such as limited access to vocational guidance...tracking into appropriate jobs and discrimination in hiring, promotions and transfers" (Barrett et al., 2003b, p.2).

Barrett et al.(2003a, 2003b) and Palmer (2002) both agree that there is a lack of research on the career development of African Americans, therefore, careful consideration needs to be given to factors that may become barriers for persons of color.

Consequently, factors which facilitate the career development of Blacks needs to be supported in organizations and these factors include, various social supports such as networking and mentoring (Barrett et al., 2003a, 2003b; Freidman et al., 1998; Palmer, 2002; Reid, 1992).

Research focusing on Black managers. The literature in the following paragraphs will discuss the research that has been done on Black managers in the public and private sector. Most of the literature explored the role of middle managers because there is a lack of Blacks in the upper echelons of management. This research is important because it highlights some of the unique aspects of their careers as well as challenges that they have had to encounter.

As previously stated, in America, the positions that Blacks could hold were limited before affirmative action and EEO; moreover, Black managers, in corporate America, were non-existent. One study that explored the roles that Blacks were offered in the private sector after this period was done by Collins (1989, 1997). In 1986 when Collins began her research she wanted to "explore whether or not these executives filled racialized roles that had emerged during the racially tumultuous civil rights period" (Collins, 1997, p.14). According to Collins (1989) racialized labor, is a phenomenon that is defined as "labor [that] performs White institutional functions that have a manifest or symbolic connection to Black constituents or Black issues" (p.326). An example would be, a Black sales representative who has been given a territory that serves Black markets. In addition, Collins examined job security within the racialized positions that these Black managers held.

Another phenomenon that Collins (1989, 1997) explored was the marginalization of Blacks into positions that lacked real authority. She called these positions, “The Relations”, these are management positions that are in the following departments, human relations, public relations, community relations. These positions symbolize racialized labor because the incumbents interact with or serve marginalized groups. Furthermore, what is so maligning about these jobs is that they do not create revenue and are not seen as contributing to the overall well-being of the organization. As a result, they do not place people on the track to the chief executive office. Collins research utilized Black executives in corporate America. She conducted in-depth interviews and utilized a group of 76 high ranking Black executives and obtained this data from the years of 1986 and 1992. These participants held positions such as, director, vice president, chief officer or trust officer.

While Collins’s (1989, 1997) research focused on the private sector, Durr and Logan (1997) conducted a similar study in a public organization utilizing New York state employees. The findings are similar between these studies which would suggest that racialized labor is prevalent in public and private organizations. While Collins found that Black managers are placed in positions within “the relations”, Durr and Logan (1997) also found that Blacks were place in positions "where the formal job title includes the words, minority, affirmative action, diversity or multicultural or where all incumbents within the position are African American....or [when] the department as a whole is designed to serve minority issues" (p.359). Therefore, the problem with placing Blacks into limited positions is seen in both the public and private sector.

A second similar finding was that the positions under racialized labor, did not have job security nor the ability to enhance one's career. Often these positions did not generate revenue for the organization; therefore, they were not considered important positions that prepared one for greater responsibility, such as a CEO position.

Another area of literature discussed Black managers and the difficulties that they experience as a result of their race. Wells (1998) wrote a conceptual piece that expounds upon the opposition that confronts Black managers. This opposition is based on the historical and social significance that this country has placed on race. Racial stereotypes guide the interactions of those in the workplace, unfortunately, when it guides one in a manner that hampers one's ability to interact effectively, this is problematic.

He highlights several scenarios whereby the manager's race impacts their working conditions. First, when there is a Black manager, Whites have the tendency to treat them as the exception to the rule and such they do not represent their racial group which "...enables [them] to maintain stereotypical generalization and attributions about the racial group" (Wells, 1998, ¶13). Second, when in predominately White organizations, there is great pressure to perform without error because errors will be magnified. Moreover, the "error is often experienced by Whites as confirmation of a negative race-based stereotype" (Wells, 1998, ¶13). Third, Black managers experience the undermining of his or her authority and they are often second-guessed and not given the benefit of the doubt. The assaults and challenges to their authority can be harmful and can affect their ability to perform effectively.

A related area of the literature discussed the impact that racial discrimination can have on interaction and communication in the workplace. According to Wells (1998)

outright racial bias that shows itself as hostility and hate is no longer acceptable in the workplace. What has resulted is a new form of racial discrimination, aversive racism, which involves the destabilization of one's power and the isolation of an individual in the workplace. Furthermore, when defining the behaviors that would be classified under aversive racism, they are termed microaggressions. These behaviors are "described...as subtle, minor, stunning, automatic assaults...by which Whites stress Blacks unremittingly and keep them on the defensive as well as in a psychologically reduced condition" (Wells, 1998, ¶7).

The literature on race and Black managers explored the impact that racism had in the workplace; there are several similar findings. First, all of the studies found that racism operates in the workplace and manifest itself in various facets of the working experience (Charles & McCleary, 1997; Fazio et al., 1995; Knights et al., 2003; Pelled, Ledford & Mohrman, 1999; Thomas & Gabarro, 1999). In the literature racism embodied stressful relationships between managers and their subordinates (Jackson et al., 1995; Knights et al., 2003) whereby Black leadership's authority was questioned and/or viewed as incompetent. Racism also appeared in the literature as negatively impacting one's career (Charles & McCleary, 1997; Fazio et al., 1995; Powell & Butterfield, 1997; Thomas & Gabarro, 1999; Tomkiewicz et al., 1998).

Most of the studies concluded that racism hindered the progression of Blacks into upper management and impacted the ability of Blacks to even gain access into the ranks of management. In fact, Thomas and Gabarro (1999) concluded that racism does exist in corporate America and that within certain organizations "no amount of individual effort, preparation or performance...is likely to propel a person of color into an executive

position...” (p.6). Therefore, organizations have to be committed to ending the negative impact that race can have within the work environment.

Another finding determined that racism impacted the social interactions of those in the workplace. There are two examples in the literature which illustrate how race impacts various aspects of the work environment. Fazio et al., (1995) explored the stress that Black managers experience in the workplace. They found that when Blacks are in the minority, they are seen as tokens, fulfilling a role that they may not deserve. As a result, there is more stress placed on the Black managers to perform. Similarly, Pelled et al. (1999) found that exclusion from decision making and other social interactions was related to if a person was dissimilar to the majority represented in the organization.

A second finding that was addressed in two of the studies, explored facilitating the careers of Black managers (Charles & McCleary, 1997; Thomas & Gabarro, 1999). Thomas and Gabarro (1999) examined how minority executives progressed into upper management. They selected the executives based on the fact that they were not part of “the relations” (Collins, 1989; 1997) but held positions in one of the core functions of the organization, such as finance or manufacturing.

What is interesting about the study is that Thomas and Gabarro (1999) chose three organizations that were leaders in incorporating diversity. In fact, they described one organization as, “by 1986 minority representation in the ranks of middle management and senior management had increased significantly...[they were] the diversity leader in [the] industry” (p.172). The participants also had extensive careers with these organizations which promoted executives from within the organization. When considering these factors, it becomes evident that these participants hail from organizations that are

committed to diversity. This research is significant because it is not the norm in corporate America. However, it highlights the importance of the organizations to ensuring its commitment to recruiting and retaining minority talent.

A major methodological concern in the research was that there were barriers that hindered the researcher's ability to gain access to vital information. When dealing with the issue of race and research it is met with great resistance. According to Hansen (2003) organizations do not want to uncover or stir up litigious concerns, such as racial discrimination. Therefore, they operate from the guise that ignorance is bliss. In Durr & Logan's (1997) study, obtaining cooperation from the New York state civil service was difficult. In fact, they were told that they could only interview Black employees. Therefore, Durr & Logan were not able to gain a representative sample as they hoped, but instead they had to deal with the limitations of the racial homogeneity of the sample. As a result, their study was compromised because they were not able to interview the participants needed.

Furthermore, the barriers that exist for those trying to engage organizations in doing racial diversity research is another concern. In order for researchers to be able to carry out effective research, there needs to be organizations that are willing to take an honest look at themselves. This candor will help organizations examine these issues and possibly explore options to have an effective racially diverse climate.

In conclusion, it is clear that there are specific challenges to being a Black manager and operating within any organization. First, the Black manager has to deal with being placed in positions that can negatively influence their ability to enter the ranks

of management or progress to higher levels. Second, they have to combat the challenges that racism and racial discrimination bring to their careers.

Critical Race Theory

With the background of the previous discussion, it now makes sense to explore how Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a significant theoretical lens in this study of African American managers in the workplace. CRT is a prominent framework because it provides a social and historical component that is integral to understanding the experiences of African Americans. CRT prescribes that racism is a part of American society that needs to be challenged. The goal of CRT is to bring the experiences of African Americans to the forefront because they have not been part of the mainstream, especially within the business environment. This is important because there is a lack of research that addresses or comprehends the experiences of African Americans.

Critical Race Theorists' Critique of Attempts at Dealing with Racism in America

Critical race theory is the second theoretical framework utilized for this research study. According to Cornel West (1999), there are two approaches that have attempted to deal with racism in America, liberal and conservative approaches. CRT theorists have found both sets of approaches problematic. The conservative approaches, according to West (1999) have three main premises, the culturalist version, the sociobiologist version and the market version to address the oppression of African Americans. The main premise of the culturalist version is that the "differential treatment of Black people is motivated by the "taste" of White employers and/or White workers" (p.252). These "taste" or preferences are rationalized when one operates from a cultural

perspective that contends that African Americans do not possess the cultural competencies to effectively compete in the workplace. For example, if an employer contends that African Americans do not have a strong work ethic then they will be excluded from the organization.

The sociobiologist's view contends that African Americans are genetically inferior and therefore, lack the superior performance scores on intelligence tests. As a result, they are disqualified from employment. The last perspective, the market approach tries to persuade employers to employ African Americans because it is a good business practice. They reason that White employers and workers need to be educated and persuaded to be more rational and pursue a stance that will maximize their profits (West, 1999).

In summary, conservative approaches are lacking because they place the shortcomings of Blacks upon themselves (i.e. the inability to possess the skills needed to succeed). These perspectives fail because they do not examine the circumstances that negatively impact Blacks.

But, CRT theorists have also found elements of liberal approaches problematic (Bell, 1995a; West, 1999). Liberalism which influenced the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s made some social changes in America such as desegregating schools and public accommodations. The Liberal approaches, which tend to value individualism, however, focus a bit too much on the idea that with hard work, an individual can better herself or himself, although there is some attempt at providing a limited structural analysis. For example, there is some recognition of institutionalized racism in social institutions, such as schools. Therefore, liberals have advocated for social interventions

from the government that will help ensure respect and equity of humankind (Sleeter, 1996). For example, the Civil Rights Movement petitioned the U.S. government so that women and racial minorities could gain access to better jobs and housing. As a result, affirmative action flowed out of liberal approaches because it sought to ensure that minorities could participate in society in a more equitable manner.

In summary, liberal approaches sought to make changes that would impede the institutional racist barriers. However, according to CRT, there are weaknesses within these approach also because the government interventions in education and employment have made little impact (Bell, 1995a; Ladson-Billings, 1999; West, 1999).

Overall both the liberal and the conservative approaches have failed at addressing racism in America. When looking at the liberal approach, specifically affirmative action, and the minimal impact that it has had on the workplace, CRT can shed some light on why this has been the case. There are several issues that have caused affirmative action to become the lackluster government intervention that it is today. First, while liberal approaches wanted to decrease the barriers that promoted racism and the exclusion of Blacks, they wanted to accomplish this with out changing the established systems. They wanted Blacks to work diligently to better themselves with the assistance of various social programs, such as job training and basic education programs. However, what these programs failed to address was the oppression that results from the structures that are in place; these structures would include the inadequate urban school systems and the barriers that exists in corporate America to gain entry into key positions. Second, the government's role in this country has been that of protector of property held by those with power. This also relates to the hesitance of those with power to relinquish it. The

dominant culture views programs that help African Americans, such as affirmative action, as impediments to them obtaining positions in the workplace or the educational arena.

Conservative approaches, share some values with CRT (West, 1999) mainly that governmental interventions, such as affirmative action, are highly unwarranted and they do more harm than good. The weakness of conservative approaches, however, is that they fail to examine "institutional structure and power relations of the market and limited attention to social and historical structures" (West, 1999, p.253). Ultimately, systems that hinder the advancement of people of color are not considered and their lack of progress is their responsibility.

As a result of the inadequacies of both the liberal and conservative approaches, a perspective is needed that will encompass the multifaceted dilemmas of racism in America. CRT is an appropriate approach to deal with racism in America because it understands the social and historical components that have created modern social institutions.

CRT's Tenets and Strategies

CRT was developed by two legal scholars, Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, in the 1970s. They felt that the conservative approaches were unsuitable and they were frustrated with the slow and incremental progress of the liberal movement, (i.e. Civil rights). In order for progress to be made, they assert, along with other critical race theorists writing more recently that sweeping changes are needed in the areas of social equality (Carbado & Gulati, 2003; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Peterson, 1999). Social equality encompasses people obtaining access to resources and

having a fair share of those resources. According to Carbado and Gulati (2003) and Ladson-Billings (1999) there are several components that CRT theorists have identified as being integral to developing a framework for greater equity. Carbado and Gulati (2003) highlight the following aspect as central to CRT: (1) dealing with race as a social construction; (2) facilitating narratives; (3) dealing with identity privilege; and (4) understanding race as a performative identity. These aspects will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

First, Carbado and Gulati (2003) state that race is a social construct that has been invented by the dominant culture to categorize and subjugate individuals that are not part of that culture. Throughout history the definition of race has changed, thus impacting the social meaning (i.e., what it means to be a Negro versus Black). What has resulted is that racism is a normal part of society and it has been steeped in the fabric of America. They cite empirical data to examine the inequities in American society. For instance, there are disparities between the salaries of Whites and other minorities. "On average, a White man with a college diploma earned about \$65,000 in 2001... [in contrast] Black and Hispanic men earned 30 percent less (Armas, 2003, ¶2). This disparity highlights the bias practices that are prevalent in the workplace; even when employees hold similar positions and educational background this disparity still exists (Armas, 2003, ¶6). Therefore, this inequity needs to be confronted and changed.

Second, CRT theorists employ the use of storytelling to "analyze the myths, presuppositions and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render Blacks and other minorities one-down" (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 12). In making use of story telling, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) describe an

account of two public school students and their experiences with selecting courses from their high school's course listings. While one student attended a public school in an upper middle class suburban area, the other attended a public urban high school in an African American community. When they compared the course offerings between the two schools, they found that there were great disparities. The school in the White, suburban area offered a plethora of courses in math, science and foreign language. In fact, "the differences in electives were even more pronounced, with the affluent school offering courses such as film as literature, Asian studies, computer programming and journalism" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, ¶28). This story captures not only the discrepancies within the educational arena, but how the curriculum and the educational resources disproportionately favor those of the dominant culture, which inadvertently insures that they will continue to have greater power. Thus the power structure remains the same and will continue to be replicated unless specific attention to these curricular issues is paid.

Furthermore, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) concluded that "property relates to education in explicit and implicit ways" (¶26). Explicitly, property owners in upper and middle class areas pay taxes that support better funded school districts; implicitly Whites in these areas are against paying for non-Whites while poor public school systems suffer. Therefore, the problem results with those with less privilege and their inability to attain the curriculum that is needed to be successful in this society. This "intellectual property", the authors maintain is similar to other struggles over property that has occurred in the country in the past. For example, the American Indians were removed from their land and

the Africans were enslaved to establish them as property so that they could be controlled and left powerless.

Third, CRT theorists argue that in American society whiteness functions as a system of privilege, and that Whites are a privileged group; “Whiteness functions as the identity against which all other identities are measured” (Carbado & Gulati, 2003, p. 1777). This means that the dominant culture has become the norm or the standard to which all others are required to perform to this expectation. In addition, the dominant culture establishes the rules within society, including who will be supported, such that the interest of the dominant culture will take precedence over any matter. For example, when the dominant culture hires individuals, they tend to hire individuals that are like them or individuals that will assimilate easily into the organization (Carbado & Gulati, 2003). As a result, Whites females have greatly benefited from affirmative action (Carbado & Gulati, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Peterson, 1999). CRT asserts that there has been a lack of progress for minorities of color since affirmative action; for instance, the benefits that Blacks have made in education have been incremental. As an example, Ladson-Billings (1999) notes that in 1992, less than five percent of the doctorates earned went to African Americans. Furthermore, most of those doctorates were in "education administration where the recipients continue as school practitioners” (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Therefore, CRT concludes that affirmative action has mainly benefited White women.

According to Bell (1995b) affirmative action is also seen as negative by many Whites because unconsciously they feel that they will have to surrender power in order to create true equality. Furthermore, if those with power feel that their superior position

will be threatened, they will not support change. Bell (1995b) cites the passage of Brown versus the Board of Education as a case in point; this landmark case ruled that schools in America had to become desegregated. Bell contends that this decision from the U.S. Supreme court was granted because it served the interest of those in power. He provides several reasons that support this argument, one being that it provided immediate leverage with Communist countries which knew the treatment that African Americans received within a democratic society. *Time* magazine was quoted during this period as stating that "in many countries, where U.S. prestige and leadership have been damaged by the fact of U.S. segregation, it will come as a timely reassertion of the basic American principle that 'all men are created equal'" (Bell, 1995b, p.23). The U.S. had an interest in keeping Communism out of America and gaining a more favorable image in the international spotlight. Further, Bell argues that when they granted affirmative action to African Americans, it was a tactic for the U.S. to gain momentum in the international forum to promote the spread of democracy.

Overall, Bell (1995b) argues "the interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interest of Whites" (, p.24). It is for this reason that affirmative action has had marginal success in incorporating less represented groups (i.e. people of color and women) into the business world. According to Bell's logic, because those with power, White males, have secured the prominent positions in organizations, they are unwilling to relinquish that power. If there becomes a time when White males need relinquish some of their power in order to serve their interest they will do so. The only time that this has occurred in America is with the

passage of affirmative action and EEO. Those with power yielded a small amount because they had to comply with the law.

Fourth, CRT emphasizes that race impacts and determines how marginalized individuals will fare in society. Race can influence not only how an individual is viewed but also how an individual will interact within society. Therefore, performative identity refers to “a Black person’s vulnerability to discrimination is shaped in part by her racial position on this spectrum. The less stereotypically Black she is, the more palatable her identity is” (Carbado & Gulati, 2003, p. 1772). This means that the more a Black female resembles the dominant culture (i.e., hair style, communication style) the more likely she is to be hired. The discussion of this tenet will resume with Bourdieu’s conceptualization of cultural capital which will be discussed later.

According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) CRT has the potential to make invaluable contributions to the field of education. They argue that in the field of education the multicultural paradigm can be likened to the Civil Rights Movement because both are grounded in the liberal approach. Many versions of multicultural education or multiculturalism are similar in that many versions advocate respect and tolerance of various cultures through inclusion rather than structural change. “The foundation of civil rights has been in human rights rather than in property rights”(Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, ¶43), which is problematic because property rights in this country have been more integral to gaining power. Moreover, the multicultural perspective utilizes the same structures that have oppressed and what is needed is radical change. “We unabashedly reject a paradigm that attempts to be everything to everyone and consequently becomes nothing for anyone, allowing the status quo to prevail”

(Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, ¶57). Therefore, an appropriate approach would critically examine how those with power maintain it and what can be done to distribute it equally. Other realms of research have yet to critically examine how the structures of power are replicated, thus hindering the progress of Blacks. CRT has been utilized in education to understand how race has impacted the field (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Peterson, 1999) however, Carbado and Gulati (2003) assert that CRT can make significant contributions to understanding the workplace (i.e., hiring decisions). In addition, since race can be a performative construct, Bourdieu's (as discussed in Kvasny, 2002) idea of cultural capital can augment the understanding of the workplace.

Cultural Capital and Critical Race Theory

This fourth tenet of CRT, about race as a performative act—the idea that people of the same group will perform their identity differently is related to Bourdieu's conceptualization of cultural capital. Carbado and Gulati (2003) argue that there has not been an emphasis on capital and the workplace. Therefore, Bourdieu's cultural capital can strengthen the understanding of this framework. As Kvasny (2002) notes, Bourdieu introduced the concept of capital to describe how material and symbolic resources are utilized in a society. There are four basic forms of capital: symbolic, cultural, social and economic. Symbolic capital is the acquisition of honor and prestige; cultural capital refers to forms of cultural knowledge, competencies and credentials. Social capital refers to social networks that one employs to improve social standing, and economic capital refers to monetary resources such as property, stocks and money. An individual is an actor who interacts within various social contexts that are labeled fields (i.e., corporate

America). In order to operate within a certain field an individual will make use of the capital that they possess in a way that will benefit them most.

Bourdieu argues that these forms of capital are unequally divided, and actors from the dominant group utilize strategies to preserve the status quo. In the corporate culture, these dominant actors are typically White males, and they utilize forms of power that are often not visible. However, the actors that engage with the dominant group play by their rules. Kvasny (2002) asserts:

These power relations are built into institutional processes such as decision making, budgeting and training, and provide a practical justification of the established order. They enable those who benefit most from the system to convince themselves of their own intrinsic worth while preventing those who benefit least from grasping the basis.

As a result, actors from the dominant group continue to replicate social structures of oppression and privilege, consciously or unconsciously and actors that are outsiders often find it more difficult to break in.

Bourdieu's conceptualization of capital, especially cultural and social capital can add value to this research. This theory takes into account the constructs of power (i.e., cultural and social capital) that operate in corporate America, and makes visible how capital produces a hierarchy within corporate America. Furthermore, the possession of any forms of capital are the core factors that define an individual's position within society, or for the sake of this argument, within corporate America. Furthermore, the possession of cultural and social capital are needed in order to compete within corporate America. Cultural capital exists in three levels: (1) cultural capital is developed in early

educational experiences; (2) it is possessed in cultural articles; (3) exists in cultural institutions, such as diplomas and certificates (Siisiainen, 2000). Social capital can be acquired when an individual joins social networks in an attempt to improve their social standing. Siisiainen states:

Memberships in groups, and involvement in the social networks developing within these and in the social relations arising from the membership can be utilized in efforts to improve the social position of the actors in a variety of different fields.

Therefore, within corporate America capital can be possessed in various ways. In order for an individual who is not part of the dominant culture to be a contender or compete within corporate America, he or she must gain aspects of capital. First, cultural capital can be possessed by holding at least an undergraduate degree. The possession of a diploma from a cultural institution (i.e., university) as a result will give one a better chance of entering corporate America. Second, cultural capital can also be gained during early educational experiences whereby a racial or ethnic minority attends elementary and high school with the dominant culture and has access to more educational resources. This is also a mechanism that will provide them with cultural knowledge about the dominant culture. Third, social capital refers to social networks that an individual joins to improve their social status.

Bourdieu's conceptualization of capital enhances the framework of critical race theory. While CRT delineates why racial equality has not resulted in America; our understanding needs to be furthered whereby we explore why certain individuals have made it within corporate America. Since these managers have had some measure of

success, understanding why this has resulted is important to analyzing the findings of this research study.

What CRT Offers to Human Resource Development and the Learning Organization

Currently within, HRD, there are two perspectives that have been utilized until recently to deal with race and racism (Gregory, 1999). A more recent approach, managing diversity flourished in the HRD literature. Managing diversity utilizes the principles that it is good business to have diversity within the organization. Moreover, they rely on HRD producing literature that will substantiate the claim that diversity within makes the organization more effective. One case that is often cited in the literature occurred when Chevrolet introduced the Nova in the automotive market in Mexico. The car they believed was fuel efficient and competitively priced but it did not sell. Chevrolet did not perform research about how the name of this car would be understood in this market. Later they discovered that the Mexicans did not buy this car because in Spanish it translated into “no go”. This is one instance that having diversity within could have helped the organization.

There is also a parallel between HRD’s adoption of managing diversity and Bell’s theory concerning the passage of Brown versus the Board of Education and the civil rights movement. Like this court decision, managing diversity has major benefits for organizations; managing diversity is about getting people from different backgrounds to work together for the good of the organization. Therefore, this perspective is about affecting the human rights of those involved and not changing the real power structures that thwart the progress of Blacks. As a result, the structure within this system remains with those that have the power, Whites, thus replicating the status quo.

HRD has also developed frameworks that call for members within an organization to work together by sharing their learning. The learning organization shares learning among its members to enhance their performance. Marquardt (1996) asserts that diversity within can enhance the effectiveness of a learning organization. Therefore, members from a diverse background share the knowledge they have within team environments. The learning organization operates from within the liberal perspective because it seeks to have people participate in an equitable manner. According to West (1999) the liberal perspective is problematic because it does not attempt to change the power structure. Those that lack power do not have the ability nor authority to change the plight of the oppressed.

Toni Gregory (1999), a diversity consultant, addressed racial diversity in the learning organization. She argued that “diversity [can not] be treated as a “token” concern, if only because the corporate world had too much of a history of tokenism here and has driven too many people away as a result” (p.275). Racial diversity, she realized has been treated with uncomplicated solutions and unfortunately, there has been little improvement with those efforts.

Gregory (1999) asserts that the framework of the learning organization presents a radical way of thinking about diversity training. She agrees with CRT theorist that the methods that organizations have chosen to deal with diversity, such as affirmative action and EEO to promote equity programs, and managing diversity to obtain higher business results, have been unsuccessful. She states that these programs are not successful because they are based on changing behavior. In addition, both approaches fail to address

“why is it so hard for different types of people to work together effectively in the first place?” (Gregory, 1999, p.277).

She notes that many organizations that engage in change initiatives do not discuss diversity issues. Furthermore, “they may not understand the link between diversity and organizational effectiveness“ (Gregory, 1999, p. 278). Therefore, Gregory asserts that systems thinking can significantly enhance diversity; therefore, organizations need to deal with the diversity tension that may result when persons are marginalized. This tension can be released when “finding the source of the problem and redesigning the system to address unproductive balances” (Gregory, 1999, p.278). The problem(s) may result from imbalances in rank, power, privilege and prejudice thus, management must be willing to change its structures. Therefore, when diversity is conceptualized with the intent of breaking racist thoughts then the organization can build on effective learning and relationships.

What Gregory (1999) is calling for is a change in how race is conceptualized and dealt with in the learning organization. She asserts that structures need to be changed in order to expose how inequality continues to be replicated. However, this sentiment has not been echoed by those within the learning organization community. What is needed is a theoretical framework that will illuminate the shortcomings of the learning organization and race.

In HRD the reality that African Americans experience in the workplace is missing, especially how African Americans experience the learning organization. Therefore, CRT has the potential to make inroads in effectively understanding race and the learning organization. CRT is relevant because of its understandings of the social and

historical issues that have impacted African Americans. CRT would be able to examine the real power structures and challenges in the organization to promote equality. CRT would be able to get at the power issues and structures by utilizing the narratives of the participants and giving voice to their reality. The reality that Blacks experience in the learning organization is missing from the mainstream frameworks. The data from this research will provide an in-depth understanding of the learning organization and how it impacts Black managers.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter reviewed the literature that was essential to this research study. The literature discussed the major frameworks of the learning organization and explored the issues that were integral to understanding Blacks and the workplace and the issues that Black managers experience. The theoretical framework, CRT was discussed along with an explanation of why it was chosen for this study. CRT provided a lens that shed some light upon why it was important to examine the learning organization and Black managers.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of my study was to explore how the learning organization impacted African American managers. In relation to their career development, I was interested in gaining insight into how the learning organization impacted their career development. Specifically, had they been able to navigate barriers in the professional realm that they experienced, as well as understanding how they interpreted these experiences within the learning organization. Therefore, the interpretation of their experiences was the focus of this study, and qualitative research was utilized.

This study utilized a basic interpretive qualitative research design. This qualitative design approach promoted dialogue with the participants and allowed me to obtain their stories. This approach also facilitated a connection between the researcher and participants so that their stories were fully comprehended. Johnson-Bailey (2001) asserts that in her research on Black re-entry women she found that the literature did not fit the participants in her study, since the research literature was largely about White re-entry women. Therefore, she had the opportunity as a qualitative researcher to engage in research that would shed some light upon a marginalized group. As a researcher, she found that it was important to "be sensitive to the position and history" (p.99) of the participants. Therefore, I drew from her approach and utilized dialogue as a means to capture the stories of these African American managers.

Research Design Overview

"Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p.3). Qualitative research can take many forms and utilize different methods of data collection. The purpose of qualitative research is to make sense of a phenomenon and interpret the meanings that people give to it (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). It is the researcher who determines the best method to study the phenomenon and analyze the data. While the researcher may have various techniques to choose from, such as interviews and observations, the researcher must determine what will be the best way to organize the study.

Similarly, according to Merriam & Simpson (2000) the goal of qualitative research is to "achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, to delineate the process...of meaning making, and to describe how people interpret what they experience" (p.98). The core of this approach relative to this study was to gain an understanding of how these participants, African American managers, experienced the learning organization. More specifically how has being a part of a "learning organization" impacted their career development and opportunities afforded to them within this framework?

The goal of a qualitative researcher is to engage in shedding understanding on a specific topic; this understanding comes as a result of analysis and synthesis of the data collected (Patton, 2002). In contrast to quantitative research, where the design includes a hypothesis and gathering data to support that hypothesis, the aim of qualitative research is to examine a phenomenon in depth and to find out from participants how they make

meaning of their experience. The study design continues to emerge throughout the data collection process, depending on the responses of the participants. This process will be augmented with other relevant opportunities in order to collect meaningful data and analyze it. The researcher analyzes the data concurrently while collecting it, through inductive analysis (Merriam, 2002). After further analysis themes typically emerge that illuminate the data from the participants' perspectives.

Merriam and Simpson (2000) suggest that qualitative research methodology is especially appropriate to use when there is little known about a specific phenomenon. Little is known about the impact that the learning organization has on any individual employee, especially African American managers. Therefore, a qualitative research design allowed me the opportunity to explore how the learning organization as a framework impacted African American managers. The research afforded me the opportunity to gain some insight into how this framework impacted the managers and their careers.

Research Perspective

This study was informed by critical race theory (CRT) because it sought to understand the experiences of African American managers in corporate America; CRT was also chosen because it recognizes the impact that social and historical issues have had on African Americans.

The study utilized an interpretive or basic interpretive approach, primarily. As discussed in the last chapter, data were interpreted through the lens of critical race theory. According to Merriam (2002), a basic interpretive approach is an interactive process examining how people interacting with the world on a daily basis create meanings as a

result of this interaction. This approach concludes that a researcher would be interested in getting the participant's perspective as a result of this interaction. A study that would utilize the basic interpretive approach would focus on the following: "1) how people interpret their experiences, 2) how they construct their worlds and 3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2002, p.38). As a result of using this orientation to research, the information and data gathered provided an understanding of how the participants made meaning of their experiences in the learning organization. I was specifically interested in how African American managers in so-called "learning organizations" perceived their experience and interactions within these organizations. In that sense, the study design fit with how Merriam (2002) defines a basic interpretive study

But given that the study was informed by critical race theory, it was important to consider what CRT suggests for doing research. According to Merriam (2002) the goal of critical research, and research informed by CRT which would be a kind of critical research, is to challenge the status quo and critique systems of power. This critique can include forms of literature and "reveals the assumptions underlying the text, assumptions about the world and the way things are, such that certain interest are reinforced" (p.328). Therefore, a critical lens guided the questioning of the status quo and issues of power and how it was maintained. CRT, as discussed in the previous chapter, provided the mechanism to interpret the findings of this research in a manner that reflected the experiences of the participants. Merriam and Simpson (2000) state that two of the goals of critical research is to examine how culture can promote social injustices and how critiquing history can bring forth a new world.

As Merriam (2002) notes, there are several critical perspectives and the perspective chosen will depend upon the purpose of the research. For example, CRT, as a critical research perspective, has developed because of the lack of research on people of color. In addition, according to Ladson-Billings (2002) research based on African Americans has been excluded from the mainstream. This exclusion has been based on a social and political decision that justifies exclusion, consciously or unconsciously, based on race. "This discourse... allowed the dominant culture to define, distance and objectify the other" (Ladson-Billings, 2002, p.259). Therefore, Ladson-Billings advocates for a research perspective that understands the dominant culture and its conscious or unconscious subordination of African Americans. CRT was appropriate to use with my research because it made the historical and social factors that have impacted the current standing of African Americans visible. The discriminatory hiring practices in corporate America significantly impacted marginalized groups and the participants in this study. Before the enactment of affirmative action, African Americans were not able to secure employment in many workplaces in America. Therefore, it was important to be able to examine and understand how social and historical issues have impacted these participants.

While the purpose of this research was not to organize the participants for social change, as is the case of some forms of critical research, the research was informed by CRT. CRT lends itself appropriately to this research endeavor because of the contextual issues surrounding the participants. "The gift of CRT is that it unapologetically challenges the scholarship that would dehumanize and depersonalize us [African Americans]" (Ladson-Billings, p.272). Since I am an African American and have

worked in corporate America, I built upon these experiences with the participants, though I did not necessarily share much about these experiences unless specifically asked. I, however, provided a brief (five-minute) overview of why I was interested in the topic before the interview began. Nevertheless, since race has been a contentious and difficult battle in this country and needs to be addressed I suspect that it played a role in this research.

As an African American working in corporate America, I have experienced racism and responses from peers and subordinates that have negatively impacted the working relationship. The participants in this study had similar experiences. Qualitative researchers believe that researcher neutrality is impossible in both qualitative and quantitative research. But it is important to try to examine one's biases prior to the start of the study to have a sense of how to attempt to hold them at bay, or to look at the ways they influence the study. In order to deal with my biases, as a result of my experiences, I provided a five minute overview of why I was interested in this topic and shared any information that the participants specifically requested but allowed the stories of the participants to come to the forefront. I was conscious not to try and let my experiences cast a shadow over the stories of the participants. Furthermore, I believe that my experience as an African American woman researcher was a strength of the study, as I have much tacit knowledge of the phenomenon under study.

Participant Selection

A strength of qualitative research is that it can focus in-depth on a small number of cases. According to Patton (1990), "the purpose of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study"

(p.169). In this research, the experiences of African American managers were best defined and described by African American managers. Therefore, this group was selected as participants for this study.

As a part of my research, I selected African American managers that worked in learning organizations. These organizations were in the for-profit and private sector and part of corporate America. The organizations chosen met the criteria of a learning organization because they have been documented by Watkins and Marsick (1993, 1996) and/or Marquardt and Reynolds (1994). These organizations were located in the Northeastern or Southeastern regions of the United States. These regions were chosen because I was able to find willing participants.

In addition, the selection of the participants was based on the following criteria. All participants were:

1. In management in a learning organization that was located within the private, for-profit sector.
2. Identified as an African American.
3. Had been with the organization for at least three years.

These participants were recruited through personal contacts. An initial letter was emailed to possible participants to explain the research project and determine interest. By using a small purposeful sample, I was able to shed light on the experiences of African American managers who were currently working within learning organizations in corporate America.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews, observations and documents are the primary means of data collection used in qualitative research according to Merriam (2002). Since I was trying to comprehend the participants' interpretation of the learning organization, my data collection centered primarily around interviews, though documents and field notes became a secondary source of data.

In-depth Interviews

"Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable and able to be made explicit" (Patton, 1990, p.278). The interview is a tool that allows the researcher to understand the meanings that people attach to certain phenomenon. According to Merriam and Simpson (2000) the interview is also effective when there is not the opportunity to engage in participant observations or when the topic that will be "explored is complex or emotionally loaded" (p.152). In addition, the interview can augment observational data that the researcher has collected.

According to Merriam and Simpson (2000) there are three basic types of interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. The structured interview utilizes a set of interview questions that will remain the same for all participants and this "structure increases the consistency from one interview to the next" (p.152). In addition, this format allows the researcher the ability to obtain clarification and further explanation on the participants' responses. In contrast, the unstructured interview guides the researcher through areas for investigation and places more responsibility on the researcher because they must be skilled in the interviewing process (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). This format is effective when trying to explore various possibilities and

identifying areas of study within future research. A semi-structured interview will utilize components from both the structured and unstructured interview. The semi-structured approach will utilize an interview guide and include the same set of questions for each participant. However, the researcher will be able to explore other areas that may be pertinent to the research.

I utilized a semi-structured interview format to examine the experiences of African American managers within the learning organization. There was an interview guide that served as a check list, but I did also allow the participants to discuss issues that were relevant to the research topic. The semi-structured interview guide contained several questions to engage the participant in discussion and the participants were also informed that they could discuss additional information not covered in the interview guide. In addition, participants were informed that they could refuse to answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable. The semi-structured questions that guided this discussion included but were not limited to the following:

1. Can you tell me about your educational background?
2. How long have you been at this organization and what attracted you to work for _____ (name of organization)?
3. What has been your prior career experience as an African American and how would you rate this organization with preparing career development opportunities for African Americans?
4. What types of learning activities do you engage in inside or outside of work? Has this learning helped you presently within this organization?

5. What is the vision of your organization and when considering this vision, as a manager what do you do to contribute to it? As an African American manager, has there ever been a time that you sacrificed your beliefs for the good of the organization?
6. In terms of racial diversity, what is your organization's approach to getting people to work together most effectively? As a manager do you feel that there is a better way?
7. Do you find any pleasure in your work at this organization? and if so can you describe the connection?
8. In business or team meetings is there an opportunity to examine faulty thought patterns or assumptions, such as racist thought patterns, that can guide one's decision making abilities?
9. During teams meetings within your organization, is there the opportunity for you to share and contribute your learning and do you feel that the learning that you bring to the team is valued?

As a researcher, CRT informed the manner in which I interacted with the participants. During the interview process, I engaged the participants in order to get their perspective about their experiences. I perceived that our interviews were shared dialogues and as they shared their experiences, I was able to share some of my own when the participant asked or if it seemed appropriate to the data collection process. This was done in order to avoid what Michele Fine (1998) refers to as "othering" participants- i.e., expecting them to share personal experiences about their lives while the researcher shares none of her/his.

This did strengthen the sharing process by having the interview as more of a shared conversation.

Field Notes and Documents

According to Patton (1990) "field notes contain the descriptive information that will permit the observer to return to the observation later during analysis and eventually permit the reader...to experience the activity observed..." (p.239). The purpose for collecting this information is to be able to help the researcher re-create the scene as it occurred during the data collection phase. I wrote field notes to include material on the participant's employer to augment the data.

The collection of documents from an organization is a "particularly rich source of information..." (Patton, 1990, p.233). The purpose of obtaining this material is that it provides information about the organization and can guide the researcher on important questions to ask. Moreover, Patton advocates obtaining the following material: "financial and budget records, organizational rules, regulations, memoranda, charts and any other official or unofficial documents generated by or for the program" (p.233). While Patton has provided a list, some of the items that I collected included but was not limited to material located on the company's website such as, company newsletters, the diversity vision and human resources brochures. In addition, articles were located about the companies that were utilized. I also kept all correspondence between myself and the participants. In addition, all the information from the organization such as, departmental newspapers, brochures and other materials was gathered for use in the data analysis.

After the interview process, I took notes to describe the atmosphere during the interview. The notes included my observations of the interviewee and their comfort level

in answering the questions, level of interest in the study, and willingness to provide additional information. Furthermore, demographic information was collected on each participant. This information provided a more complete picture of the participants. Immediately following each interview, I recorded my field notes to ensure accuracy.

Data Analysis

The data analysis began after each interview, though a more detailed analysis took place after the transcripts of the interviews, field notes and documents had been completed. According to Patton (1990) the ultimate goal of qualitative research is to obtain thick description so that the readers will be able to understand the results. Furthermore, when there is a plethora of data before the researcher, she must remember to focus on the original purpose of the study so that the findings remain relevant.

According to Patton (1990) there are two approaches to data analysis: case analysis or cross-case analysis. Case analysis presents findings based on a single case while cross-case analysis analyzes the various cases based on central issues. In the basic interpretive approach data analysis begins with "identifying recurring patterns (presented as categories, factors, variables, themes) that cut through the data" (Merriam, 2002, p.38). This is similar to what Patton (1990) has termed content analysis, which is a process of identifying, coding and categorizing the data into various patterns.

"Simplifying the complexity of reality into some manageable classification scheme is the first step of analysis" (Patton, 1990, p.382). In the initial stage of coding, I reviewed the transcripts and made comments in the margins. These comments coincided with the questions that I asked and served as a label system for my notes.

In the second stage, I looked across the transcripts to find common themes. Patton states, that the researcher's goal is to look for recurring patterns across the data. Thus these patterns can be sorted into categories and the categories emerge as a result of developing unique and salient categories. The researcher "works back and forth between the data and the classification system to verify the meaningfulness and accuracy of the categories and the placement of data in categories" (Patton, 1990, p.403).

This process is also similar to another inductive approach, the constant comparative method. According to Maykut and Morehouse (1999) "the data are not grouped according to predetermined categories. . . [but emerges]. . . out of a process of inductive reasoning" (p.127). This method also helps the novice researcher with the process of developing categories and coding the data. During this process, I was guided by my advisor who has expertise in this area. Therefore, various categories and sub-categories were tightened and re-named slightly in light of the different nuances of different data fragments within a larger category. It was through this back and forth process that I was eventually able to bring closure to the data analysis.

In the process of the write-up, I was careful not to misrepresent these participants. As Ladson-Billings (2002) so pointedly remarks, it is important to situate oneself as researcher "because it affects what, how and why I research" (p.268). What the researcher chooses to study will influence the manner in which the participants are portrayed. Ladson-Billings advocates for researchers of color to name their own reality. Furthermore, it is important to represent the participants through their own voices and in their own words to enhance the validity of the study, and to keep one's own biases at bay.

Strategies to Enhance Quality and Dependability

It was important to ensure that the research findings were dependable and valid. Validity is assessed in qualitative research through the researcher's ability to accurately collect and analyze the data; however, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) there is a conflict with this term because of its roots in quantitative research. When discussing external validity, they advocate for the use of the term "transferability". Transferability refers to inferences about populations which "can be made with greater and greater precision to the extent to which the population is divided into homogeneous strata" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.297). The ability to have transferability depends upon the similarity between the two research contexts; therefore, the researcher must provide descriptive data in order for the reader to judge similarity to another context. The focus of qualitative research is to study the particular in depth, not necessarily to promote generalizeability. However, the findings of the study will perhaps be most relevant or "transferable" to experiences of African Americans in other professional corporate settings in the United States at this point in history.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) the researcher needs to be able to produce credible findings. This can be achieved by demonstrating a prolonged period of engagement with the participants, doing persistent observation and triangulating the data. Similarly, Merriam and Simpson (2000) state that there are several strategies to ensure credible findings, these include: triangulation of the data, member checks, peer/colleague examination of the data, researcher's statement of assumptions and biases, and immersion in the research situation.

Triangulation can be achieved through various approaches. Its intent is to bring several pieces of data together, such as various sources and methods, investigators and theories, in order to achieve credible findings. Merriam and Simpson (2000) state that triangulation helps confirm the findings; I engaged in data triangulation whereby I collected multiple sources of data and compared it to other sources of data. This created more credibility in the findings, and the multiple data sets include the transcribed interview, the field notes and the documents.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) the purpose of member checks is to test "data, analytic categories and conclusions...with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected" (p.314). Therefore, member checks help the researcher correct errors, obtain additional information from participants and evaluate the data categories that the researcher has established. I also conducted member checks to ensure that the transcribed material reflected the voice of the participant. Member checks involved two steps, first the transcribed interview was taken to the participant and second, the participant viewed the tentative interpretations based on the data. In addition, I reviewed and examined the data with my advisor; these sessions helped me to navigate through the process more readily. In addition, my advisor also served as peer reviewer which allowed for triangulation of the investigators. My advisor reviewed the first two initial transcripts to ensure that I was coding and analyzing the data properly.

The purpose of stating one's experiences and biases helps the reader to understand how the researcher dealt with various issues that affect the research process. In addition, I stated my experiences, assumptions and biases in reference to this research and my positionality was stated as an African American female who has worked in corporate

America. I explained that the study was theoretically grounded in critical race theory and that I would be analyzing the data through this lens. This enhances the validity of the research because it makes all aspects of the research process as transparent as possible.

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the major tenets of qualitative research, participant selection, and research perspective. The data collection and methods to achieve this were discussed as well as the procedure used for data analysis. Finally, the process that was utilized to ensure credible and dependable findings was discussed.

CHAPTER IV

INTRODUCTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

This chapter will introduce the thirteen African American managers who participated in this study, as well as provide a brief description of the companies that employed them. The participant profiles go into some depth about their experiences because it is out of their past experiences that they have become the persons who they are today. Each manager has a unique story about his or her ascent into management that was relayed to the interviewer. These personal accounts are included as a prelude to the results of the research. In order to maintain the confidentiality of the participants, and to protect their identities, pseudonyms were used. In addition, the names of the organizations which employed them are not used but the industries in which they operate were described. Because it helps the reader better situate the participants in the context of their companies, I will begin first with a profile of the companies involved. This is followed by a description of the participants.

Profile of the Organizations

The participants in the study were employed in one of seven Fortune 500 companies. While there were seven organizations used, six were Fortune 500 companies and one was a Global 500 company. Each company had several divisions which operated according to the small hybrid model. No more than three managers were utilized from the same small hybrid organization, or division. The small hybrid model, according to Daft

(1998), was conceptualized as a means to allow these multiple operations to become smaller companies and not have the total organization responsible for multiple companies. As a result, this smaller organization operates more effectively by putting the needs of the customer first and being flexible with responding to the environment. Moreover, the smaller organization can share the resources of the larger and thus have a better advantage in the marketplace. The organizations that were utilized operated within this framework. To ensure that I would obtain a more representative sample and not focus on one corporation that conceptualized itself as a “learning organization,” I used seven learning organizations. In addition, The Copy Company, Shipping Company and Transmit Company were recognized by *Fortune* magazine, in 2004, as some of the best companies for minorities to work. The learning organizations that employed the participants are described below.

Copy Company

This corporation is a \$15.7 million technology and services enterprise that helps businesses deploy strategies and find better ways to work. It has become a leader in supplying innovative technologies, products and solutions for its customers. Some of the products it produces include: color and black-and-white printing and publishing systems, digital presses and laser and solid ink network printers, copiers and fax machines. As of September 2004, this corporation employed 59,300 people worldwide, including 33,127 in the United States.

Shipping Company

This corporation is one of the premier providers of shipping and information services worldwide. In 2003, it employed approximately 230,000 people and generated

\$24.7 million in revenue. It has several sub-companies that function and operate independently, which allows each company to focus exclusively on delivering the best service.

Technology Company

In 2003, this organization generated \$89.1 million in revenue and employed 319,273 people worldwide. As a global operations company, it has conducted business in some 170 countries. It is one of the highest-ranking technology industry companies, recognized by the field. It has become a leader in the invention, development and manufacturing of the industry's most advanced information technologies, including computer systems, software, storage systems and microelectronics. It offers advanced technologies to its customers through professional solutions, services and consulting businesses.

Transmit Company

In 2003, this company had approximately \$35 million in revenue and employed 59,500 people. This organization provides Communications Services which includes voice, video and data communications. As a company that operates in the international market, it serves businesses, consumers, and government. It is a leading supplier of data, internet and managed services for various sectors, and offers outsourcing and consulting to large businesses and government.

Diversified Company

In 2003, this organization's revenues totaled \$134.2 million. It is a global company that operates in more than 100 countries and employs more than 300,000 people worldwide. As a corporation it is the most diversified because it offers technology,

media and financial services. It boasts that it is dedicated to creating products that make life better, producing goods such as water filtration systems, financial services, medical imaging, and television programming.

Fast Goods Company

This global company has its headquarters in Europe, but it has several divisions in the United States. It is the parent company of a group of brands that supplies fast moving consumer goods, such as food, home and personal care products worldwide. It has become a leader through innovation and meeting the needs of its consumers. While it employs over 234,000 people worldwide, in 2003 its revenues totaled \$27 million.

Materials Company

This is an organization that operates in a global market place, and employs more than 17,000 people. It has over 100 manufacturing facilities and 30 research facilities in 27 countries. As a specialty materials company, it has annual sales revenue of approximately \$6.4 million. It designs materials and processes for products that are sold primarily in the following areas: construction and building, electronics, household products and personal care, packaging, food, retail and automotive markets.

Profile of the Participants

Thirteen African American managers agreed to participate in this research study. The participants had been working in corporate America for at least 7.5 years, and the average number of years that they had been employed with their current employer was 16.6 years. All of the managers worked in a company that was identified as a learning organization. The study included six males and seven females. Ten of these managers

were located in the Northeast region of the United States, and three worked in the Southeastern region.

As managers, their titles varied, but six were first line managers. Six were middle managers, which included three entry level executives, and one was a senior manager. The majority of the managers contributed to the bottom line of the company and held important positions that had revenue generating responsibilities. This sample also included two managers who were part of what Collins (1989, 1993) called “the relations,” meaning human resources, public relations etc., which typically have no direct revenue-generating responsibilities. The time spent in management varied, but the sample included managers who had between eight months and twenty-two years in management. These managers operated in the following areas: customer service in a technical field, technical sales, operations and human resources.

The managers who participated in this study were extremely generous with their time despite the many challenges in their lives, such as demanding work schedules, various extracurricular activities and commitments to their families. In fact, several participants agreed to meet with me at their work locations. The managers are described below, and the table 3.1 on the following page provides a summary of the participant information.

Table 3.1 Participant demographics

Name	Gender	Education	Current employer	Management level	Time in management (at corporate level)	Years total	Number of years it took to get into management
Abraham	Male	BA	Copy	First line	14 years	28 years	14 years
Anna	Female	MBA	Copy	First line	2.5 years	7.5 years	5 years
Barry	Male	BA	Copy	Middle	17 years	25 years	8 years
Betsy	Female	MA	Shipping	Middle	16 years	19 years	3 years
Charles	Male	BA	Diversified	First line	8 months	13 years	12 years
Clarice	Female	MBA	Transmit	Middle	15 years	15 years	0 years

Name	Gender	Education	Current employer	Management level	Time in management (at corporate level)	Years total	Number of years it took to get into management
Debra	Female	MBA	Technology	Middle	8 years	15 years	7 years
Denver	Male	MBA	Diversified	First line	11 months	8 years	7 years
Eric	Male	BA	Technology	Middle	20 years	26 years	6 years
Eunice	Female	BA	Technology	First line	2 years	7 years	5 years
Florence	Female	BA	Technology	Middle	21 years	26 years	5 years
Geri	Female	PhD	Fast Goods	First line	4.5 years	4.5 years	0
Harry	Male	MD	Materials	Senior	22 years	22 years	0

Abraham

Abraham is currently employed by Copy Company. I met Abraham, a man in his late 50s, at his place of employment. He had been extremely busy not only performing his responsibilities but also filling in for a fellow manager who was on vacation. He had been with his company for approximately 28 years and began in the organization as a technician. Going into corporate America was not his first career.

Abraham grew up in an urban city in the Northeastern with his mother. He lived in a community that was all African American, and part of his childhood he lived in housing projects. He received his early education in the urban public schools with other African American children. He was one of the few in his high school that went to college, and after graduating in 1974, he worked within the school system teaching. After several years of working in the education field, he was ready for a career change and went to technical school. This enabled him to pursue a more lucrative career.

When Abraham entered the organization 28 years ago, where he is currently employed, he was sent to a region that was unfamiliar to him. This was done because this region did not have a representative number of African Americans. While this was a longer commute, he noted that in the end it was a blessing because it helped him focus on his career. The blessing he notes was not being distracted by communicating with his friends. He began his career at Copy Company as a technician, interacting with customers and servicing the brand products of the organization. In an attempt to advance his career opportunities, he entered the Management Development Program at the organization with the desire of going into management. This was fueled partly by the desire to provide a better quality of life for his family.

Out of all the interviewees, Abraham was probably more astute, and this was partly due to his many years with the organization. He has been in management for the past 14 years as a first line manager dealing with technicians who service the brand products. He gave an account of a broad history and an analysis of the changes that have occurred in the organization. He discussed that as an African American he realized that the playing field was not the same; he felt that the stereotypes surrounding African American males placed more stress on him to perform and be better than his White peers. In spite of these challenges, he refused to allow that to become his main focus. Instead he focused on being a better manager and helping those who served under him.

Anna

Anna works for Copy Company, and is in her early 50s. Upon her suggestion, we met after work and had dinner at a Greek restaurant. She told me that her days at work had been extremely busy and the next day she had to be up early to meet some clients. She had been working for her organization for the past seven and a half years and had spent the majority of her time in sales. Initially she was an operations manager, then transferred to a sales position and has been there for the past five years. Currently, she is a sales manager and has served in this position for the past year and a half.

Anna grew up in the segregated South and went to schools from kindergarten through 12th grade with African Americans, and the community that she grew up in was also African American. Anna was a psychology major as an undergraduate and then worked in early childhood education for approximately 25 years. She was able to ascend into the ranks of management in that field along with obtaining a masters degree in

business. After 25 years, she felt that she had reached a plateau in her career within the early childhood education field and wanted a different challenge. Additionally, she realized that there were more benefits in corporate America (i.e., salary). A friend and mentor gave her the opportunity to transition into the private sector.

What prepared her most for corporate America was her prior career experience and education. While she was educated in the segregated South, in the 1970s she went to a college that was racially integrated. She described this time in her life as formative because she experienced other cultures. Another important component to her college experience was that it provided her with some understanding of how to interact with the dominant culture. The skills were valuable for her and integral to her success in the workplace.

Barry

Barry works for Copy Company, and is in his late 50s. I met Barry at his residence to conduct the interview. He is single but has custody of his godson, and much of his time has been devoted to raising him. Barry spends his free time creating art or finding art to decorate his home.

Barry grew up in a city in the Northeast region. He was educated in Catholic schools and attended these schools with various ethnic groups. Barry graduated from college with a social service degree, and liked working with young people. In fact, after being displaced as an athletic director at a boys club, it was one of his students who encouraged him to enter the technical field. His technical background was extensive, but he had not attended technical school. Due to his innate ability with technology, he was a

shoe-in for a technical position. After going to a headhunter who was recruiting for Copy Company, he was offered a position as a technician. Barry has been with the same organization for the past 25 years and has approximately 17 years in management.

Since his organization believes in promoting from within, he was able to rise into management. Barry feels that his race has not negatively impacted his career. He felt that the organization has been able to have a substantial number of African American managers to substantiate this, he reported that the vice president of his division is African American. However, recently there has been a decrease in the number of African American candidates for first line management positions. In fact, he reported that only 2 out of the 35 first line managers, in his division, are African American.

Betsy

Betsy works for Shipping Company and is in her early 40s. I met Betsy at her job site and on this particular day the company was having a cookout for its employees, so she was in the midst of preparing for this. Before beginning the interview I explained to Betsy the nature of qualitative research and the importance of having the transcribed interview to analyze and compare with the others. She was reluctant to agree to the tape-recorded interview because she was a journalism major and felt that the material could be damaging to her career. She only agreed to the recorded interview after she was cleared through the corporate level public relations department. During the interview she remained very guarded, and during her response to several questions she refused to answer the questions in reference to her personal experiences. As a result, this was the most difficult interview that I conducted.

Betsy grew up in the segregated South; she lived and was educated with other African Americans. Her career has been very important to her, and she has always been intent on developing her career. For the first three years in the organization where she is currently employed, she worked as a customer service representative. Since she wanted to stand out from the other representatives, she volunteered for assignments that would ensure that she was recognized for her performance. In addition, she obtained a masters degree through the tuition-reimbursement program in personnel management to facilitate her entrance into the ranks of management. After several years within the company, Betsy progressed into middle management, and today she is in charge of two operation facilities in the Northeastern region and has the responsibility of managing 205 employees and 8 front line managers. In this position, she has the responsibility for ensuring that these two centers operate in accordance with the codes of the organization, meet federal guidelines, have the appropriate personnel, and generate revenue.

Betsy feels that her company has treated her fairly and the CEO has been extremely dedicated to the incorporation of diversity. However, when putting the CEO's diversity vision in practice, there have been some problems with racial discrimination. Betsy did not disclose the nature of these problems, but she has been committed to the company's diversity vision. This has prompted her to employ diverse employees for her first line managers. Initially, all of the first line managers were White; recently Betsy hired two African American males and a Hispanic female to account for the lack of diverse racial representation.

Charles

Charles works for Diversified Company. He is one of the younger managers in this sample and in his late 30s. Charles is single and talks about having a family one day, but he has been fully devoted to developing his career. At his request, we met for dinner; he had just returned from vacation and showed me his photographs that were loaded into his laptop. He was very open during the interview and discussed his feelings on the topics that were presented to him.

When I asked Charles about his early education, he reported that he grew up in the suburbs and lived in a middle class community that was predominantly White. His public school experience was also a time that he interacted as “the only”; he was one of a few African Americans who attended that suburban school. Charles notes that growing up he felt that he was raised to be “the only”, and while this was a point of contention for him at times, he used it to his advantage. The advantage was that he developed skills to help him navigate and understand the dominant culture from an early age. Charles stated that when he initially entered the organization, he was an entry level engineer.

He described his initial years as a time to learn how to become an engineer and bring all that academic knowledge into the workforce. During his second year with the company, he was offered a promotion in another division, but his direct manager did not allow him to take the position because he felt that he did not have enough work experience. What was troubling to Charles was that this position was given to a White peer who had the very same experience and skill level as Charles. Charles felt that giving the position to a White male who had the same knowledge base and amount of time within the organization was wrong. However, his solution was to recognize that he had

to be better than his White counterparts in order to be promoted. As a result of being passed over for this position, Charles sought to differentiate himself in order to stand out and looked for opportunities to develop his knowledge and skills.

After becoming a top sales performer, he worked his way into management, and currently he manages a team of sales representatives who operate across the United States and within the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Clarice

Clarice works for Transmit Company and is in her late 30s. Clarice and I met at her place of employment in the lunch room, and she was able to carve out time at the end of the week to meet with me. We connected immediately, and this is probably due to the fact that she looked at the interview as an opportunity to share some of her wisdom and experience. This was one of the best interviews that I conducted, and I learned a lot from her and her experience.

Clarice and her family immigrated to the United States from Trinidad when she was in elementary school. They moved to an urban area in the Northeast where she completed her education and went to college. As a political science major she had ambitions of going to law school, but she decided to obtain a Master in Business Administration. After completing the program as a full-time student, she then pursued a career in corporate America.

Clarice worked for her current employer as an intern during graduate school and was recognized as a top performer. Prior to graduation, Transmit Company offered her several positions and she finally accepted a management position in the finance

department and remained there for about eight and a half years. What is interesting is that the field of finance is dominated by White males. However, Clarice was able to flourish in this arena until the organization hired a White male from New York. Clarice reported that he began to make changes that made the work environment more of a “good old boys” network, which meant that the new boss favored White males. Clarice left the finance department because she did not have the support to remain there. In total, Clarice has been with the company for 15 years, and she is very goal-oriented. For instance, when she entered the organization where she currently works, she wanted to reach middle management after ten years, and she has been able to achieve this goal.

Another interesting topic was that Clarice was the first female among those I interviewed to discuss the challenges of having a career and raising a family. While her career goals were ambitious, she also knew that she wanted to have a family. Furthermore, Clarice believes that management was supportive when she went out on maternity leave, and this did not hinder her career. However, she has made changes in the types of management roles that she will accept now. Such that she recently left a stressful management position within the company for one that would enable her to spend more time with her family. She has a husband and three children and employs a nanny to assist with the family.

Debra

Debra works for Technology Company and is in her late 30s. She is employed in the Southeastern region of the United States. I made the appointment with her assistant, and the day of the interview was the first time that I spoke with her. She received

minimal information about the research project from a colleague, yet she was more than willing to meet with me. She graduated with an electrical engineering degree and then entered into an MBA program before entering the workforce. Her initial roles were in technical sales, and she became recognized as a top performer. After seven years with the organization, she began to look for a new challenge. Since she was comfortable with sales, she decided to go into management. As a sales manager she excelled and moved into a middle management role. Debra is the youngest executive manager in her organization and the only African American. She reported that this has not been a problem for her because she has become accustomed to being the only. For her, being the only African American has not been a point of contention, and it is possible that she developed some skills because of her educational experiences. Debra grew up in the North and was educated in the public school system; she attended an elementary and high school where she was bussed into an area that was predominantly White. The middle school was located in her neighborhood, which was predominantly African American; middle school was the only time she recounts in her life where she was not the only African American person in the classroom. It appears that her educational experience, has groomed her for corporate America. Out of 60 executives, in her division, she is the only African American.

As a working mother Debra discussed the challenges associated with balancing her work and family life. She has two small children and has found ways to support the existence of a family in the form of having a nanny to care for the children. In fact, as a manager who is also dedicated to her career, Debra had to gain the experience of working in the corporate headquarters with the top management of the organization. For several

months, Debra left her family in the care of her husband and traveled to New York Tuesday through Thursday night in order to be groomed for her current role as a director in a technical sales field.

Denver

Denver works for Diversified Company. I met Denver for the interview at his office; he is in his late 20s and single. Denver grew up in an urban city in the Northeast and lived in an African American community. He was educated, however, in private schools that were predominantly White. He feels that his educational experience helped him gain skills that would make him effective in his career. Yet when he returned home, he was able to interact with members of his own culture and he feels that this kept him grounded. His father was a manager, and he describes this relationship as integral to facilitating his career development.

He has been devoted to developing his career and was an intern for his current employer. Denver's major was engineering, and after graduation, he was placed in the Management Development Program for two years. In this program he was offered management classes and rotated to different roles for six month stints in order to gain a variety of experiences in the technical field. He has moved several times for the purposes of developing his career and has worked for several divisions within the company.

In Denver's current role he purchases products for this global organization needs to perform its daily operations. This is his first management role, and he described this as a challenging role but one that could help him establish his career in management. One thing that Denver noticed when he relocated to his current position was that there was a

lack of African American representation. He approached Human Resources and informed them that he wanted to help fulfill the CEO's vision of diversity. As a result of this partnership, he and some other African American managers have been assisting with the recruitment of African American candidates.

Eric

Eric works for Technology Company, and is in his late 50s. Eric's interview was arranged with his assistant; so when I met him for the interview that was my first time speaking with him. He had received an email that I would be coming to the Southeast and arranged for me to meet with him at his office. He was one of the few participants who had worked for other corporations, so he was able to discuss the differences of the experiences that he had with his present employer.

Eric grew up in the inner city in a predominately African American neighborhood and was educated in that public school system. He graduated from college in the Midwest and then first worked for a beverage company. This company was under fire from a civil rights organization because it did not employ any African Americans. He explained that he had been the fifth African American hired there, and his brother-in-law was the first. Therefore, he was able to discuss and compare his experiences between the beverage company, which was pressured to comply with affirmative action, and his present employer, which had a vision for diversity. When Eric decided to leave the beverage company he did so because he wanted the opportunity to further his career.

He met with a manager from Technology Company and expressed his interest in gaining meaningful and challenging work experiences and was assured that this

organization would exceed his expectations. Upon his entrance into the organization some 26 years ago, he took a systems engineering role. As his career progressed, he was placed on the management fast track, which meant that he was placed in different positions to gain more work experience and exposure to different divisions of the company. His employer, Technology Company has offered him the career experiences that he needed. What made the difference between this company and his previous employer was that his current employer was dedicated to developing the careers of African Americans, even into management positions. Moreover, top leadership is committed to a diversity vision, which enabled the formation of several affinity groups for underrepresented populations.

Eunice

Eunice works for Technology Company and is in her mid 30s. She grew up in a city in the Northeast and the community was predominantly African American. Her high school was also in the inner city and was African American.

I met Eunice at a restaurant for lunch because she was preparing to leave for a business trip. She is a first line sales manager for a technical sales organization and is responsible for a sales team that sells one specialized product.

Eunice was recruited by a sales manager from a non-profit organization and relocated to the Southeast to take a sales specialist position. Initially, she thought that she would gain entry into the organization and later transition into public relations; however, she became a top performer in sales and was recognized for her talent. She served as a

sales representative for five years and then began to look for a new challenge and pursued a career in management.

Eunice has been with her present employer for over seven years and plans to remain to further her career by pursuing an executive management role. She has expressed concern with the glass ceiling and the “good old boys” network, which are the invisible barriers that impede the progress of African Americans into management. One element that was important to her was to understand how to navigate these barriers, and she valued the wisdom of African Americans female mentors for this. One mentor in particular is a middle manager that has been with the organization for over 20 years. Eunice thought that this relationship was valuable because this mentor was open and shared her perspective on how to navigate the “good old boys” network, and become a contender for upper management.

One thing that her parents, immigrants from Trinidad, expressed to her was the value of hard work. Therefore, Eunice hopes to overcome these barriers by being a top performer in the organization. She is fully committed to her career but has future plans of getting married and having a family.

Florence

Florence works for Technology Company and is in her early 50s. She grew up in a racially segregated city in the Midwest and was also educated in the public school system there. Florence began her career in 1978 with Technology Company because she found their tuition reimbursement program enticing. This program would allow her to continue to pursue a bachelor’s degree as a part time student. Florence was one of the

more interesting participants because of the path that her career traveled. She began working in operations with other engineers and was the only participant who came into corporate America with the intention of just having a job. However, this period of time turned out to be more than just a job; it turned into a career.

After earning a bachelors degree in 1980, Florence focused on her career within Technology Company and was promoted to management in 1983. In the late 1980's she obtained the attention of a vice president at the company, a White male, and he began to serve as her mentor. She described this relationship as integral to enhancing her career. He promoted her and her career began to flourish. Currently, she is an executive and has served in this role for seven years; her responsibilities include, promoting training opportunities for various business units in the United States, Latin America and South America.

Florence also has a family, and early in her career she was placed on the advanced management track. This was a career option for stellar performers that would prepare them for senior management positions by exposing them to various divisions within the company. However, Florence came to the conclusion that while her children were young she wanted to focus more on her family. Her conundrum was much like Clarice and Debra, the other working mothers in this study. So she disembarked from this path and attempted to lead a more balanced work and family life.

Geri

Geri works for Fast Goods Company and is in her late 30s. Due to some time constraints, I conducted this interview over the phone. She was going away on vacation

so doing the interview over the phone worked best for her. Geri grew up in the suburbs in the Northeast in a racially diverse community. Her early schooling was also diverse and the students were predominately White. She had over 15 years of experience in the field of human resources and also worked in affirmative action. Geri was a communication major and when she graduated worked for a publishing company. While still exploring her career options, the director of human resources at the publishing company offered her a job in human resources. This began her journey in corporate America.

What is interesting is that Geri came from the pharmaceutical industry to work for her current employer. She described the pharmaceutical industry as including more diversity, and when Fast Goods Company initially offered her a position, she declined because of the lack of racial diversity. To illustrate this point, the senior leadership is comprised of all White males and there are no African American vice presidents in the company. When the vice president of human resources began to aggressively recruit Geri, he explained that the company wanted to change their lack of diversity. Therefore, Geri has been given the charge to promote more racial diversity in the company.

While working for her present employer, she has found that African Americans are indeed under represented. In addition, when she recently re-located with the company to the New England area, she found this to be somewhat of a culture shock. She is the only African American female manager and there are two African American male managers. What Geri and some of the other African Americans have done is to create an informal networking group. What is interesting is that this is the only company, represented in this research that did not support the incorporation of affinity groups.

Geri stated that this was due to the lack of African Americans that were employed within this particular location. Currently, Geri is working with a leading diversity consultant to facilitate the incorporation of all aspects of diversity within Fast Goods Company.

Harry

Harry works for Materials Company and is in his mid 50s. Since his father was in the military, Harry grew up on various military bases in the Northeast region of the U.S. These military bases were racially mixed, and the communities where he grew up overall were diverse. For the majority of his kindergarten through 12th grade education he experienced some periods of integration during school. However, during middle school he was in the classroom with other African Americans.

Harry is part of the senior leadership at his corporation, and his career development was somewhat different than the other participants. It was not his intention to enter corporate America; as a medical doctor, he was interested in general preventative medicine. He wanted to remain in the university setting and continue to do research. However, after there had been some cuts to funding sources which contributed to his research, he considered other career options.

He had been doing research for Materials Company, and gained some contacts. These contacts informed him of a job opening with the company and encouraged him to apply. He thought that he would spend some time with Materials Company and wait until the funding sources for research stabilized. However, he never returned to the university setting and has remained within this company ever since.

What is remarkable about Harry's career is that he did not concentrate on its development. When he entered the company he was in a management title, and he had the opportunity to participate in some exciting product development. This exposure allowed those in upper management to notice him and after being within the company for twelve years he was promoted to senior management. Harry became the company's first African American vice president. Since Materials Company deals with specialty materials, he is responsible for ensuring that there is no harm to the people that work or live in the communities where they are manufactured. He is responsible for these manufacturing plants all over the world and manages directly and indirectly approximately 400 people.

Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter introduces the participants, and shares their stories to help the reader understand them as individuals. Furthermore, the paths they have traveled provide a context to the development of their careers and highlights some of the choices they made. Their stories illustrate that they are more than just managers. They have had lengthy careers in their prospective learning organizations, the shortest career being 4.5 years and the longest spanning 28 years.

CHAPTER V

PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

The purpose of this research study was to explore the experiences of African American managers working in “learning organizations.” The participants were employed by learning organizations that were either Fortune 500 companies, or in one case, a Global 500 company. This chapter introduces themes and patterns that emerged from the interviews of the participants and are the result of a constant comparative analysis of the participants’ narratives.

The findings of this study are organized into four major sections, and the categories of each are presented in each section. First, in order to understand how the learning organization impacts African American managers, it is important to consider the historical context of the managers’ entrance into corporate America. Thus the discussion begins here. In the second section, the focus is on their specific learning as African American managers. Third, the aspects of racial discrimination that manifested within the organization are explored. Lastly, because the focus of this study concerns their experiences specifically about the learning organization, some of the findings are explored in relation to the specific disciplines of the learning organization. What follows is a data display that summarizes the main findings of the study.

DATA DISPLAY

- I. Effects of Cultural Capital and the Historical Context on Career Entry
 - A. Cultural Capital and Early Educational Experiences
 - B. Older Managers: Accessing Through Affirmative Action and Hard Work
 - C. Younger Managers: Accessing Through Internships and Inside Connections

- II. Taking Advantage of Learning Opportunities in Furthering Their Careers
 - A. Making Connections Between Formal Learning and Work Practice
 - B. Informal Learning Through Observation
 - C. Learning Through Mentors
 - 1. Multiple Informal Mentors
 - 2. Cultural Mentors
 - 3. Mentors in Positions of Power

- III. Race Relations in African American Positive Learning Organizations
 - A. General Satisfaction with Organization's Equity Efforts
 - 1. Having an Effective Diversity Manager
 - 2. Sponsoring African American Networking Groups
 - B. Primary Consciousness of Racism as an Individual's Problem
 - 1. Denial of Direct Experiences of Racism
 - 2. Moving Beyond Racism
 - C. A Microcosm of Society: Limitations with Equity
 - 1. Low numbers of African Americans in Management
 - 2. Marginalization
 - 3. Problems of "Comfort" Hiring and Mentoring

- IV. Implicit Rather Than Explicit Knowledge of the Learning Organization
 - A. Making Use of Systems Thinking
 - B. Personal Mastery: Taking Initiative Toward Personal Vision
 - C. Limited Organizational Desire for Uncovering Mental Models
 - 1. Perceived Repercussions to Challenging the System
 - 2. Limited Tolerance of Mistakes
 - D. Acceptance of Upper Management's Vision
 - 1. Supporting the Vision
 - 2. Lacking the Human Element
 - E. Effective Team Learning

Effects of Cultural Capital and the Historical Context on Career Entry

This first section discusses how the participants made their entrance into corporate America and then management. Career entry is an integral part to the career development process, and the aim of this research was to explore how the learning organization impacted the career development of Black managers. In order to understand how the participants entered corporate America, it is important to understand something about their earlier educational experiences, and their cultural capital as well as the historical context in which they entered corporate America. As discussed in Chapter 2, Bourdieu's conceptualization of "cultural capital" is also useful here, and refers to the extent to which individuals possess attributes based on the constructs of power that are valued by the dominant culture and help them navigate in it. This includes factors such as race, class, gender, privilege, educational background, etc. Thus, the possession of cultural capital is a core factor in defining an individual's status and opportunity within society, specifically in corporate America. What is striking is that each manager possessed some elements of cultural capital that were rooted in his or her background and lived experience. Thus, the following discussion begins here.

Secondly, what helped many of the managers find entry depended upon several issues. At times it was a combination of opportunity embedded partly in historical factors such as civil rights and affirmative action. In 1954, the United States Supreme Court handed down the *Brown versus the Board of Education* decision. This historic event resulted in significant changes in this country; it dismantled the legal basis for racial segregation in schools and other public facilities. On the heels of this decision, in 1964 the Civil Rights Act was passed. This legislated against discrimination in the hiring

of minorities, such as African Americans. This legislation resulted in affirmative action and Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC), which addressed discriminatory hiring and promotional practices that impacted African Americans in the workplace, especially corporate America. Civil rights organizations were an additional component that facilitated the incorporation of African Americans into corporate America; these organizations compelled companies to comply with affirmative action.

While the interviews for this study did not specifically inquire about affirmative action, some interesting themes emerged surrounding its significance for at least five of the managers. The older managers, who had more than 19 years in corporate America, were cognizant that this had been a historical period in the United States in which the doors of opportunity had opened. All of the managers held at least a bachelors degree. There were, however, distinct differences between the younger and older managers. The younger managers possessed more cultural capital and were “groomed” to appeal to the dominant culture. Thus, after discussing the cultural capital and educational experiences of the participants, the second and third parts of the chapter deal with the differences in the historical context between the older and younger managers that enabled them to gain entry into corporate America.

Cultural Capital and Early Educational Experiences

The level of cultural capital among these managers varied and depended on their early educational experiences. In order to work in corporate America for a Fortune 500 or Global 500 company, there is a “code” that these managers had to decipher. This code refers to the unstated, preferred conduct and rules for working in corporate America. On the whole, the younger managers had more cultural capital than the older managers.

However, specific themes emerged from the data, such as parental grooming and the provision of early educational experiences, which were common to all of the participants; yet enabled them to be successful within this setting.

An overwhelming majority of the participants did not have parents who were employed in corporate America; thus each of the managers in this research was a trailblazer in his/her own right. Both Clarice and Eunice had emigrated from Trinidad, and their parents stressed that education and hard work would raise their daughters' status in society. Each manager spoke about the positive impact that their parents had on them. Moreover, the parents were instrumental in encouraging and directing them toward being successful.

Eunice's parents were very instrumental in getting her to focus on education and to use that education as an opportunity to achieve a better life. Their lack of education was the impetus for encouraging Eunice to do well in school. She stated:

I'm from Trinidad originally and my mother and father neither of them graduated from high school. However, they instilled in us the importance of an education and making sure that you reach for the stars, and I think that that passion has driven me to try to be successful in anything that I do. I was very successful in school.

Eunice's parents instilled a strong work ethic in her which also enabled her to pursue greater opportunities in adulthood.

In another example, Florence's mother groomed her for greater opportunities in life. Florence was from a family with a working class background. She described:

My Mom was a domestic...She used to take me with her to clean houses in the summertime. And I used to tell her, Mom, when I grow up...I don't want to be like you, and she said that she was taken aback. And she said now that she thinks back, it was probably really good that I didn't want to be like her because it caused me to go on and get additional education and to work a lot harder than your average person. Because my Mom always taught me that you have to work hard, and what I find even today as a Black woman, you have to work harder than your peers. There's no way to get around it.

Florence had a passion to be something greater, and her mother supported this. Her mother instilled in Florence the notion that she had to be better than her White counterparts. In addition, having a strong work ethic would help her daughter achieve her dreams.

Denver utilized the knowledge and experience that his father had bestowed upon him since his father also worked in management. He reported:

His background was in management. . . I've learned from him. A lot of advice on things he would have done differently in his career to kind of help me move forward.

Since Denver's father was a manager, he was able to provide some words of wisdom to his son. In particular he said:

My father used to say, sometimes you have to toot your own horn. And I think the big thing is that self-promotion among African Americans is unusual. And saying, hey, look here at my jobs, this is what I've accomplished. And I think that's appropriate, you have to...people have to notice you in the company.

In sum, the parents of these managers groomed them for greater opportunities in later life. Their wisdom and encouragement played a role in their sons' and daughters' attempts to become the best.

The early educations of the managers were of interest because these experiences generally molded them for future educational or career endeavors. Overall, six of the managers were educated with other African American students (most of the older managers, and one of the younger managers), while the others were educated within predominately White school settings. Education is a component of cultural capital, because it transfers pertinent knowledge about the dominant culture. Therefore, it acculturates a person on how to operate in the world and how to operate effectively in this society.

The younger managers who had fewer than 18 years of work experience were more vocal about navigating the dominant culture. This group of managers entered the workforce in the late 1980s and 1990s and included Charles, Denver, Clarice, Debra, Geri, and Eunice. Most learned how to navigate the dominant culture through their experiences in school, from kindergarten through 12th grade and in college.

The majority of the younger managers were educated in predominately White schools; some of them went to public and others to private schools. Charles, Denver, Clarice, Debra, and Geri all went to schools during their formative years where the majority of the students were members of the dominant culture. They felt that this advantage prepared them as Blacks for interacting comfortably within corporate America and for being contenders for management.

Clarice stated that her parents stressed getting a good education and that they wanted her to receive the best education possible. While she grew up in an urban area, her parents sent her, at one point, to an affluent private school with members of the dominant culture. Her experience is an excellent example of this phenomenon. She stated:

I started at a school, rather exclusive in D.C., where they sent in Georgetown all the lobbyists' kids and politicians' kids, but it was a good experience for me. . .

We were a working class family. What it gave me access to was that I was just as smart as anybody else. . . And when you're in an environment, and to sit with them [White people], that is, if you can do it, you're not intimidated by it.

For Clarice, interacting during her formative years with members of the dominant culture gave her confidence in her abilities. In addition, this also translated to her work experience. She reported:

So it was a good experience for me, even though there was this all White world at school. I came home to a place that kept me grounded. So I was never confused about who I was. . . What it gave me access to was that I was just as smart as anybody else. And I've always said that when you meet Blacks and others in the inner city, the difference is what their experience has been. Because if they sat in the setting that I did, and realized these politician kids, these lobbyist [kids], I was getting better grades. . . They're no smarter than you are. . . And when you're in an environment, and to sit with them—that is if you can do it—you're not intimidated by it.

Clarice's educational experience was positive for her career, and she learned skills that helped her interact with the dominant culture. In addition, she also felt that she was deserving of any position within corporate America.

Charles was another participant who had been educated with members of the dominant culture. His parents moved to a suburban area that was predominately White because the school district was rated better than the surrounding urban district. Charles's parents wanted him to have a topnotch education. He stated:

I went to an all White high school, an all White college, and work for an all White company. So I've sort of been trained, through high school to deal in that type of society. So it wasn't a big switch for me going into corporate America being that way. . . being all White. So I think that maybe that had a positive impact on me as far as being able to perform in corporate America because I was used to it since high school.

Charles felt that his early education had given him a distinct advantage. He felt comfortable interacting with the dominant culture, and it facilitated his ability to function in corporate America. This was especially true since his peers and supervisor at Diversified Company have been predominantly White.

Debra was the only participant who remarked that she did not know what set her apart from her African American peers that she grew up with. However, during our conversation, Debra commented that attending school with predominately White students assisted her in being more effective in corporate America. She relayed:

When I look at my life, there wasn't anything different about me from the rest of the (Black) people that went to public school, other than I was bused away. . . So I was given opportunities.

Debra was bussed, which meant that she traveled to schools that were in White neighborhoods and served White students. Bussing was a corrective measure linked to the 1954 *Brown versus the Board of Education* ruling. This decision was enacted to bring greater educational equality to Black children, because White schools typically had more educational resources. Therefore, integrating the schools was an attempt to end the disparity in the education of Black students.

Although Denver lived in an urban area and his neighbors were Black, his parents sent him to private school. Like the other managers interviewed for this study, Denver felt that this educational experience helped him feel comfortable interacting with people of other races. Denver stated:

I went to a lot of private schools. That's the sacrifices that my parents made. The schools were mostly White, so I never had problems with interacting with people of different races.

Denver felt that his educational experience was an asset for him. When he entered corporate America, he was comfortable interacting with various races.

Eunice was the only younger manager who had not attended school with the dominant culture. She went to public schools in an urban setting, but then went to a college where the majority of the students were White. What is different about her career is that she spent five years in the non-profit sector before transitioning to corporate America. The early educational experience of these managers was integral to their

success in corporate America. *Brown versus the Board of Education* was a landmark case for providing equality of education for African Americans. Its main premise was that a strong education would enhance an individual's later opportunities.

As a parent, Barry (one of the older managers) felt that a quality education was needed in order to compete in this society. He based his rationale on his experience in the workplace. He stated:

I would never recommend for my child to go to a Black school throughout his entire life. I think that's a fatal mistake. He needs to understand White people, spend time with White people, so that way when you get out here into the real world [you'll be equipped] . . . You don't live in a Black world. You live in a real world. So I think you need diversity before you get out into the real world to understand what's going on. . . You're not going to work around all Black people. It's going to be a lot of White people that's going to be around you, and you need to understand how they think, and how they act.

What is evident, with the younger managers, is that they went to school with students of the dominant culture. Most of their parents' believed that a topnotch education, which also meant interacting with the dominant culture, would enhance their child's prospects for better career opportunities.

Older Managers: Accessing Through Affirmative Action and the Virtue of Hard Work

Affirmative action opened the doors of opportunity, but it was their hard work that enabled the managers with more than 19 years of experience to enter corporate America. The managers who were hired in the late 1970s and the early 1980s had an experience that was different from the managers hired closest to the 1990s and beyond.

The period between the 1970s and the late 1980s was a time when organizations were trying to recruit a large number of underrepresented groups, such as African Americans, into corporate America in order to adhere to affirmative action legislation. In contrast, the managers with 18 years or less in corporate America did not appear to be as overtly affected by the affirmative action legislation. In the 1990s, there was controversy about the merits of affirmative action. In 1989, three cases were brought before the Supreme Court, which argued that affirmative action resulted in perceived cases of reverse discrimination, whereby Whites were not given adequate opportunities because of the “quotas for minorities” and were being dealt with unjustly. The Supreme Courts ruled against the use of minority set-asides and restricted the use of statistics to prove discrimination, since statistics did not prove intent.

In this study, the managers with more than 19 years of work experience in corporate America exemplify that the objective of corporate America was to adhere to affirmative action by hiring underrepresented groups. These managers included Barry, Abraham, Florence, Harry and Eric; affirmative action provided these managers with an opportunity to enter corporate America. In fact, Eric’s experience with his first employer provides an excellent example of this point. He described:

The reason that the beverage company was hiring African Americans is because of “Operation PUSH” in 1972. It was headed by Jesse Jackson, [he] said, we drink a lot of your product, and you have no African Americans. . . So they hired people simply because they wanted to address the fact that they knew that there was a large percent of African Americans who were consumers of their product. . . which was almost exclusively sold in the African American community. So

naturally, they said, “Well, we can’t lose this [market].” So . . . they brought in African Americans. So there were about a dozen of us who were hired in 1973 with no obvious plan for movement [i.e., career development]

Eric also stated that his brother-in-law was the first African American hired, and he (Eric) then became the fifth hired at the company. The demands that this civil rights organization placed on this company made them accountable to the guidelines of affirmative action. Therefore, as a reactive measure, the beverage company sought to employ African Americans.

Eric explained that the 1970s was a time of change in corporate America. When he finally left the beverage company to look for a better opportunity, he recalled that it was not to look for a better salary, but to gain an opportunity that would enable him to move into management. Eric discussed the historical context at the time he began to look for another opportunity. He reported:

In the mid 70’s there were a lot of companies scrambling for African American talent, as they had a large African American consumer base. Or if they had a reasonable number of government contracts, they needed to have some African Americans do something at their company. And when I was looking for another job, a company in Chicago was going to double my salary but . . . [I would be] getting more money to be in the same kind of hole as the beverage company that I am today. It had a management title to it, but so what? You’re window dressing and that’s it!

While affirmative action opened the door of opportunity for Eric, he took his career seriously and wanted to contribute in a meaningful way to the organization.

Therefore, with the passage of time, he was more deliberate about the positions he took. Eric was the first among the participants to address the conflict that resulted from affirmative action. For instance, he noted that while affirmative action opened doors for Blacks, it also carried a stigma. Some members of the dominant culture criticized affirmative action because they felt it permitted less qualified individuals to enter corporate America. A major difference that Eric noticed between his previous employer and his current one, which is a learning organization, was that there was less focus by those he worked with on how he got his position in corporate America. Eric stated:

The beverage company was a little different, same city but a different attitude. Whether there were people who were curious about you, or people who thought you'd joined the beverage company for legal reasons and that you didn't deserve to be there. . . So you never saw any of that at Technology Company in all my career.

During his career with the Technology Company, Eric never felt stigmatized by affirmative action. His co-workers never made or implied any accusation that he obtained his position as an "affirmative action hire." In fact, he has always received respect from his co-workers for the value that he brought to the business, and he has felt that being a valued contributor was the only thing that mattered at Technology Company. Eric was the only manager who overtly discussed affirmative action and the impact that it had on his career, although several other participants referred to it.

Another participant, Barry, spoke about his entrance into corporate America and referred to the issue of affirmative action. His story also provides support to the notion of the pressure that civil rights and affirmative action placed on organizations to recruit and

hire qualified African Americans. Barry recalled when he entered Copy Company in 1980:

[I was hired] because I was Black because Copy Company was hiring minorities at the time. I went to a headhunter, and the headhunter was looking for minorities with technical skills. And the only reason I know this is because the guy kind of alluded to it and I was there early because I didn't have a car at the time. I had to take public transportation and you want to be on time. You'd rather be early, and I was about an hour early. And everybody [at the interview] before me was Black, and when I came out, everybody after me was Black.

His account of how he entered corporate America highlights the impact of affirmative action. Organizations were focused on recruiting and hiring qualified African Americans, so Barry used this opportunity to his advantage. He entered the company as a technician and used this job to develop a meaningful career.

Barry was later promoted to manager, and he recounted a second incident at Copy Company. During Barry's first year as a manager, he attended a meeting held by his supervisor, a White man. At that meeting, held sometime in 1986, Barry reported:

[My manager] said to the staff, and we had a staff of 12 or 13 managers. We were going out recruiting because we needed to hire about 20 folks. . . . If they're not a minority, don't bring them back here because I am not going to let you hire them. He said it to the whole group, and minority could have been White female, Black female, or Black male. He did not want predominantly, White males. He did not want any and he told the staff so.

Once again this provides more credence to the significance of affirmative action; it impacted corporations' recruitment decisions. Barry, as a part of the management team, was a witness to his organization's struggle to adhere to affirmative action.

Affirmative action served as a mechanism that enabled these African Americans to gain access to corporate America, but out of their own perseverance and dedication, they became recognized as exceptional performers. Therefore, affirmative action and the civil rights movement opened the gates of opportunity for these African American managers. However, in order to remain in the competitive environment of corporate America, these managers made every effort to be the best in their respective organizations.

When Eric decided to leave the beverage company to pursue a better career development opportunity, he took a pay cut. Eric stated that he "took about a 25% cut to come to Technology Company versus the beverage company simply because I felt that there were greater opportunities at Technology Company". He felt that if his skills were to be valued, he needed meaningful, career-building opportunities, and his experiences at Technology Company would then allow him to move into management. In fact, other talented African Americans left this beverage company because they were not given the opportunity for advancement. He informed me that two African American men later became senior executives, both at learning organizations—one at another beverage company, and the other at an automotive company. Therefore, his decision to relocate to Technology Company was based on the opportunity he would have to obtain meaningful work experiences that would facilitate his career development and ultimately move into management.

Florence was another manager who was hired during a period in history where organizations were focused on complying with affirmative action. She was employed in 1978 in an operations division that was primarily filled with White male engineers. Later she progressed into management, and then served as what she called the “token” for the work unit. By token, she meant that although she was African American, she worked for a division that had very little racial diversity. Florence was sent to national events to represent the division and became their spokesperson. She reported:

Because there were so few Blacks. . . and I had gotten my degree. So it was like I was a token and I wouldn't say Technology Company's token, but the manager's token. So whenever there was an opportunity to go to an award conference, or anytime there was an opportunity to speak or do anything, I was always there, they always put me up there to do it.

Since organizations were focused on adhering to affirmative action, Florence was able to benefit from it. This exposure enabled her to enhance her career, and she utilized affirmative action to her advantage. Florence has been able to maintain her position because of her hard work and commitment to the organization. She first entered the organization in an entry-level position, but she was recognized for her talent. After obtaining her bachelor's degree three years later, she was promoted to management. Florence was placed in an accelerated management track that would enable her to move into upper management. She explained:

I was always there [at the national conference], you know, they always put me up there to do it. One time I was in Miami, Florida, at a national conference that Technology Company has. And there was this one man who was a vice president

at Technology Company at the time and he wanted to know who I was. And they told him who I was, and three months later I got promoted. And before I know it I was moving from the Midwest—that's where I was from—to the Northeast.

After this vice president had met Florence at a conference, where she had been demonstrating the latest technology from her division, he was impressed with her talent and decided to assist with her career development.

Harry was another manager who alluded to both tokenism and capitalizing on affirmative action and hard work. At Materials Company there were no African Americans in upper management, and the CEO wanted to change the image of the company. The CEO wanted the company to be recognized in *Fortune* magazine as one of the best places for African Americans to work. Harry reported that the company wanted to improve its image surrounding diversity, and one of the items in the diversity report suggested placing an African American in senior management. Shortly after that report, Harry then became the first African American senior manager within Materials Company.

The only manager with more than 19 years in corporate America who did not fit into this category was Betsy. This maybe due to the fact that she was guarded during the interview, and very reluctant to discuss how race impacted her career within Shipping Company.

In conclusion, the managers used affirmative action as an opportunity to advance their careers, but they also took initiative and worked very hard, which contributed to their advancement. Prior to affirmative action, however, discrimination in hiring practices within corporate America negatively impacted African Americans. Affirmative

action was a means to facilitate the inclusion of African Americans into the ranks of corporate America. What remains true of the corporate environment is that it is competitive, and in order to remain in it, one must be a top performer. Through their sheer determination and initiative, these participants proved their worth and excelled, rising into the ranks of their company's management.

Younger Managers: Access Through Internships and Inside Connections

The career entrance of the younger managers was made possible by the connections that they had with the organization. All of the managers, both the younger ones and the older ones, held at least a bachelor's degree, which is one element of cultural capital. What is striking is that the younger managers possessed more cultural capital as they entered the corporate setting than the older managers. This was due largely to their earlier school experiences and the fact that they were socialized early on about navigating the dominant culture. Overall, the younger managers possessed more cultural capital and were more accustomed to understanding the dominant culture. They capitalized on their knowledge and skills from their early education in order to become more successful in corporate America.

Clearly, the managers with more than 19 years in corporate America paved the way for the younger managers. As a result, the career entrance for the younger managers took a different path for their entrance into corporate America. The younger managers entered corporate America mainly because they possessed greater cultural capital. In addition, several of the managers, Clarice, Denver, and Debra, became acquainted with their present employer through an internship. This served as a period of time for them to showcase their talent, and within this time, they were recognized as exceptional

performers. For example, Denver was an intern for Diversified Company. After graduation, he applied for the management development program at the company, which was a competitive process. This program would ensure him a full-time position and career development opportunities for upper management. He discussed:

It was really driven primarily by performance. In the summer internships they used an appraisal process, you're given scores, one to five, five being the best on your performance. And basically it's a lot of manager input. You don't even get an interview. . . If your performance wasn't above, let's say, a four or a three and this is the initial screening and obviously it's a lot of interviews that you go through.

Denver was able to use this internship as an opportunity to become recognized by the company as an exceptional performer and through his hard work, he was chosen for this program. As a further testament to his hard work, Denver became one of two employees selected for this program. He remarked:

That particular summer there were only two hires. There was myself and another guy who was actually another minority. . . a lot of eyes stopped because we were the only two in the whole division, and that was the first time that ever happened in the whole division.

Clarice was another participant who used her internship as an opportunity to showcase her talent. She stated:

Between my first and second year I did an internship with Transmit Company down in D.C. And then when I graduated they extended several job offers to me until I accepted the one in New Jersey.

Clarice was recognized as a top performer and secured a position in corporate America. In addition, Debra was another manager who was able to secure a position with her current employer because of a connection that she had with an upper manager. As a graduate student, she was able to interact with this manager in a professional environment, which served as a way for her to showcase her talent. Debra stated:

So I'm a consortium fellow and. . . it used to be for minorities a way to get your MBA. So I was on the liaison to the board. One of the gentlemen on the board worked for Technology Company, and our paths have crossed every now and then. But he's a general manager today.

Debra's entrance into corporate America was similar to the other managers' with 18 years or less in corporate America. Due to her affiliation with her college, she was able to develop a contact that helped her enter corporate America. But ultimately, it was the managers' hard work that opened doors for them. Additionally, they had a fair amount of cultural capital. This also helped them become bicultural in the sense where they could easily navigate within both the African American culture and dominant White culture.

While Anna was one of the younger managers, because she had worked fewer than 18 years in corporate America, her career began in the non-profit sector in the 1970s. She worked in a field that was dominated by women, and over the years she gained a significant amount of experience in management, within the non-profit sector. In addition, she networked with professionals who were employed within corporate America. Therefore, she gained greater cultural capital by earning an MBA, working

hard, and being mentored by a manager who was employed at Copy Company. This manager facilitated her entrance into Copy Company.

In sum, clearly both the historical context and the participants' cultural capital were significant means for their entry into corporate America and for how they were able to navigate the dominant culture. But once they were in corporate America, they continued capitalizing on learning opportunities to further develop their careers. The managers' learning opportunities are discussed next.

Taking Advantage of Learning Opportunities

Once they were actually working in corporate America, all of the managers continued following their strong work ethic and began looking for learning opportunities to advance their career. As a result, the managers favored learning experiences that would assist them in becoming more knowledgeable or skilled within their organizations in several ways. First, some participants valued developing management skills and knowledge. Debra, Clarice, Betsy, Anna, Eunice, Denver, Eric, and Abraham recounted their most significant learning that helped them to become better managers. Some managers valued developing respected skills and competencies within the organization, and developing a reputation as an effective manager. In contrast, Barry and Charles felt that they valued learning that would develop their skills and increase the organization's profitability. This section of the chapter focuses on how these managers actually went about learning how to be successful in management and to survive in corporate America. Therefore, the first section explores the formal learning of the participants.

Making Connections Between Formal Learning and Work Practice

Formal learning became an integral part of the managers' career development. This formal learning involved different types of activities, and occurred in universities or on-the-job training programs. The participants made use of both types of formal learning in their careers.

When discussing formal learning opportunities, several managers spoke of their importance. Four managers, Debra, Clarice, Charles, and Barry, spoke highly of a specific formal learning opportunity, such as obtaining graduate degrees and training programs. Each felt that the learning was significant because it enhanced his or her value as a manager. In contrast, Barry and Charles felt that the learning augmented their careers because it allowed them to be recognized for positively impacting the profit margin within the organization.

For example, Debra joined her company after graduating from an MBA program, which she felt was a wise choice. She recognized that there was a difference between her undergraduate and graduate preparation. Debra stated:

To join this organization, being an engineer, having a fundamental engineering background, I was better prepared once I got my MBA. To really understand the business intent, because I do think in engineering you are trained to build the best product. . . And I think what's lost there is that if the product isn't marketed correctly, developed, manufactured, all these things correctly, then nothing is ever going to happen with that product. So it's very good for me to understand how corporations run, and what they focus on, and shareholder value. I think that made me a lot more competitive once I joined Technology Company.

Specifically for Debra, her technical background, she felt, did not prepare her to operate in a business setting. Since she knew her desire was to move into management, she needed to have a global knowledge of business. One class from which Debra drew a lot of material was an organizational behavior course. The strength of this course was that she learned some skills to open her understanding, such as understanding the political structure in the organization. She reported:

When you're in the first 90 days of a job, you want to ask as many questions as you possibly can. Try to get as much information as you can. And then what I would traditionally do is spend time with just, really analyzing the political structure of your organization. Ok, "Who's your manager?" "Who's your manager really listening to?" Now that's somebody that you need to get some time with maybe once a week, and say, "Hey, tell me why you think they made this decision?" "What do you think is going on?" "What do you think I should do?" Because this is a person that's in the inner circle, right in the power circle.

Understanding the politics of the organization was something that Debra learned in her MBA course. She learned the questions to ask and how to understand the political structure of the organization. Debra found value in the organization behavior class because "we did a lot of focus on the inner circle and who makes the decisions, and the unofficial decision making tree."

Clarice was another manager who valued the learning that she acquired in a formal learning environment. Although Clarice came into her current organization with an MBA, she later pursued another master's degree because she was promoted into a management position. This position, however, was in the information technology (IT)

field, and in order to become more competent in this area, she entered an information systems master's program. Clarice stated:

I think the best learning has been in using the opportunity to get my masters...And I think what's been great about that is getting it in an area at a time or starting it in an area that I was working in. I found that you could really bring a lot of real life work experience to the assignment. . . At least from an IT perspective I think the learning (in the master's program) did at times bring back a fresh perspective in terms of how we might go about approaching the problem. And it's the same thing even with the job I'm in now.

What Clarice liked most about the program was its practicality and that she could discuss work related problems. Discussing these problems with other professionals was what she valued most. Clarice began her career in finance and had an extensive knowledge of the field. What she encountered in the IT field was that her staff was not always truthful with her, and her lack of expertise put her at a distinct disadvantage. Therefore, she entered the IT field with limited knowledge. Her overall goal was to ensure that she would be able to function effectively as a manager. The master's program provided her with some practical knowledge as well as augmented her skills as a manager in IT.

In conclusion, the managers who valued formal education did so because they wanted to become more effective managers. Possessing the knowledge that they gained from a graduate degree was therefore valuable toward their management careers.

Four of the participants entered management development programs (MDP) offered by their organization before their entrance into management. These programs

were sponsored by their organizations and were educational programs that highlighted the role of management within that specific organization. Although the programs differed among the various organizations, they all offered courses that would assist the employees' transition into a management role. In one instance, the participant was also exposed to a different role in his organization every six months. All of the managers stated that the program was very insightful regarding the realm of management and highlighted the characteristics and qualities that were needed. In addition, they all enjoyed the program.

Abraham stated that the MDP was a benefit to him and in the following example expressed the components that he valued. He reported:

Prior to becoming a manager. . . I went through the management development program, which is a series of self- evaluations. You have to evaluate yourself to see your own strengths and weaknesses.

The programs also provided them with scenarios of decisions that they could potentially face. They were tested to see how they would handle personnel situations prior to going before management for an evaluation period.

Clarice's experience with the MDP was also beneficial because of her lack of work experience. She stated:

I thought it was an excellent curriculum at least for someone coming out of school and only having a year of work experience. It might not have been applicable to someone with a lot of experience. But since the program at the time was geared to folks that didn't have a lot of work experience, I thought it was perfect. I think that when I was done with it though I probably took more than 20 courses.

Clarice expressed great satisfaction with the types of courses that were offered. She thought that the classes gave her knowledge and skills that would be critical to her effectiveness as a manager. Clarice's experience was not unlike that of Denver's; both had little experience within the workforce.

Since Denver had come into the organization as a college intern, he applied for the MDP and was accepted. The MDP required him to rotate between various work settings and positions and he was placed in the following roles: manufacturing, technical, online commerce, and operations. Denver described:

It's two years; it's a structured program. . . It's almost like being in college. Once you get out of the program you've got to manage your own fate. Nobody tells you, to take this course in our corporate training school. . . What I think really ends up happening is that you really have to continue to do self-assessments.

Denver stated that upon finishing the program which took two years, he did not have a management position. It was not until seven years later that he obtained a role in management.

What is interesting about the MDP is that it does not guarantee a person's entrance into management; this was true for all four of the participants. Even after Barry successfully completed the MDP and was ranked above average, he was not placed in a management position for another 10 months. What was interesting was that Denver and Clarice had to possess a strong academic record and exhibit superior performance during their internship in order to gain entry into the program. The other managers, however, were permitted to enter the MDP because they exhibited superior work performance.

Charles and Barry discussed a specific learning program that has revolutionized the workplace. The program is called Six Sigma, and many organizations use this structure. Six Sigma is a strategy that organizations have used to make improvements in processes, products, and services by eliminating waste and reducing defects and variations in many aspects of the business. These improvements make it possible to reduce cost and improve quality. Six Sigma's main goal is to develop and deliver near perfect processes, products, and services.

Barry and Charles both took intensive courses to learn this process; the courses varied in length. Charles described:

So first they give you a disk and on this disk it talks about Six Sigma and you go through these training modules on that disk. And going through that disk takes at least 10 hours of your time. . . After you go through the disk, you go to a Six Sigma class...And afterwards you go through the week of training, then you have one year to complete the green belt exam, and green belt exam is a pretty extensive exam.

Six Sigma is a problem-solving strategy that has also been used in many areas such as reducing manufacturing errors and/or administrative costs and/or improving quality. Not only is this strategy used internally but it is also used with external customers. Barry was excited about using the skills that he gained from Six Sigma and was looking forward to making the organization more effective. He reported:

The way our budget is designed is based on what sales does. Because we're post-sales analyst, they sell a piece of equipment that's networked. It's my people that have to go in and connect it once the box actually gets installed. Our budget is

based on sales selling whatever their target is. And it's based on them selling it at the price that they are supposed to sell it at. Well, two things are happening. One, sales is not selling what they should be selling, they're down eight, to nine percent of what they should be. But in addition, they're discounting my services and I've got a problem with that! So the bottom line, we aren't making what we should be making. I have to go in again and use statistics to show not only why we're not making it (profit) but I'm going after those sales folks who are discounting and shouldn't be discounting.

In fact, Barry was looking to become a Six Sigma black belt. He explained:

You have to save the company \$580,000 in economic profit, which means that you have to really document that you can save the company money by your projects. And you got to complete two projects at a minimum. . . Starting in September, there's a couple of things I have to work on and I'm going to use my Six Sigma skills for. . . so I can be certified by the end of the year. I'm probably one of the few black belts in the company that's going to make that end of the year target.

Barry planned to use his new Six Sigma skills within the organization so that he can be recognized for his contribution to the organization. He will be able to save the organization money, and become more valued for his talent.

Charles also valued the Six Sigma training because it was an added benefit when working with external customers. Since he has to develop products that help them reduce costs, he utilized Six Sigma to create cost efficient measures for customers. Therefore, Six Sigma was a method that he used to bring about this result. Charles reported:

The most valuable [learning] so far has been the Six Sigma training. That's the most valuable because it gives you the methodology of how to solve problems, or go to your customer and reduce some of their cost, and being able to talk the Six Sigma language.

Charles understood that the Six Sigma methodology has been effective in his organization. Utilizing Six Sigma with his external customers enabled him to develop products that meet the needs of the customers. Charles also valued continuing his learning with Six Sigma and pursuing a position as a black belt. Charles stated:

Being a black belt [in Six Sigma] where I could actually use that methodology to drive cost out of other areas within the company. Or taking that methodology out to a customer, and driving cost out of a customer's process. The black belt position in Diversified Company is very prestigious for that reason because they are a significant savings to the customer or to the company. So that's a positions I would like to have.

Charles has been able to understand Six Sigma and how it can make him more effective within his organization. Learning Six Sigma was valuable for both Charles and Barry. This knowledge has the potential to make them more valuable to the organization, and enhance their career development opportunities. Driving costs down and being an effective problem solver are skills that promote the organization's effectiveness. In summary, Barry and Charles valued learning that would enhance their careers, because they possessed skills which can potentially help them be recognized as valued contributors.

Informal Learning Through Observation

The managers engaged in informal learning as a means to facilitate their career development. Informal learning also was integral to Denver's understanding of the unspoken rules of career development in corporate America. The information that Human Resource and Finance people held were critical to understanding the future direction of the organization and career options. He stated:

HR people know a lot of stuff, they know who's retiring, they know about the organizational changes that's coming in six months. "Hey maybe you need to get out of this organization because they're going to cut heads in six months." You know they know a lot of the information that is critical to you making the next move, or making an adjustment in your current role. So I think one of the big things is getting in tight with your HR people.

What Denver learned was that his performance was not the only facet of his career that was significant. Through observing members of the dominant culture, he came to understand the key people within the organization that he needed to be connection with. What he found was that Human Resource and Finance departments are privy to information that can impact his career options, such as making decisions about remaining in a certain division.

A more common type of informal learning was observation for the purposes of learning and understanding the skills and competencies of an effective and/or successful manager. Several managers discussed how they observed other managers, and through this experience, learned integral management competencies and skills. What is

interesting is that while all of these managers were part of a management training class, observing incumbent, successful managers was more valuable to them.

Debra noted that informal learning was integral to her strategy of progressing into management within her organization. She talked about closely observing managers who were held in high regard in the organization, and trying to discover his or her key to success. Debra explained:

I do this mental game when I'm in a room with executives, and this is before I became an executive. I would sit and think, "What is it about that person that Technology Company thought to make that person an executive?" Is this a behavior that I want to try and adopt? So I've been very, very purposeful with what I embody, and what's been consistent is the [organizational] values.

Since Debra knew that her goal was to progress higher in the management ranks, she observed incumbent senior managers. This observation helped her uncover the skills and behaviors that promoted their success. Through Debra's observation, she has been able to uncover characteristics that are integral to effective managers. Mainly, she discovered that these executives embody the organization's values and have supported the goals of the organization.

Anna and Abraham also felt that observing other managers was an important learning activity for themselves in their management development. Abraham reported that during his career in management, he has had seven supervisors. He was able to learn from each manager's positive and negative career moves, and understand how these moves impacted their careers. Abraham stated:

I've been through a lot of training courses, but I've also watched a lot of senior managers come and go. I've had seven, at least seven senior managers over me. They've all had different styles, and I've learned from each one of them a little bit. But I've seen them come and go, and like a revolving door. So they've also had mistakes that they've made too. So sometimes I've learned from not just from the positive things that they've done, but the negative things that they've done. I've seen them make mistakes that I've tried not to emulate.

Observing the managers who have supervised Abraham was an integral learning opportunity. He learned how to be an effective leader by incorporating some of their strengths, and being careful not to duplicate their negative traits.

Anna was another manager who relied on informal learning, through the observation of successful managers. She relayed a story about her first manager in corporate America, and what she realized about him was that he was a very successful manager. The characteristics that he embodied made him an effective leader, and provided her with an understanding of the skills she needed to adopt. She stated:

That individual was the best manager that I ever worked under. He was the kind of manager who would let people do their job and reward them in such a way that they always wanted to do it well. And they always wanted the rewards. He's very, very motivating. . . . You wanted to do things for him.

Currently, as a manager, Anna strives to incorporate some of the characteristics that she learned from this manager. An important characteristic that she learned from him was how to motivate her team. She reported:

Well, the one thing was always a reward for people, for a job well done, and there were also expectations set. And that's something that people don't spend a lot of time on, but if you set expectations for people, and you get them to help set the expectations, you get their buy in. And then you hold them accountable, and you reward them for doing it.

When Anna utilized his management style as a front line sales manager, her results were remarkable; she was able to take a weak sales team and transform them into stronger performers. As a result of Anna's observing an effective manager, she was able to understand effective management characteristics. She utilized them with her own sales team.

Informal learning was important to Denver because it helped him uncover the unspoken rules of career progression within corporate America. When observing how others were being promoted, he found the approach that he was using with his career development was wrong. Initially, when he entered corporate America, he thought that his performance would be the key to developing his career. However, to his amazement this was not the case, and his comments illustrate the importance of informal learning for his career development. Denver stated:

You maybe see other people do well. . . they seem to be more connected, they seem to have access to better roles, and opportunities. You start to realize that they run in a different circle than you do, and maybe they have better access. And if you have the information you can plan accordingly. And to know that information, you have to know the people that have access to that information, and that's HR people, and Finance people.

Denver found that his connection to people with information about the company was a factor that impacted his career development. While formal educational opportunities were clearly beneficial, much of what these managers reported learning took place more often through informal learning. Informal learning occurs outside of a formal setting, such as a classroom, and it can occur at a time that is least expected. All of the participants in this study discussed how important informal learning was to them. Informal learning may have been significant to them because these managers were not privileged to be part of the in-group (i.e., the dominant culture). Thus, they had to obtain information about corporate America through other means. The norms that they uncovered included: performance is not the only factor for career progression, employees in HR and Finance have information about the future of the company, managers must embody the organization's values, emulate effective managers, and motivate teams by rewarding them on a consistent basis. More information related to how the managers uncovered this material is discussed in the mentoring section that follows.

Learning Through Mentors

Learning through mentors was an integral career development component for these managers. Mentors are important for individuals who are taking a journey into unknown territory. The overwhelming majority of these managers were the first in their families to enter corporate America. Since they pursued careers in management, they certainly needed mentors. Therefore, their aspirations to enter management were much higher because their parents did not possess the knowledge and skills to facilitate their son's or daughter's entrance into management. Furthermore, once they entered corporate America they had to locate individuals who would be willing to assist them with their

career development. An overwhelming majority of the participants had mentors who facilitated their career development and progression into management. In addition, there was an interesting theme for a significant number of the managers; many of them had cross-cultural mentors. This information is discussed in the following section.

Multiple informal mentors. There were various aspects to informal mentoring and the managers relied upon multiple informal mentors which served as an integral part of the managers' learning. One major theme that emerged was that most organizations did not have formal mentoring programs for their managers. In fact, only four managers had formal mentors. Technology Company was the only company that had a formal mentoring program, and highly qualified candidates were allowed to participate based on their supervising manager's recommendation. Therefore, most of the managers relied on informal mentoring relationships to assist with his or her career development. A common theme among the participants was the importance of informal mentors, especially in relation to their careers in management. These informal mentors came from various settings, and in fact, some came from outside of the organization. Informal mentors were also utilized because they understood the culture of the participants and thus could assist them in operating within the dominant culture.

A common theme that emerged was the significance of having several mentors to fulfill the various needs of the participants. There were many facets to their lives for which they needed guidance from those who had more experience. The managers, specifically the working mothers, had complex lives and needed support in aspects of their lives not related to work. Therefore, mentors were utilized by these managers for many areas of their lives. Florence described:

You can't have one, you have to have multiple mentors for different reasons, because our lives are so complex, especially as working women, and mothers. It's so complex! You have to have different people for different aspect of your life. So I have a variety of mentors now.

As a woman with multiple roles, Florence needed support in many aspects of her life. Being a working mother, she found that she needed guidance from people who were more experienced. Debra was another manager who used several mentors. She stated:

I have a variety of different mentors I can talk to about different topics. For example, as a working mother, there are issues that you have that no man's going to understand. At my level most of them have spouses primarily who handle the household, and then I have a dual income family. So I have one mentor who's sown so much into me as she's been an executive for a very long time "Well how did you handle being the reading monitor at school?" [Debra would ask.] These things seem inconsequential, but they're very important to your children. It's just balancing.

As a working mother, Debra found that it was integral for her to have some guidance from other managers who were working mothers and understood her plight. She realized that they had accomplished what she was hoping to achieve, and they had knowledge from which she could benefit. Debra also valued mentors who were honest to supply her with feedback on her performance. Debra stated:

I have several now and you should have several different flavors and several different levels [of management]. To me, first of all, you need somebody that's going to give it to you straight. And so I make that a penalty for the relationship,

meaning I don't report to this person; this person doesn't report to my manager. So it's almost like, "Hey, let's just be real. . . Let me ask your advice, penalty free." I think those are very important, but also inside of the structure you need to make sure that someone either one level or two levels above you knows your name, knows what your aspirations are, and knows what your capabilities are or you will never get to the next level.

The mentors that Debra sought out were for support with her career. In addition, she wanted the mentors to help her gain a truthful and objective perspective on problems and circumstances that impacted her. Her aspirations were to move to the levels of management where her mentors had been. Debra's strategy was to have mentors who were at least two levels above her, and she found that they provided more insight into where she desired to go.

Cultural mentors. Cultural mentors have the same cultural background and served as a source of support for these managers. Several participants described the importance of having cultural mentors. Denver, Clarice, Debra, Eunice, and Charles spoke about having someone who had a similar cultural background, such as race. The significance of the cultural mentor may have been tied to the fact that many of these managers were the only African Americans in their offices. They felt that it was important to have someone in their organization who understood them culturally, but Denver and Charles also received this kind of mentoring from their fathers. When Charles was dealing with some problems with his supervisor who was treating him unfairly, he found that his father was supportive at this point in Charles's career. He described:

There's five of us [on the sales team] and sometimes there's a good sales opportunity that comes up. And they're right in my territory, and he (my boss) gives it to my co-worker. That's happened to me numerous times....I was having some good years in sales, so I guess my boss saw my co-workers weren't having as good years. So, I guess he wanted to share the wealth. . . But, you know, he was just giving away opportunities (sales leads) that were suppose to be mine. . . And you really want to have as many large prospects as possible because it gives you a chance to be more successful. Because it's all based on sales revenue and there's been numerous times, at least three times, where the large prospects were given to my co-workers as oppose to me.

When Charles reflected on this relationship with his father, he stated:

My Dad was always there. He always listened to my stories. He probably didn't know the specifics or the technology that I was discussing, but he knew about the human element of it. He was definitely a mentor as far as getting me through those situations where I thought I was blatantly being discriminated against.

Charles had to deal with a conflict with his supervisor, and since he had not gone through a similar situation, he needed guidance. His father provided some guidance because of his experience in the workplace, but more importantly he understood how Charles's race could impact how his son was treated.

Denver was another manager who spoke about the importance of having cultural mentors. However, he found cultural mentors inside the organization. He stated:

I think a cultural mentor is somebody that you can come and talk to about cultural issues. So if you're in a meeting and someone tells a joke, [a cultural mentor is]

someone you can ask, “How do I handle that?” Somebody on a team made an inappropriate remark, “How do I handle that?” Somebody that understands you, and they can give you some context. And I think that has a lot to do with being secure in your career life. You have to have multiple outlets, people that can give you a different perspective.

There were times in Denver’s career that he needed to speak with a cultural mentor about how to respond to challenging situations. This was important to him because he wanted to be clear in how he understood others, and in how he presented himself.

Another manager who found value in having cultural mentors was Eunice. She found that it was important to discuss and learn from African American female managers who had had some measure of success in the company. In addition, she felt that this relationship enabled her to relate to someone who understood what career mobility would be like for her as an African American female. She stated:

In speaking to people that were successful. . . I learned it’s really once you get beyond a certain level, especially now as a first line manager, it’s so imperative that you have a mentor, or at Technology Company they call it a sponsor.

Because many people tend to hit the glass ceiling quickly, especially African Americans and African American Females. And it’s really who you know after first line management that will get you the next job, which is unfortunate because sometimes the most skilled person is not placed in the job

Mentors in positions of power. Participants who had mentors in positions of power were in a cross-cultural mentorship and thus were being mentored by White males.

Cross-cultural mentorships occur between people from different ethnic or racial backgrounds. A significant theme that emerged from this study was the importance of African Americans having mentors from the dominant culture, specifically White male mentors. This specific cross-cultural mentorship was identified concisely by Eunice, Denver, and Geri, but utilized by Denver, Geri, Debra, Florence, Anna, and Eric. Anna conceptualized the significance of having cross-cultural mentors within corporate America. When I asked Anna about the importance of cross-cultural mentors, she stressed:

I think that you do need them (the dominant culture) as an employee in an environment where you are a minority. You need to find people who will support you. Not just other minorities, but people [from the dominant culture] who respect you and your skills and you as an individual. Someone who will give you information they may have and counsel you about people who don't share those points of view.

Anna felt that it was important as a minority to have members of the dominant culture who would support a minority person. Furthermore, when locating members from the dominant culture, she thought it important to find individuals who recognized that there were differences for minorities.

When Denver entered corporate America, he immediately focused on locating a mentor; he realized the significance of having the appropriate mentor. The appropriate mentor was someone who had power, power to help him navigate his way into meaningful career development opportunities. He also found a mentor who recognized that there would be differences because Denver was African American. Denver stated:

To be honest with you, I sought the opinion of the few other African American individuals that were in the organization at that time. The guy (an African American) was a manager early on in his career. And after we developed a relationship, and culturally he understood my background, [I said], “Hey who would be a good person to mentor me?” And obviously being African American he has a better sense of who would feel most comfortable mentoring an African American and so that’s how I developed that relationship. So I sought the advice of somebody else, who was African American to help me identify who would be a good mentor.

Denver realized that in order to be in an effective mentorship, he had to have a mentor who would be comfortable with cross-cultural mentoring. This type of mentorship he felt was critical for him as an African American, and that is why he sought the advice of another African American who knew the reputations of the White male managers in the company. Selecting someone who was part of the dominant culture was the critical element for Denver when selecting the most appropriate mentor. He articulated:

What happens when people have these promotion discussions, is nine times out of ten, just speaking of who’s making the decisions, of who are they going to promote, I think the key is that you have to have somebody in that room who can vouch for you, and say, listen, this guy can be a natural. So that’s why it’s great to have. . . people who are in the power club, if you will, who can vouch for you when those informal promotional discussions come up.

Denver explicitly stated that the managers who are in the power club in corporate America are White males. While he felt that interacting with more experienced African American managers was important, within his career they did not have the influence he needed for his career. Denver like many of the other participants sought managers who were part of the dominant culture to facilitate their career development.

Florence was another manager who spoke about her experience with cross-cultural mentors. Initially, Florence's career in management was lackluster. However, after being mentored by a vice president from her company, her career flourished. She was given more career opportunities, after being given the approval of a manager from the dominant culture. She reported:

He (the vice president) had the most significant impact on my career. One of the things he did for me was that he promoted me four levels with just the wave of his hand. And I got promoted. And people wondered why aren't we getting promoted? . . . I was good and it was deserving. And he took the initiative to move me from I guess a first line manager to a second line manager. And I remember him sitting there telling me. . . he'd had an opportunity for me. And it was the kind of opportunity that if I could succeed in it I would be successful in no matter what I did.

During her career with Technology Company, this vice president continued to mentor Florence. She described:

He was always [there] and I knew he was always watching my career. It wasn't somebody. . . who I could go sit down and talk with about my problems. It

wasn't that kind of relationship, but it was that kind of relationship that I could tell that when I was being moved it was because of his request.

What is unique about Florence's career is that significant promotions for her were tied to having a White male mentor. This mentor in essence sponsored her, and predominantly because of his position, he had the power to enhance her career. She stated:

He tells me he's going to send me from the Northeast to the Midwest. And he says if you can manage an all White branch office in the Midwest. He believed I could be successful at anything and I was. I went out and the branch was probably 15 out of 16 branches. . . And it was good advice because, yes, I always put it in perspective because. . . I don't care what you do, you're always going to be Black. And not that he was putting it in my face, he wasn't, he was just saying you have to recognize it and use it as your strength forever and whenever.

Even though this mentor was a White male, he understood that Florence had to be able to operate effectively within the dominant culture. This meant that at times she would be the only person of color in the room, and this could not impact her ability to perform. In addition, this mentor prompted Florence to think about tough situations because he wanted to prepare her. She explained:

He asked me one time, and I was taken back at first. But he said what are you going to do when somebody stands up in a meeting and says I don't agree with you, using the 'N' word? Because you know what, they do that. You may not like to hear it, but they do that, so what are you going to do? How are you going to approach it? It made me think!

This mentor not only assisted her career development but also prepared her for situations that she could potentially encounter as a manager. He realized that in the climate of the workplace, Florence would have to be prepared for the worst, and be ready to handle those situations appropriately as a manager.

This same theme was observed in Debra's career. She had been a manager for several years. At the time, one of her mentors was the general manager, who had been very supportive of her career. Debra stated:

Even last year as I was the executive assistant for the general manager he stayed on as my mentor. Even though he was two levels above me, and I worked for him, he wanted to help me.

When she wanted to become an executive, the general manager, a White male, facilitated her ascent into the ranks of executive management. Moreover, the gift that this general manager provided to Debra was the increased experience of working with the other executives in the division. These executives were also introduced to her, and the approval that the general manager extended to her was valuable. She reported:

Because I had that relationship with him (the general manager) of course people would listen to me and respect my opinions. So I have a lot of opportunities because of my job to stand in front of them and present some data. So, yes, I feel very comfortable that they're listening. . . . So because I had that position, I feel very comfortable in my role because I've been doing that for so many years.

Since the general manager was part of the dominant culture, he provided the access to the career experience and exposure that Debra needed. His influence on her

career was positive, which enabled her to progress into the ranks of executive management.

Geri's career experience also gave credence to this same phenomenon. When she began working in her field, she had two significant mentors. One was an African American female, who encouraged Geri to enter Human Resources and gave her an entry-level position. The other was a White male who Geri felt was more crucial to her career development experience. She felt that the resources that he had access to were more valuable. She reported:

If you find somebody that's older and been with your company for a long time, they can tell you how to maneuver and things that have happened in the past with certain individuals and how to go the right route. . . I learned the HR [human resources] stuff from him and he would teach me how to maneuver the organization from a White perspective, which was quite helpful. . . I think it's as important to have somebody that's not the same race, or a White male if you can, that supports you. Because they can maneuver you through the organization quicker than somebody of color can.

Geri credits this mentorship, with a White male, as integral to understanding the HR field and career progression. She felt that his many years of experience within the organization provided her with information that she could utilize to her advantage.

As a first line manager, Eunice wanted to progress higher in the organization, yet she realized that there are barriers for African Americans. She reported:

As I look at people, past African American females that have accelerated their career, they had a White male sponsor. . . because, regardless of what we think,

well, the “good old boy” network still exists. And sometimes to even maneuver through the network, you have to have that person by your side. That’s very, very real

Eunice’s observation of successful African American women within her organization led her to the conclusion that having a White male mentor facilitated these Black women’s career development. What was perplexing to Eunice was that she realized the importance of having a mentor from the dominant culture, however, she had not done so. Perhaps, she, like some of the other managers was reluctant to “play” the game and become pawns in this game of approval from the dominant culture. When I asked Eunice about her strategy for promoting her career development, she said she recognized the importance of being cognizant of politics. Politics also included realizing who held the power within the organization. Eunice reported:

I think my strategy has always been to make sure that I perform and excel in my position. And although I know that there is a political side to everything, especially in corporate America. . . I have not focused as much as I should, (on the political aspect) but that is something that I need to do, and it is effective.

What was even more perplexing was that while Eunice has been in the organization, she has seen how politics operate with career promotions. Eunice like some of the other managers was cognizant of the power issues. The other managers who were cognizant of the power issues but chose not to become beholden to them included Abraham, Clarice, Anna, Eunice and Harry. Indeed, some of the managers chose not to play the game, and seek mentors from the dominant culture. These power issues impacted their ability to enhance their careers. In addition, what was further perplexing

was that some of the managers verbalized that there “were no differences in their organization when it came to race.” These issues are discussed later in the section on the subtleties of race.

Another interesting theme that emerged was that Harry did not have any mentors within the organization. When he entered Materials Company, he did have a difficult time with his initial supervisor, who was condescending and did not value anyone. Harry said he found comfort in reading the *Bible* during this time which made his circumstances bearable; he said he looked to the teachings of the Apostle Paul to guide his behavior and actions. Harry stated at the beginning of the interview that his career was probably not like the other managers’. He did not enter a MDP and reported that, “there was no conscious effort to develop my career.” In fact, he did not compete for a position in upper management like the other participants in this study, whereby they attempted to fit into the dominant culture. He stated:

The piece that sort of struck me was how outside the mainstream I really was. I don’t like playing golf. I don’t like playing poker, and so I noticed that a lot of the guys who are at senior management are ten years or more my senior. They hung out with each other on weekends. . . I wasn’t there, I wasn’t invited. So that piece of it was very different.

He further reported:

When you’re thinking about my experience. . . it’s important to know that my position is not in the mainstream of the company. It’s not running one of the businesses, it’s not the CFO (chief financial officer), and so in a way it’s easier for me to do what I do with out necessarily palling around with everyone.

Since Harry's position was not in an area that generated revenue, it was not considered one of the more competitive positions. Therefore, this position was less valued because the position would not lead to the chief executive position.

In summary, the managers in this study valued many forms of learning and took advantage of pursuing advanced degrees. The majority of them found that informal learning was integral to understanding how to navigate into the ranks of management in an organization. They usually did this with guidance from mentors, and mentors served several purposes for these managers both inside and outside the organization.

Race Relations for African Americans in a Positive Learning Organization

In this third section, the experiences of African American managers surrounding race within learning organizations is discussed. There were several themes that emerged. The first theme highlights the fact that while their organizations were not perfect, overall the managers expressed a lot of satisfaction with their particular organization. The overwhelming majority of the participants in this research were satisfied with their current employer. One indicator of their satisfaction is the length of their careers with the same employer. Nevertheless, as is explored with the second theme, these organizations are a microcosm of the larger society in dealing with race. Thus there are limitations on such equity efforts, which did impact some aspect of their career.

General Satisfaction with the Organization's Equity Efforts

The managers in this research study were mostly satisfied employees, and each manager expressed positive feelings about the company that employed them. This was further evident in the fact that 10 of the 13 participants (Abraham, Barry, Betsy, Charles,

Clarice, Debra, Denver, Eric, Florence, and Harry) had spent their entire careers with the same organization. In addition, after graduating from college, Clarice, Charles, Debra, Denver, and Florence went straight to work for their employer at the time. The participants stated that there were numerous benefits to working for the company. This was evident in some of the discussion in the first section. Further, most of the participants believed that their company had some commitment to diversity, and believed that positive strides were being made towards equity. The participants attributed this to their company's vision and actions related to diversity. They believed this emanated from the senior leadership and focused the direction of the organization. This commitment was manifested in a variety of ways, but most often discussed was the presence of an effective diversity manager and support of African American networking groups.

Having an effective diversity manager. The fact that these organizations each had an effective diversity manager impacted the managers' satisfaction within the organization. According to Eric, Technology Company, hired a manager for diversity who made significant changes for underrepresented members of their organization. This manager worked closely with the CEO of the organization and identified some key factors that needed to be implemented. As a result, Eric believed that his employer, Technology Company, had an excellent track record of hiring African Americans, especially into integral positions. For example, when he worked in the Midwest with a division for his current employer, there was only a small number of African American employees. Eric described the changes that followed when a new African American manager was hired in the late 1970s. He stated:

[There were] 230 people in the branch. There's 12 to 13 African Americans. . . Who would have thought in 1980 that any Technology Company facility in the Midwest where the population is less than 15% minority in any flavor, and the branch office had about a dozen African Americans, would have. . . an African American branch manager? It was a surprise to most people in the branch, including ourselves (other African Americans).

Furthermore, this manager was embraced because the members of the organization focused on its overall success. Eric felt that his company did an excellent job with promoting talented African Americans.

Florence, who works for the same company, also believed that the company was committed to diversity, and alluded to this same diversity manager as a positive influence. She contributed:

We have a . . . diversity manager. He's Black and he actively goes out...he recruits us and then he wants us to recruit. So it's like he is actively seeking to bring in competent African Americans.

Eric added:

[The diversity manager] would tell a Black executive that we look at your commitment to the business based on what you are doing to develop good people for the business, so we expect to see you involved in these organizations (African American Networking Group) helping to develop people, so it's a different view.

Eric felt that this diversity manager, along with the support of senior leadership, had positively influenced the organization. The organization has empowered Black middle and upper managers to assist in the career development of Black talent. The

diversity manager has also encouraged the development of a regional and national African American networking group. Many of the managers felt that this was a positive force in organizations. With the exception of Fast Goods Company, the companies utilized African American networking groups to create more positive work environments. These are further discussed below.

Sponsoring African American networking groups. When senior management was committed to the overall satisfaction of its minority employees, they supported the existence of affinity groups within the organization. An overwhelming majority of the managers felt the African American networking groups had tremendous value; the managers with fewer than 19 years in corporate American especially found value in the African American networking groups. Charles and Denver found value in the African American networking group sponsored by Diversified Company. They may have felt that it was positive because they were in the initial stages of their career and needed to network in order to further their careers. Charles reported:

The African American networking group gets together in D.C. every July. . . It's really good to be amongst 1500 African Americans across Diversified Company at all different levels—CEOs, top managers of Diversified Company, down to the new employees and interns of Diversified Company. . . all coming together, going to workshops. Learning from each other, hear each other speak and asking questions. It's all about really self-help. So Diversified Company figured in order to retain their diverse population, they put the diverse population in a position where they can help out themselves. By coming together and identifying what our needs are and training us to be sure we are on the ball and we're doing

the right things to help build our career and then after we get together in D.C. we come back to our jobs and we're usually more energized and I can do a better job throughout the year

Denver highlighted the fact that being a part of a networking group also helped make visible the fact that it is possible to rise to higher ranks of management in this company. He noted:

For African Americans they have support here, it's called a forum (African American networking group) where you have discussions. . . [How it] helps is seeing other African Americans in positions of power, inherently in your organization. If you see somebody that's already doing better than you, you think, well obviously, it's possible!

An overwhelming majority of the participants took advantage of the African American networking group because this provided an opportunity for them to specifically interact with other African Americans about issues related to career development.

As a middle manager Eric found a great deal of value in the programs sponsored by the African American networking group. He reported:

It has made resources available to them for information on mentoring. It has helped them to realize the value of building a strong [career] development plan. And it has helped them to hear the success stories of several of the people who are at Technology Company and what has made them successful as they have gone through their careers.

Meeting African American managers who were successful within the company was encouraging to other African Americans, especially those aspiring to enter management.

Geri's company, Fast Goods Company, was the only organization in the study that did not have a formal African American networking group. However, she and the few Black colleagues within the organization have begun to meet informally. She attributed not having a formal network to the lack of support from senior management and insufficient numbers of African Americans within her division. She reported:

We don't have enough [African American] people. And in order to have it be effective you can meet and talk about stuff, but you don't have support from your board to listen to what you have to say and your suggestions. Then you're just a group just sitting around chit chatting. Right now we don't have support from our board to do affinity groups.

Furthermore, she concluded that the organization had a different conceptualization of diversity, because the company was European. She stated:

My European counterparts, they would say their vision for diversity is diversity of thought [and] more inclusion of women at the executive level. That's the issue in Europe, more women because we don't have a lot of representation of women. . . . If you ask my North American counterparts, they would say diversity of thought, which we think is hogwash anyway!

The senior leadership of European White males in Fast Goods Company believed that having managers from different European countries enabled them to harness diversity of thought. This they felt was integral to their success. However, Geri noted

that this lack of racial diversity hampered the organization's ability to recruit and reach diverse markets within the United States. She noted that the company had not grown its profits in the United States within the last four years.

In contrast, Technology Company felt that they needed to utilize the diversity within and leverage the fact that they employ diverse individuals in order to connect with those customer bases. Eric and Florence shared that the CEO of Technology Company in the 1990's identified workforce diversity as one of its main focuses. They instituted a diversity task force with the goal of understanding the various minority groups within the company, and found ways to ensure that these groups were valued within the company. They also felt that greater diversity within the organization would help them attract a more diverse customer base.

Primary Consciousness of Racism as an Individual's Problem

Most of the managers viewed racism as an individual's problem, rather than a problem within the organization. As discussed in Chapter 2, viewing racism as an individual choice or problem would be akin to what Cornel West considers the liberal approach which reasons that an individual can change their plight through hard work. In contrast, Critical Race Theory (CRT) argues that there are structures in place in society that impede the progress of individuals no matter how hard they try to succeed. What is striking is that the majority of the managers in this study viewed racism as an individual construct; they reported that racism was a choice or a problem of a given individual. There was only one manager who spoke about racism as being within the structures of the organization. Some of the managers also denied experiencing personal racism within the organization, whereas others discussed it as limited experience of individuals.

Denial of direct experience of personal racism. The majority of the managers denied that they were impacted by racism within their organizations. Most believed that racism was not a problem within their organization, and indicated that they had not had any direct experience of personal racism in their organization. These managers included: Anna, Betsy, Barry, Charles, Debra, and Denver. They felt that organizations abided within the law (i.e., affirmative action and Equal Employment Opportunity) by providing opportunities for employment to all. For example, Anna stated:

They (Copy Company) look to see what your minority make-up is. They do monitor it; they check the numbers to see how many are on each team. . . I haven't had anybody come to me and say you need a certain number of this.

In addition, the organizations had diversity visions that incorporated diverse members of the organization. Shipping Company's website reported:

We take our commitment to diversity seriously. In fact, the company was built on a philosophy of people first and allows diversity to be embraced.

Similarly, Transmit Company's website noted:

As a global company touching diverse customers and markets wherever we do business, Transmit Company values individual perspectives. We recognize that it is just and right to treat every human being and their culture with decency and respect.

Furthermore, when these particular managers spoke about racism, they felt that it was an individual that was malevolent as opposed to a system that facilitated discriminatory hiring or promotional practices.

Anna stated that her race was not an issue, and in fact, racism was something that she had never experienced in this organization. Debra too felt that her race did not matter; she provided an account of an event that she attended with the other executives within the organization. After taking a picture with the executives, she observed:

I'll tell you this, I didn't realize that I was the only one until we took our picture (of the managers in the division) . . . because they didn't say anything that went off in my mind. And it's because I'm the only African American but there's so many other ethnic groups inside my organization.

Similarly, Debra felt that her race did not impact her negatively, and she never felt that her peers made her race an issue. The vice president of her division is Asian, and since other minorities were a part of the management team, she did not feel that being African American negatively impacted her.

While Debra and Anna did deny that racism was an issue in the organization, they were talking primarily about their own personal experience. However, as is discussed later, they do discuss issues of marginalization of African Americans such as the low numbers of African American managers (see discussions below), although apparently they did not define this as racism.

Moving beyond racism. These managers dealt with issues of race as an insignificant occurrence within the workplace. While there were some managers who did not deny the presence of racism, they felt that it was not very prevalent and blatant racism was not tolerated. Wells (1998) defined blatant racism as an outright racial bias that shows itself in hostility and hate. For instance, one participant, Barry, reported that

racism does exist, but it never impacted his ability to progress higher in the organization.

He reported:

There's been racism no question. I don't think it affected my career. There's no question that racism exists in the company and there's no doubt about that.

He also added that blatant racism was bad for business and argued, "most companies I don't care how racist they may be, they're not going to tolerate blatant racism." His feeling was that within corporate America, racism within certain individuals was alive. However, companies would not permit an individual's acts of blatant racism to negatively impact the business. Barry defined blatant racism as:

Where everybody's not seeing what's going on and seeing what you're doing.

So you could not give somebody a raise this year because they're Black and give the White person a raise. Yes, you could do that, but you couldn't do that on a continual basis.

Barry defined blatant racism as the company's permitting unfair hiring or promotional practices. He felt that any company would not jeopardize itself for an individual who wanted to behave in a manner that would propagate racism. Additionally, there were controls in place within Human Resources that served as checks and balances for fair hiring and promotion within the organization.

Betsy also felt that her company did everything in its power to ensure that everyone had an equal opportunity. She had the opportunity to meet the CEO, who also created the company. Her impression of him was that he did not encourage racism. She reasoned:

So as far as the company is concerned through diversity and through everything else they do. They try with all the resources that they have to make sure that everybody has an opportunity. Now, have I been affected by racism at any place in my career? Of course I have. I think we all have, but do I think it has affected me to the point that it has been a deterrent to me being able to succeed in the company? I don't.

During Betsy's career within the company, she did not deny that she had faced racism, but she refused to discuss any instances with me. Her view was that she took a global picture of what she has been able to accomplish within the organization; her career aspirations have been fulfilled. She stated, "every job that I have ever applied for, I've gotten." Therefore, her career took a path that exceeded her expectations. Like Betsy, most of the managers felt that racism was something that they just had to deal with.

All of the managers verbalized that they knew they were African American or Black and that this meant they had to work to prove their worth. Therefore, they concentrated on the things that they were able to control. Denver dealt with being Black by just realizing that being accepted (by the dominant culture) was a process. He believed that he could overcome the negative stereotypes surrounding Blacks. Denver concluded:

Sometimes you'll develop more credibility in what you have to say and have more merit than some people. Sometimes being African American, people kind of have the wait and see approach, and say, "Hey let's see what this kid can do." And you've just got to show people, it'll take time no matter where you are. Nobody's going to think you're the greatest thing since sliced bread day one.

Abraham added:

Being Black, we have to work harder and be more precise. I mean the playing field is not level and by no means; that's just the way the cards were dealt. I didn't deal the cards out and I didn't make the particular playing field. That's just the way it is. So, yes you can say being Black you have to run a tighter ship and you have to do things more precise and you have to be more up on a situation.

Geri further substantiated this notion:

I have to earn my seat at the table. I do a lot of reading. . . You have to be two steps ahead of them (Whites) all the time. . . Most of the African Americans at Fast Goods Company are much more academically qualified than the people that they're working with. We have a lot of people with graduate degrees and law degrees and they're still in a professional level or just getting into entry-level management. If they were somewhere else, they would be further along.

These managers knew that being African American would require that they work harder than their White counterparts. Denver's approach was to work on the problems that he had control over; he would work to prove to others that he was competent. However, he indicated that those that continued to hold negative feelings about him because he is African American, he would not worry about. He stated:

And they make judgments about me or interact with me based on my cultural background, there's nothing I can do about that. I can't worry about those people. So I would say, yes, someone sees me and makes a judgment about me, there's nothing I can do about that. And I can't waste time worrying about that.

Denver felt that he could only work to change things that he was able to control; the things that he could not, such as racism, he would not labor over. Most of the managers stated that his or her race was not an issue, but they discussed the hard work that they did because of it. They felt that despite being a minority within the organization, it did not impede their career. In fact, being Black impelled them to be the best.

Barry's perspective was similar. He also felt that you cannot change someone who is racist. As a manager, when he received complaints about representatives, he did not give credence to individuals who had non-specific complaints about Black representatives. He felt that a customer's dislike of Black service representatives was predicated upon the fact that there were some other issues. He stated:

Well, you can't change the customer's racism, you just have to deal with it. What you can change is the customer being disrespectful to you. . . Those things you can address, but there are racist customers all the time. That's nothing new...because what he doesn't like about the person is the fact that he's Black. Black, making 60, 70 thousand dollars a year, that's what the person doesn't like about them. They're not going to come and tell you that.

Barry felt that he could not change a customer who was racist, and he rationalized that sometimes customers were jealous of Black representatives who were well compensated.

In conclusion, none of the managers felt that racism was a significant factor, particularly on an institutional level within the companies that employed them. Managers that did feel that they were treated differently felt that this was the case because of cultural bias. This bias led members of the dominant culture to surround themselves with

employees who looked like them or fit into their culture. Each of the participants discussed some aspect of this. Florence talked about not wearing her naturally curly hair at Technology Company. Geri joining a wine-tasting club. Denver began golfing with co-workers. Therefore, most of the managers felt that there were means to deal with racial bias in a learning organization. However, none of the managers in the study felt that there were racist structures within their organization that would impede their careers.

A Microcosm of Society: Equity Efforts with Limitations

The companies that employed these managers sought to employ diverse employees, but there were limitations to this diversity. In order to explore the experiences of African American managers within the learning organization, what needs to be understood are the opportunities that the learning organization provided for these managers. What was interesting was that several managers stated that the corporate world was a microcosm of society. While they basically felt positive about how they were personally treated in their companies, and that their companies had made great progress toward equity, the dominant culture still imposed certain limits. In essence, the general dynamics present in the larger culture around power relations between the dominant and oppressed groups were of course present to some extent within these organizations, according to these themes, which are discussed below: the preponderance of low numbers of Black managers, the marginalization of management positions, and the problem of “comfort” hiring and mentoring.

Low numbers of African Americans in management. Every manager reported that there is a limited number of African Americans in the management of their organization. These Black managers noted that while the situation in corporate America has improved,

there are still low numbers of African Americans in management. They felt, on the other hand, that their organizations have attempted to build an internal staff that resembles the diversity of American society. Clarice reported:

When I first started, there was a decent amount, percentage-wise, in first levels. Second levels a trickle more, but by the time you get up to the third level, there are few and far between.

Geri added:

There aren't a lot. . . Most of the minorities are in the plants, they aren't managers, they're clerks, [and] production people. We don't have a lot of managers. We have a handful of directors [middle managers], less than 10 in North America and no vice presidents.

Within the Fast Goods Company, there were no African Americans in senior management, and a small number of middle managers. Since Geri was in Human Resources, she also knew that the majority of the African Americans were in entry-level positions within the company. In addition, Geri added that she was the only African American female in human resources. Abraham added that at Copy Company, within his division, "I am the only Black service manager in the Northeast region of all the 15 service managers."

On the other hand, while there are greater numbers of African Americans overall in the organizations, all of the managers noted there was still a lack of adequate representation of African Americans in the management ranks, especially in the upper echelons of management. When looking at the websites for each of these organizations that display their senior executive leadership (i.e., CEO and vice presidents), there was a

striking theme. Transmit Company had one African American female senior executive out of eight; similarly at Technology Company there was one African American male senior executive out of 18. Materials Company had the most ethnic or racial diversity with a CEO who is a minority and two African American vice presidents. It is troubling that there is a lack of significant representation in senior leadership in these organizations, which was a concern of the participants.

While progress has been made in these companies, even the lower levels of management experience a lack of African American representation. For example, Debra stated that in her organizational unit, African Americans are represented only at certain levels. Debra stated:

In this particular organization it's very diverse on the representative level. I think we probably have 40-50%. Somewhere along the way we've lost traction when you get to the next tier of first-line managers. So I would guess, it's probably 25% when you get to the first-line manager. . . . When you get to the Business Unit Executive level, which is the manager of managers level (or second line manager), it drops dramatically to maybe 10%. And then at the executive level (middle manager) it's me out of 60.

Debra's experience within this company exemplifies the lack of Black managers beyond the first level of management.

Of all the participants in this study, five were first-line managers—Abraham, Anna, Charles, Denver, and Eunice. There was only one senior manager, Harry. As there was an increase in the management level, there was a smaller representation of African Americans (and other minorities). Similarly, there are fewer and fewer people of

color and women represented in the more powerful places of government, educational institutions, and businesses in the larger society. Even these companies that are recognized as positive places for African Americans to work mirror this dynamic in the larger society. Thus, these organizations function as a microcosm of the larger society, and are prone to the pitfalls of other businesses in regard to dealing with diversity. The participants discussed some of the more common factors that accounted for the lack of Black managers: the glass ceiling, downsizing, comfort level, and outgrowing the organization.

The glass ceiling is one component that impedes the career progression of African American managers. Understanding the factors that negatively impact the careers of African American managers was important. Clarice felt that, while positive efforts had been made in her organization toward diversity, there was also a glass ceiling that limited African Americans within the management ranks. Furthermore, she reported that while in the past, the organization appeared to care more about diversity, recently they had not focused on issues surrounding employing more racially diverse individuals. She stated:

I've seen quite frankly the company where you see the diversity of a lot of the folks of color and not in management positions, but once you get past the first level of management there aren't many. When I first started, there was a decent amount, I'd say percentage-wise in the first levels. Second level's a trickle more, but by the time you get up to the third level, there are few and far between. And now it's even probably, I would say that most managers, people of color probably max out at the second level- that's the glass ceiling!

Clarice also felt that there was a glass ceiling within her organization and was a component that hindered the advancement of African Americans into the upper echelons of management. Glass ceiling is a term that has been used to explain the “invisible” barriers that exist within corporate America and obstruct the movement of African Americans into the upper tiers of management. Several other managers also either stated that the glass ceiling still exists or alluded to its presence.

Another aspect to the glass ceiling was that once upper-level African Americans managers retire from the company, there is, of course, no guarantee that their replacements will be African Americans. As a result of these dynamics, Debra recognized that there continues to be a lack of diversity within the organization, which other African American executives have brought to the attention of the company. Debra’s main concern was “how do I for the next 20 years that I work get to have the right set of opportunities to be a more senior level executive?” Therefore, retaining talented African Americans was a problem that Technology Company was aware of, but presently there appears to be no plan in place for facilitating their career development beyond middle management.

The senior managers at Technology Company were concerned with the retention of those just beginning their careers as middle managers and helping them obtain meaningful experiences that would promote them to the next level. What is interesting is that at Technology Company, in order to become a rising manager, one must gain exposure through a diverse set of experiences within the organization. This may mean traveling abroad to manage a location in Asia or taking an assignment at the corporate headquarters in the Northeast.

A second explanation for the lack of African Americans in upper management, according to the managers, was that talented individuals left the organization for better opportunities. Eric and Florence both felt that Technology Company was effective with promoting talented African Americans through a certain level. However, once they reached a senior management level, their opportunities were limited. Eric concluded:

Bob (a former senior manager at Technology Company) had the opportunity to go to a software company and be the CEO for millions and millions of dollars; you can't blame him for leaving. Did he reach a point he could not go much further? That is likely, because as president of the sales and distribution division, where would he go? And his next position might be chairman. Well, based on [the CEO] being there, other people were also vying for that position, and was he going to be chairman? The odds were probably not. So he had an opportunity to go lead a company and make it successful and use his skills and competencies and knowledge that he had to make it successful and he did it, which is not different than what other executives at his level have left Technology Company. We've had two or three others who were in similar positions who have left over the last few years.

Similarly, Florence also spoke to the issue of good people leaving because of better opportunities elsewhere. She reported:

Once you're at Technology Company and reach a certain level, it's very difficult to get any higher. We've seen a lot of excellent, excellent, excellent industry leaders leave the business. And it's unfortunate like Bob, he was on *Black Enterprise* three weeks ago. He used to work for Technology Company, and now

he's the CEO for this new software company out in California. A very good friend of mine used to be the vice president in global services, he's now working at a competitor. I know another lady who left Technology Company, to work for a Fortune 500 company, yet another one went to work for another Fortune 500 company. So a whole group of Black folks that could have helped other Black folks have gone on to other jobs, very successful jobs but have gone on. And it's hard to cultivate that kind of relationship.

Florence suggested that when these talented managers left the company, they took something with them. The relationships that they built with members of the company were lost, and the upper managers that left served as a beacon of hope for the younger African American managers within the company. In addition, these managers typically took an interest in helping other aspiring African Americans. Thus, since there are few African Americans to reach down and help lower-ranking managers or to serve as role models, less African American talent is being cultivated. Florence described:

What I find out is some people coming in that haven't grown up in Technology Company as we call it. They could have been professional hires, but they don't have that same sensitivity about other folks. They come in, do what they need to do, and go on to their next job. So I think that would be a negative aspect based on my perspective.

When these senior managers leave the company they have spent the majority of their career with, they take something with them. The hope that they represented for other Blacks within the company is dashed.

Marginalization. The career opportunities that were offered to African American managers within the learning organization was limited. One aspect to the contributions of African American managers within the learning organization was their dedication. They were so dedicated to advancing their careers that these managers accepted marginalized management positions. These positions were marginalized for several reasons. First, they were non-competitive positions. This means that there was a lack of competition for these roles; so other potential candidates were not interested in the prospect of taking the role because of the problems surrounding the position. Abraham stated that his management role was not coveted because of its location. The territory was in an urban area with a large number of African American external customers. He explained that his peers did not covet his role specifically because it was located in an urban setting. His White peers understood that they would have to interact with more African Americans. He stated:

There is no other manager that really wanted to work here in the city because the parking is perceived as a particular gripe. As far as certain managers are concerned where they've had a choice as far as where they have wanted to work, they have not worked here in the city because it's a lot easier working in suburban areas.

In fact, Abraham noted that the company had a practice of placing representatives and managers of the same color to serve that geographic territory.

Abraham suggested that sales territories were assigned partly based on the managers' race. Anna, who works for the same company, also spoke to this point in regard to her own position. She is a first-line manager who serves government accounts

in the Northeast. Several years ago, her organization changed sales territories and placed all government accounts under the same sales team and geographical area. Government accounts are less desired because they receive discounted rates from the company. As a result, those that service these accounts generate substantially less revenue, which in turn means lower sales commissions. Abraham remarked:

Black people were given the government accounts and the city. And the more lucrative accounts were given to the majority population (White people). That just seemed to happen. Some of it was done criminally knowing that they were low payback types of accounts; others [were] done because the fact that this is a Black city...And they figured if they put a Black person there, they figure they'd be able to get through the politics of this urban city a little bit better...So some of this was not done criminally, but it had the same results, putting people in lesser paid types of jobs, with lesser bonuses.

Using the term “criminally,” Abraham suggested that how the company restructured the territories negatively impacted African Americans, and he felt that it was intentional. Furthermore, before Anna took her current role as a manager for government accounts, the position had many negative aspects. The sales team had a history of poor performance and did not meet its sales quotas. There was significant turnover with the teams and managers. As Anna described her role, it became evident that it was a marginalized position. She reported that, “there was high turnover in management, high turnover in sales representatives, and a lack of consistency in management.”

Clearly Abraham and Anna had taken on marginalized managerial positions. But other managers who wanted to gain more responsibility would take a marginalized role as

a strategy to prove themselves. Florence and Denver both spoke to this point. In order for Denver to obtain his first management role, he stated that he took a position that no one wanted. He reported:

I feel pretty safe to say that this job, is a job that not most people want to take.

Only because it had the perception of being really screwed up...In my mind I think people build a lot of credibility taking tough jobs. Taking jobs that people say they don't want, or man, that's really screwed up. And when you come up and fix it, and to me this job and probably my last job, they value me for that.

And that's the reason. . . there's not a lot of competition for the role.

In order for Denver to obtain his first management role, he took a position that was not highly desired by his peers. This allowed him the opportunity to enter management, but at the expense of taking a marginalized position.

Florence also described her current management position as a marginalized role. She wanted to move into the executive ranks of management, and she and her peers were offered an opportunity by the general manager. There were two executive positions that were open, and the one executive position would generate revenue from external vendors by providing training to meet their needs. This in turn meant that there would be an opportunity to earn sales commissions. In contrast, the internal training executive position, Florence's role, would provide training to internal divisions of the company and its budget would come from within. Therefore, internal training would not provide an unlimited opportunity to generate revenue, but Florence hoped to become recognized as a valued contributor to the company. Thus, Florence's experience was yet another example of how African American managers opted to take marginalized roles in order to gain the

experience that they needed to advance. Both Florence and Denver felt that when managers did take this type of role, they were able to transform not only that particular role, but also their reputation as a manager.

In fact, Denver used his ability to succeed against all odds in a marginalized role as his strategy to differentiate himself from his peers. This was the same strategy that Florence, Abraham, and Anna used. Florence saw her ascent into executive leadership as an opportunity to further her career. During the early part of her career, she was placed on the management fast track. Because of her responsibility to her family, she chose to divert her attention to her family. She now felt that taking a marginalized role was a means for her to resume her career development and obtain an entry-level executive role. She described:

Back in 1998 I think it was. . . They were trying to separate internal learning and external learning, but keep it under one learning organization. And everybody wanted to be on the external side because that's where you make the money. And you're on commission; you can't be on commission if you're internal. When you're on commission you tend to get more awards, you tend to get higher appraisals. So everybody wanted to be on the external side, nobody wanted to be on the internal side, and I raised my hand and said, "Fine I'll do it."

Florence's experience also supported the marginalization theme in that she felt that in order for her to become an executive she had to take a role that was less competitive.

The problem of "comfort" hiring and mentoring. These study participants reported that being African American can hinder one's ability to be selected for career

opportunities. While none of the managers felt that his or her company overtly practiced discrimination in hiring or promotion, racial nepotism was an aspect that several managers felt impacted on how they were treated within the organization. One aspect that some of the managers discussed was that managers hired and promoted employees that they felt comfortable with. Since the dominant culture tends to have more positions of power, this adversely impacts African Americans' career progression. Not only did racial nepotism affect hiring and promotion but also how decisions were made. Charles described the following example:

People like similar people. . . Like my boss for instance. . . I can remember several situations where. . . sometimes there's a good sales opportunities... And they're right in my territory and he gives it to my co-worker [a White male] . . . and the bottom line was he was looking out for his buddy [a White male] who worked for him, and he wasn't looking out for my best interest.

Barry also spoke to this point:

Now when I say racism, I'm not talking blatant racism, I'm talking an ingrown racism that says 'I hire people who look like me'. I don't think it's intentional racism for the majority of the managers that we have. I think they're good people, but it's just like you're comfortable hiring somebody who plays the sports you play. . . who goes to the churches you go to, and does the things you do, and that's your comfort level.

Barry sums this point up by suggesting that at his company, the managers were influenced by this desire to surround themselves with individuals that they were comfortable with. He stated:

You'd have to make an extra step to hire somebody who's not in your comfort level. I think a lot of our managers haven't made that move, so that's part of it.

Barry felt that to get African Americans into management, managers needed to move beyond helping only individuals that looked like them. In addition, Anna also felt that the managers' comfort level affected the manner in which they selected potential candidates for the management development program. She stated:

I would think that if there's anything that . . . they need to improve upon is to ensure that they're developing talent within the organization, minority talent within the organization. . . Because I'm not so sure that the structure is as strong as it could be in developing management-ready candidates. There is a structure in place but that structure is totally dependent on managers willingness to identify potential candidates, and if you've got a manager that doesn't identify minority candidates, then you've got a breakdown right there.

Anna has worked for three different divisions of Copy Company and she found that there was a difference. One division did not have a formal management development program. She described:

The last organization that I was in. . . didn't have anything (formal management development program) and they also had no African American males in management positions. They had very few African Americans in sales positions.

Anna found that this particular division lacked the ability to move beyond their comfort level and develop minority talent. Since there were no African American males in management and in other positions within the division, Anna felt that this was problematic. The most pervasive problem was that managers were not moving beyond

their comfort zone, and facilitating the career development of African Americans. She felt that when upper management instituted a formal management development program, there was more of a commitment to recruit minority talent into management.

Geri's responsibilities within human resources included handling discrimination cases. She recounted a story of how her supervisor withheld information about a discrimination case because he did not feel comfortable speaking with Geri about the case. She told her supervisor:

I have no problems talking to you about [the discrimination lawsuit]. Part of you not talking to me is impeding me from doing my job. . . If you're uncomfortable maybe you need to take a look at that!

The supervisor spoke with Geri's White peer and allowed her to handle this discrimination case. This supervisor did not give the case to Geri because the plaintiff was an African American female. What offended Geri was that the supervisor looked at her as an African American first and not as a competent manager of Fast Goods Company.

Implicit But Not Explicit Knowledge of the Learning Organization

The managers in this study had limited knowledge of the learning organization as a theoretical concept, but they did make implicit use of some of the disciplines of the framework. While these companies were identified as learning organizations in the literature, they apparently did not educate all of the managers in the company about the learning organization as a concept

Given that most of these managers were unfamiliar with this concept as a way to get information about how these organizations operated as a learning organization, I explained to each manager, during each interview, the concept of the learning organization and its purpose in enhancing the effectiveness of the company. Only one manager was familiar with the learning organization concept, probably because she was responsible for training and development across the organization. Perhaps, because the rest of the participants did not have any overt training function, but rather were responsible for managing to increase the bottom line, they were not as schooled in the “language” of the learning organization. They did, however, make use of many of the disciplines of the learning organization, such as systems thinking and shared vision. In essence, they seemed to know implicitly “how” to implement a learning organization, even though most of them were not familiar with the “learning organization” as a concept.

Based on the managers’ experience within these identified learning organizations, the data were analyzed in relation to the disciplines of the learning organization. This data will be discussed in the following paragraphs whereby five significant findings emerged about the components of the learning organization as follows.

Making Use of Systems Thinking

These managers utilized systems thinking within the workplace. Systems thinking compels the employee to see the interrelatedness of the whole organization. This section of the paper discusses how systems thinking was utilized within these learning organizations. Systems thinking creates an atmosphere of understanding of how the subsystems in the organization are connected and each shares the responsibility for

problem solving and creating effective solutions. Several managers discussed certain aspects of this principle.

First, two of the managers were part of a matrix managing role. In this role these managers were responsible for working with employees who were managed by others. Clarice explained that “administratively they report to another manager but in terms of supporting the projects and the status of what’s going on they are reporting to you.” She described the connectedness of the various departments and how they worked together to accomplish a common goal. Clarice stated:

I was matrix managing a group of folks that were responsible for launching Transmit Company’s new products and services. . . What that entailed was working with all the functional areas that would be impacted in launching that product. That means, for example, starting with the legal team, seeing what the legalities would be in terms of launching this new product. . . Working with the marketing folks to come up with the ideas. Working with the systems folks to ensure that we can actually bill for the services. Working with the financial folks to make sure that we can account for it. It’s really end to end.

As the manager of this team Clarice was responsible for getting the right people to the table and ensuring that this project was completed. She was able to ensure that the product would be developed and delivered by integrating the various departments.

In Fast Goods Company, Geri was responsible for meeting the needs of the Finance and Corporate Affairs units. Her responsibility was to ensure that the goals of the organization were being met within the units’ business strategy. She stated:

My responsibilities encompass bringing in great talent to grow the business. As Human Resources, we have a strategic matrix, and every group has actions under that matrix. And we have a case called Magnet for Talent, which is really the HR part. And recruitment is in under there, diversity is under there, learning, performance management, and developing people.

Geri worked in conjunction with the management in Finance and Corporate Affairs to assist them in realizing their strategic goals. Her role was to ensure the employees within these divisions were provided the resources they needed to perform.

Another component that facilitated systems thinking was Six Sigma. Both Charles and Barry utilized this strategy within their companies. Barry was using Six Sigma to explore the delegation of services with the departments (i.e., sales) that were connected to the products that his team offered. He found that his department was not generating the revenue that it should. Barry did not blame his representatives but chose to explore the problem from within the guise of Six Sigma. He stated:

The sales force sells a piece of equipment that's networked, and it's my people that have to go in and connect it. . . And our budget is based on sales, selling whatever their target is. And it's based on them selling it at the price that they're required. . . So bottom line, we aren't making what we should be making. I have to go in and use Six Sigma to show why we're not making our target.

Barry felt that having the data to document the decrease in profits would help him uncover the real problem.

Within Technology Company, Florence's role was to oversee the development of learning and training programs for its divisions in the United States, Canada, and Latin

America. The company took a systems approach to meeting the learning needs of its members. She described:

We work with the lines of business to understand their learning requirements. . .

We work with the business units to embed learning into the business units. . . I want them (the training staff) to be experts. . . in the line of business to understand in-depth what's going on in their business, everything from product strategies to employee performance so they need to understand everything to be experts in that area.

Since Technology Company is large, there is a need to ensure that they are delivering effective and appropriate training programs. Florence's staff consults with the various divisions to understand their needs. This enables them to serve as a link between Human Resources and the division, and to develop effective training programs.

Personal Mastery: Taking Initiative toward Fulfilling Personal Vision

Personal mastery was incorporated within the organizations through the personal initiative of the managers themselves. Personal mastery was conceptualized by Senge (1990) as thinking about life from a creative viewpoint, and it is a process of developing for personal growth. Personal mastery is developed by following a set of principles and practices, such as creative vision, and it is developed intrinsically. Senge argued that while organizations can provide training programs to facilitate personal mastery, it is not in line with freedom of choice to mandate individuals to utilize personal mastery.

Therefore, the practices that are most conducive to developing personal mastery include "developing a more systematic worldview, learning how to reflect on tacit assumptions, expressing one's own vision and listening to others' visions and joint inquiry into

different people's view of current reality" (p. 173). Organizations provide support within for its employees, but the individual must choose to utilize personal mastery. One aspect to achieve personal mastery is through lifelong learning. Senge argued that in order to foster personal mastery, a climate must be created in which it is safe for people to practice personal mastery daily. "That means building an organization where it is safe for people to create visions, where inquiry and commitment to the truth are the norm, and where challenging the status quo is expected" (p.172). A second aspect of personal mastery is making the organization a better place; it embodies creative tension, which is a central principle of personal mastery. Creative tension is the gap between the vision and the current reality, which becomes a source of energy; "if there was no gap, there would be no need for any action to move toward the vision" (p. 150). While none of these managers used the term "personal mastery," several discussed a personal vision they had within the company and how they used creative tension to take initiative and make a more effective organization.

Managers saw personal mastery as a means for making the organization better. All of the managers reported that making the organization better was a way for them to give something back to their fellow co-workers. Denver described that the reality within his division was that there was a lack of African American employees. He approached Human Resources (HR) about this and offered to help them realize the incorporation of a more diverse workforce. He stated:

I volunteered to be a recruiter. . . I wanted to bring some people into the program.

I went to HR and said, "Look, I understand that the chairman of this organization says that diversity is important. And I want to help you meet the chairman's

objectives. How can I help you?" I was recruited for this organization from the National Society of Black Engineers. . . I had interviewing training and I went out and I recruited [African Americans], and brought some people in. But if I hadn't done that, there wouldn't be more people here. I think it is about accountability. People aren't going to change unless you force them to change. You've got to force change.

Denver saw that there was a desperate need for more African Americans within this division of the company. He aligned himself with Human Resources in order to effect change and assisted them with recruiting more African Americans into the company.

Another approach the managers took to affect change was in taking the initiative to mentor others. If there were to be more Blacks in management positions, these managers had to assist with their career development. All of the managers mentored others; they realized that this was a way to ensure the progression of Blacks into management. As previously stated, Technology Company encouraged its middle managers to mentor others and attend the African American networking groups.

Florence reported:

He (the vice president) is not in a position to reach down and grab someone, so he's depending on middle managers to reach down and pull somebody up. . . So I'm always looking to actively helps Blacks. . . Kevin (an employee within Technology Company) asked me if he could get 15 minutes on my calendar a month, just to talk to me. . . What I was doing for him was helping him navigate the management system at Technology Company.

Florence felt that her role within the company was to facilitate the career development of aspiring employees into the ranks of management. She served as a link for Kevin to understand how management worked and assisted him with gaining exposure to upper management within the organization.

Geri's personal vision was to facilitate the inclusion of greater diversity within the organization. She was recruited by the Vice President of Human Resources because of her wealth of experience with diversity related issues. She explained:

The reason I turned the job down twice was because of the lack of diversity I saw in the organization, and I was very clear with the recruiter why I turned the job down. The Vice President of Human Resources wanted to meet with me and that's what we talked about. . . [He told me that] we need your help. If you would come to the organization, we would support you in helping us improve in those areas. So the same reason I turned the job down was the reason I took it.

However, Geri further reported that since her tenure within the organization, she has not been supported with changing diversity within the organization. She reported:

The reason I came is like pushing a rock up a hill. . . We haven't grown within three years in my division, and we haven't gotten bonuses for that reason. And they're like grow the business and I'm like, why don't you go about it a different way? You keep trying to go about it the same way! And it's not going to work again for the fourth year in a row. So why don't you think about being a little bit more creative, and try targeting certain markets that maybe our competitors aren't looking at? They're like, "no that's not it!"

Geri has not been supported by the organization, and they have not realized the significance of incorporating more diversity. Utilizing diversity as a business advantage has not been understood or accepted by the senior management of Fast Goods Company, yet Geri has remained committed to furthering this vision.

In sum, while most of these managers did not use the term “personal mastery,” they did take initiative to make some of their own personal vision for the company a reality.

Limited Organizational Desire for Uncovering Mental Models

Mental models, as a concept, was not widely utilized by these companies. According to Senge (1990), this component is important for making an effective learning organization. Mental models are the internal pictures or assumptions that an individual holds of how the world works. In addition, it is the simple generalizations or complex theories that are used to understand how things operate. It involves people examining and discussing beliefs or assumptions with the purpose of uncovering the truth. Senge offered several techniques to accomplish the examination of mental models such as leaps of abstraction. Leaps of abstraction are uncovered by “asking yourself what you believe about the way the world works. . . What is ‘the data’ on which the generalization is based? . . . Am I willing to consider that this generalization may be inaccurate or misleading?” (Senge, 1990, p.194). Senge advocates for organizations to put measures in place so that effective decision making occurs; this will occur when there is a process of asking purposeful questions and advocating for a warranted position. A second important aspect to mental models is taking mistakes that occur within the organization and using them as a learning opportunity.

Structures to uncover mental models. Overall, the managers in this study felt that when they made decisions, they were based on what was best for the company and what the organization would support. For example, Six Sigma was one aspect that enabled the managers to examine data and then utilize that data to make decisions that would benefit the company. When Denver initially took the position, there were changes that he implemented as a result of his expertise in Six Sigma. He reported:

There hasn't been a lot of focus on process and rigor. . . and based on my previous experience, that's why I was hired to come in and streamline the process. And bring some rigor around what we do. . . As a quality leader, basically as a change agent, it's all about making robust processes, making processes better. . . broken processes that need fixing.

Therefore, Diversified Company supplied Denver with the tools that he needed to utilize data and make an effective decision. Denver has been recognized by the company for the changes that he was able to implement.

Geri, on the other hand, felt that companies did not encourage the process of challenging those in power. She recounted:

This particular upper manager (of Corporate Affairs), my co-workers all warned me, "she is so tough and call us if you need help." "She rakes people through the coals." And from the first meeting I challenged her on everything. . . [She incorrectly assumed that] you can have diversity of thought [I informed her that] if you don't have a diversity of people sitting in the room [you can't have diversity of thought]. We're known to hire people like ourselves and you don't have diversity of thought.

Geri's colleagues did not enter into dialogue with this upper manager, and this manager did not encourage her subordinates to challenge her generalizations. However, this particular manager appreciated Geri's candor and ability to help her uncover faulty assumptions. Therefore, most of the participants felt that upper managers made the decisions, so they would not challenge their authority.

While there were structures in place to examine mental models, most of the participants felt that their suggestions to problem solving were not always welcomed. In fact, several managers felt that the company was open to hearing only some of their suggestions. For example, Technology Company has an online system that captures employees' suggestions for improving the organization. Eunice felt that there can be repercussions for those that go against the status quo in the company. She stated:

Overall you are afforded the opportunity at all times through different vehicles to speak up, to voice your opinion. They even have IDEAS which is an online tool where you can post your suggestions. Now I do think that within the organization there are penalties associated sometimes with those that are against the norm. And it's that unspoken penalty; so being politically correct and tactful is always critical.

Eunice felt that this online tool could be effective, but she was reluctant to use it. She felt that this could be detrimental to her career and management did not attempt to dispel this belief.

Therefore, it seems that decisions were made either by more senior managers or within the upper levels of management without some discussion from those that are most affected by these decisions.

Limited tolerance of mistakes. Analyzing mistakes within these companies was an ambiguous element. One aspect of Senge's conceptualization of mental models was in using mistakes as an opportunity to learn. The participants shared some interesting information about this, and most of the managers felt that mistakes could be learning opportunities. Barry felt that when employees were new to a role, allowing them to make a mistake facilitated valuable learning opportunities. Barry was in the process of grooming a new team to work together and felt that allowing them to make mistakes would be a valuable learning tool. He described:

Let them fall, and once they realize that they're all vulnerable, now they're open to teaching. As long as they think they know it all, you can't teach someone that knows it all. . . They have to open up and say, well, maybe I don't know everything and you let them fall. Let them make some thoughtless decisions as long as it isn't anything that's going to get you in trouble.

But Debra spoke about mistakes in relation to her perception of the limitations on tolerance for making mistakes. She noted:

As much as it pains me to make one (a mistake), I just have to admit that I made one and move forward. . . In lieu of this whole Enron situation, your ability to pass an audit is whether or not you stay gainfully employed. So you're a leader of an organization who fails an audit, you're already one step out of the door. They come back and in six months and if you still couldn't pass that audit in six months you're gone. So on things like that, they're unforgiving, absolutely unforgiving because it's an audit and there's some SEC rules and all these other things that come into play.

Debra also felt that mistakes that were small enough would be tolerated and had the potential to be learning opportunities. Her main focus was on completing the main tasks within her responsibilities.

While everyone clearly was going to make mistakes, two of the managers felt that mistakes were not tolerated in any form at their company. Charles and Denver felt that in order to remain with the company, an individual's performance appraisal had to be excellent, as the company fired the bottom 10% of its low performers every year.

Charles stated:

Diversified Company is a demanding company, so mistakes as an opportunity to learn, I don't know about that. One reason I say that is because Diversified Company does not give you too many opportunities to make mistakes. They have this performance system. . . So, therefore, as far as mistakes. . . there aren't too many opportunities to make mistakes because Diversified Company is a big believer in getting rid of the bottom 10% every year.

In sum, while it seems that the idea of uncovering mental models is part of the language of the "learning organization," in reality there appeared to be limited tolerance for challenging mental models or of making mistakes. As a result, there was a resistance within most companies to explore views that were outside the realm of the status quo. It seemed that if upper management made a decision, then that decision remained unquestioned.

Striving to Follow Upper Management's Vision

These managers perceived that their role was to make every effort to carry out the vision of the organization. Senge asserts that shared vision is powerful because it

connects those within the organization to achieve a common goal. He argues that when this vision is created by the members of the organization, it is more effective. What is interesting is that within all of the companies, the vision was created at the senior management level.

Supporting the vision. The managers felt that their responsibility was to support the vision of upper management. While the extent to which the vision is shared by all aspects of the organization is questionable, all of the participants felt that it was his or her responsibility to support and contribute to the vision of the organization. Most of the participants simply accepted upper management's vision, without question. For instance, Betsy felt that as a manager, it was her responsibility to contribute to the vision of the organization. This vision was created by the CEO of the company. She stated:

I feel that I contribute to [the vision] . . . everyday that I show up to work because I operate daily with that in mind. I think that when you agree to become a manager in any organization, your focus should be the focus of the organization.

Denver took a similar position, and didn't seem to challenge the idea of shared vision, though he was a bit more overt about the fact that all employees have a part to play in the creation and implementation of that vision. He noted:

Everyone has a part to play that ties into the vision. And sometimes that means we want to improve our market share and improve our margin. . . The key is that you have to figure out what your role is, and how it fits into the big picture. You need to focus your vision based on that. You can't come up with your own agenda. Your agenda should be based on the overall vision of the organization.

What all of the managers reported was that it was their responsibility to align themselves with the vision of the organization. They also believed that their role was to increase the profitability of the organization. Each manager had some level to contribute, which was the value that they added to the organization. For example, the sales managers had a quota of products and services that they were to meet every quarter. This generated revenue for the organization and increased the shareholders' value. Four of the managers felt that if an individual could not operate within the guise of the vision, they needed to separate from the organization. As Betsy explained:

I think at any point that an employee's agenda becomes separate from the organization's, that person needs to go away and start their own company. So my personal views don't conflict with Shipping Company's philosophy because at any point, if they do, I don't think I need to remain here.

What was striking was that these managers felt that it was their duty to perform for the organization, rather than to challenge its vision. One manager even stated that one motto the employees used for Diversified Company was, "the company first, God and then family." These managers stated that if there was a departure from coinciding with the organization's vision, then that manager was doing a disservice to the company.

Lacking the human element. These managers felt that the vision of the company did not consider the individual employee. Several managers voiced the concern that there was a lack of focus on the employees; these respondents were employed at companies that had been recently affected by great losses of profitability. This in turn resulted in cutting cost, and most companies turned to downsizing through employee separation from the company.

While these managers didn't challenge the vision of their organization, some did recognize that there can be a disconnect with the vision. After a recent downsizing at Transmit Company, Clarice felt for the first time that there was a disconnect for her with the vision. She observed:

I see why they need to cut the costs, but if you look at it strictly from the whole financial concept of maximizing shareholder value, it sounds great. But I think you're more and more seeing the people impacted. . . My reaction used to be, "oh they finally got rid of some of these dead weight people!" . . . They're here pulling the [big salaries] but they do no work. It's gotten to the point now where actually this last exercise [of downsizing] a lot of good people were cut. . . So it had nothing to do with say your performance; it was not performance based at all, just eliminating a function. So, granted it's nice to minimize whatever, but it's also balancing it with the people piece. From a financial perspective, I truly, purely understand what we needed to do, but when you balance the people piece of it, it really impacts how you see the company.

Clarice felt that the company's vision focused less on its employees, and this affected the way that the employees felt about the company.

As a result, six of the managers felt that there were times within the company that their vision and the vision of the organization did not coincide. This conflict was the result of not always agreeing with the direction that the company was pursuing.

When I asked Barry: Would you say your vision and the vision of the organization coincides, or at times do they not coincide? He answered:

Definitely at times they don't coincide. . . We're getting better because we were almost in bankruptcy a while ago. . . We're getting better but you still see your friends going out the door in layoffs. So right now we're not on the same page. Copy Company used to be a place where I would say come on and work for Copy Company. I would not have any of my friends work for Copy Company today! Not that it's not a good company, it's just not a stable company.

So while increasing profit was a part of the shared vision, the loss of profitability appeared to impact the shared vision. Once again because the company was focused on profits, this strained the relationship that the company had with its employees.

What is interesting is that in order to mend this disconnect, most managers focused on their personal visions. Their personal vision enabled them to remain within the company but also to look for ways to improve the company or look for ways to branch off from the company. While Abraham felt that as a manager, conflict would inevitably arise between his vision and the company's vision, he used his personal vision as energy to motivate him. He stated:

I might as well see this thing the rest of the way through and just try to make it work the best I can. And to try to take care of my co-workers, my direct reports and try to reach out and help some other African Americans if I can.

Therefore, Abraham was able to reconcile this disconnect with the company's vision by focusing on his personal vision. In addition, Clarice focused on her personal goal; she reported:

My goal was when I got out of graduate school, I actually started a few entrepreneur classes and debated on whether to do the corporate thing... and get

... tied into the money. . . My goal when I did the corporate thing was to maybe spend maybe five, ten years and I was going to leave. It wasn't fifteen!

In summary, the managers felt that their role was to promote and contribute to the vision of the organization. These visions emanated from senior leadership and were communicated to the organizational members. The main objective of their vision focused on promoting the profitability of the company, and for the most part were not challenged by its employees.

Effective Team Learning

The concept of team learning was utilized within the various learning organizations. Senge asserts that team learning is integral to the learning organization, and as teams learn, they become a microcosm for learning throughout the organization. Teams are effective for changing the organization because they allow discussion and dialog which uncovers effective problem solving strategies. These companies did value team learning and provided training on effective team learning and team management. Abraham for example, was trained by his company on how to use teams effectively and found the training to be instrumental in his ability to utilize teams. He described:

I was trained at Copy Company formally in work group concepts and team development, teamwork, the whole thing. . . assigning the different roles to people, peer pressure. I've been trained in all of that and how to use those things effectively and to really get the most out of people. . . I think Copy Company really did a great job as a leader in those particular areas and concepts as well as developing their particular people.

Abraham felt that the company equipped its employees to work well in teams, and team learning was an element that made the company more effective.

Team learning was also closely aligned with systems thinking, and most of the organizations made employees within certain regions work together in teams. As a middle manager, Debra reported that she could not possess the knowledge required to make every decision for her division. Within the former appraisal system at Technology Company, there were three components, and an individual's performance in a team setting was not only encouraged but evaluated. Therefore, she utilized teams to gather information that would help her make effective decisions. Debra stated:

I'm still not trying to be technical. I'm trying to set the strategy and the execution of that strategy for the team. So I don't need to understand [each technical program]. I just need to know the top five in a broad sense, and I will support the effort and secure the funding necessary for it.

Debra felt that teams were very effective in helping her execute effective decisions; she utilized the learning that the teams engaged in to make the organization more effective.

In sum, team learning was utilized and valued in all of the organization. Most of the participants felt that when the teams learn, problems within the organization were solved more effectively.

In conclusion, while these African American managers were not familiar with the concept of the learning organization, they were familiar with how to implement many of its disciplines and resonate particularly with team learning. Elements that could be classified as personal mastery, and the importance of buying into the company's vision.

For the most part, however, they accepted quite uncritically that the vision was a vision of upper management. And it is clear that they did not believe that many mistakes would be tolerated, and that one had to be careful about uncovering mental models that would be seen as a challenge to the organization.

The learning organization is a framework that can enhance the effectiveness of the organization through the adoption of the five systems described in this chapter.

However, organizations did not communicate throughout the company the merits of this framework and how it worked. What is apparent is that each company provided many learning opportunities for each manager and encouraged them to become lifelong learners, although these opportunities have limits.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the major findings of the study have been discussed. The chapter began by discussing the effects of cultural capital and the early educational experiences of these managers' career entry. The pattern of career entry of these managers differed between the older managers and the younger managers, but the common factor between them was that both groups were extremely hard working. Further, one primary difference stemmed from the historical climate in America. First, the enactment of affirmative action significantly impacted the careers of the managers with more than 19 years in corporate America. This legislation resulted in the banning of racial discrimination in hiring. In contrast, the managers with 18 years or fewer in corporate America possessed greater cultural capital, which enabled them to gain access to corporate America.

In the second section, the focus of the discussion was how the participants went about continuing to learn once they entered corporate America and these “learning organizations.” Each manager sought out learning opportunities that would further his or her career. Several managers enrolled in formal learning programs that would enhance their ability to progress into management or become recognized as a valued contributor. These learning opportunities included graduate degree programs, management development programs, Six Sigma, a problem-solving strategy and training.

However, the most significant learning opportunities for these managers, since they were not part of the dominant culture, was informal learning. Informal learning provided them access to the unspoken norms, which were integral to their success in corporate America. 12 of these managers was the first in his/her family to achieve in such an organization. Therefore, a significant number of the managers had at least one mentor during his or her career, usually from the dominant culture, who knew how to navigate this career ladder. What is striking is the achievements that these managers have made in their careers; seven out of 13 managers, had at least reached middle management. This is a great feat for any one who has aspirations for management.

In the third section, the discussion focused more specifically on dealing with race in corporate America in these organizations. On the whole, the participants were quite satisfied with their organization’s equity efforts. While occasionally they would run into overt racism, they did tend to frame such racism as a particular individual’s problem and not as an institutional problem. However, one variable remained true for each participant, even with attempting to assimilate into the dominant culture—there were still obstacles that they had to overcome. These obstacles were the result of a history of racial

discrimination and inequality within American society. These problems manifested in a variety of ways, including a lack of adequate representation of African American managers, marginalized management positions, comfort hiring and mentoring, and the glass ceiling preventing Blacks from achieving high levels of management. However, some organizations were proactive in their stance of combating dissatisfaction among their African American constituents within the company, by sponsoring African American networking groups.

Finally, in the last section, the discussion focused on the fact that the participants had an implicit knowledge of how to create and work in a learning organization rather than a knowledge of the concept of “the learning organization.” They made use of team learning and systems thinking, and drew on learning opportunities (both formal and informal) to increase their personal mastery. However, they were quite accepting of the vision created by upper management, and suggested that there wasn’t much tolerance for uncovering mental models that would challenge the system.

In sum, what becomes evident is that the participants in this research study were impacted by specific elements of these learning organizations. In essence, the learning organization asserts that the organization becomes more effective as a result of the learning or knowledge that its organizational members possess. Their knowledge facilitates greater opportunities not only for the organization in their members’ abilities to generate more revenue, but also for the individual manager as well in furthering their career development.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of African American managers within the context of the learning organization, including their career development. As was noted in the first two chapters, there has been a lack of research on the impact that the learning organization has on the individual employee. Moreover, there is a dearth of literature on the context of diversity within the learning organization. The unique feature of this study is that it focuses on the component of race within the learning organization; specifically how the learning organization impacts African American managers. Whereas the one study that was found on diversity and the learning organization was a survey that examined how different cultures (i.e., United States, Israel and India) experienced the framework. This study explored the career experiences of African American managers within the learning organization.

The design of this study grew out of my personal and professional curiosity as a researcher who first wanted to give voice to the experiences of African American managers and understand how they have functioned within companies that have been identified as learning organizations. Second, the study attempted to identify how the learning organization impacted the career development of these African American managers. In light of the findings of the study, the purpose of this final chapter is four-fold. First, the major points of this study will be summarized. Second, the findings of

this study will be explored in light of the literature discussed in chapter two focusing in particular on what the study contributes to the learning organization and career development literature, particularly related to African American managers. Third, implications for the field of adult education and human resource development will be presented. Fourth, this chapter will conclude with recommendations for future areas of research. Finally, I will conclude this dissertation with some brief closing reflections.

Summary of Findings

The data analysis uncovered that these African American managers were affected by these companies identified as learning organizations in numerous ways. Their career development experiences were akin to several previous studies on African American managers in the workplace (Barrett, Cervero, & Johnson-Bailey, 2003a, 2003b; Collins, 1989, 1997; Palmer, 2002). Furthermore, while there were some similarities among the participants, there were also differences. Prior to discussing these differences it is important to delineate the general findings of the research study based on the data analysis.

In the last chapter the findings of the study were discussed in four major sections. First, the effects of cultural capital and the historical context to career entry were discussed. Clearly, in order for the managers to become contenders for professional positions in corporate America, they had to possess some level of cultural capital. Cultural capital according to Bourdieu (as discussed by Kvasny, 2002) refers to forms of cultural knowledge, competencies and credentials that enable one to navigate proficiently in the larger society. Cultural capital is important when a person from a marginalized or outside group needs to gain access into the realms of the dominant culture. There were

different levels of cultural capital among the participants, but there were commonalities among them as well. All of the managers had at least a bachelor's degree, thus they had cultural capital in light of their education. However, the younger managers as a group possessed more cultural capital due partly to their early educational experiences in integrated or predominantly White schools. This gave them greater experience interacting with and knowledge of codes of behavior of the dominant culture prior to entering corporate America. Also noted in this first set of findings, was the fact that the managers were extremely hard working and strove to maintain their position within their respective organization. However, one significant difference between the younger managers and the older managers was that the historical period in the United States affected their career entry into corporate America. Those managers with more than 19 years in corporate America discussed being recruited specifically because companies were not in compliance with affirmative action, whereas the younger managers were recruited through internships, and other experiences in their formal education.

The second set of findings focused on their learning experiences once in corporate America. The managers took advantage of formal learning opportunities that would enhance their career development. These learning opportunities were integral to them expanding their understanding of their role within the organization (i.e., management development programs) and how to perform more effectively within the company. These programs included management training and other on-the-job training experiences such as Six Sigma. The most integral learning opportunities for these African American managers was informal learning. Since these managers were not a part of the dominant culture, they needed some way to uncover the norms associated with corporate

America subtleties like how to navigate the management ladder. This learning typically involved mentoring relationships or observing other incumbent managers within the company.

The third set of findings focused more specifically on dealing with race relations in these learning organizations. Overall, the managers were quite satisfied working for their current employer and did not have any desire to leave the company. Most of the managers related this satisfaction to what they were able to achieve within their careers while working for their current employer; seven out of the thirteen managers had reached at least the middle management level. In spite of their individual success, however, there were limitations to racial equity, such as being placed in marginalized positions or managers from the dominant culture practicing comfort hiring and mentoring. There was a low representation of African American managers at all levels of management; three of the companies had only one African American at the senior management level. There were several reasons for this deficiency which included the glass ceiling and the fact that some African Americans who had been very successful in the companies left for better opportunities.

The last set of findings focused on the managers' perceptions of their companies as learning organizations. It is important to note here that with only one exception, the managers were not familiar with the concept of the learning organization. There were, however, aspects of the framework that resonated with the participants. They did emphasize the importance of "shared" vision, although it was a vision defined predominantly by upper management, and largely accepted by these African American managers. In essence, they felt that their role was to support and enhance the vision of the

company. Another component of the learning organization that resonated with the managers was the importance of team learning. They found that teams were an effective way to problem solve and systems thinking was integral to understanding the organization as a whole. These managers felt that it was their responsibility to contribute to the vision of the organization, but there were times when they did not agree with the vision. Moreover, these managers felt that there was a lack of organizational desire to uncover mental models because of the fear of repercussions. They also felt that there were limitations on the extent that organizations would enhance personal mastery.

Discussion of the Findings

The above section presented general findings and now it is important to consider plausible explanations for these findings. Thus, each of the four sets of findings discussed above will be explored in light of the literature.

Career Entry and Development

It is important to note here that the career entry of these managers can only be understood in the historical context of this country. It appears that their career development was enhanced because of the knowledge that they possessed concerning the dominant culture.

Analyzing the historical context. These African American managers entry into corporate America and into management was dependent on the historical context of the time; this has been a key finding of other studies as well (Collins 1989, 1997). Historically, in the United States racial discrimination was an acceptable practice until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Racial discrimination affected many aspects of the lives of African Americans including housing, education and employment. Collins

(1997) found in her research that the majority of the Black managers prior to 1961, had interacted primarily within their own community. Even Elsie Cross (2000) a leading diversity consultant recounts that she could not obtain a job in corporate America in the 1950s. It was not until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which prohibited racial discrimination that more career opportunities for African Americans were provided. Furthermore, the managers with more than 19 years in corporate America were hired when companies were trying to adhere to the guidelines of affirmative action. Companies that did not adhere to these guidelines were penalized by the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission. For example, Coca Cola was fined in November 2000 and had to pay close to \$200 million to settle a class-action race-based discrimination lawsuit. The lawsuit reported that Blacks remain underrepresented in top management at the company, were paid less than White employees and fired more often (Ronan, 2000).

In addition, civil rights organizations such as Operation PUSH headed by Jesse Jackson put pressure on companies to employ African Americans, especially those that targeted their products to the African American community. This is very similar to Collins' (1997) findings; many of the participants in this study were able to enter corporate America because of these initiatives. Eric began working for a beverage company in the 1970s and this career opportunity came as the result of a civil rights organization compelling the company to have African American representation since it served this market. Abraham had the longest career in corporate American and began with Copy Company in 1976 and Barry began with this company in 1980. The "older managers" that entered management between 1976 –1985 (Abraham, Barry, Betsy, Eric

Florence and Harry) took advantage of the doors that affirmative action opened, yet they did not take their positions for granted. They worked extremely hard and in order to remain employed by these companies they usually out performed their White peers.

While it was affirmative action that enabled these managers to enter corporate America, it was their determination and hard work that made it possible for them to stay employed within their respective settings. Critical race theorists would assert that affirmative action was a liberal approach (Collins, 1989, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1999; West, 1999). They also point out that it did not change who controlled these companies; such that, White males maintained positions of power in corporate America or who progressed up the corporate ladder.

In contrast to their younger counterparts, the managers with 18 years or less work experience in corporate America were also impacted by the historical climate in America. They had to compete for jobs in an era where there was backlash to affirmative action, and ultimately to its curtailment. Peterson (1999) cites Lani Guinier, law professor and critical race theorist, asserts that Civil Rights legislation opened the door of opportunity for African Americans as well as other minorities. But as Guinier suggests, in speaking in the late 1990s about the critiques of affirmative action, it “should be analyzed to determine who really benefits from the system and who does not” (Peterson, 1999, p.87). Other critical race theorists, writing in the late 1990s also called for an examination of the effects of Civil Rights legislation to uncover who benefits from it (Bell, 1995b; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Peterson, 1999; West, 1999). The impact that the curtailment of affirmative action has had on the recruitment of African Americans into corporate America is unknown, and would need to be the subject of further research.

The significance of cultural capital. An important influence on the participants' career development was the level of cultural capital these managers possessed. As discussed in chapter 2, Bourdieu's conceptualization of cultural capital provides a helpful explanation of the constructs of power that operate in corporate America. As summarized above, the possession of cultural capital was significant to each manager. In order to fit into the dominant culture each had to have some level of cultural capital; although as a group the younger managers had greater cultural capital. Just as many critical race theorists have suggested (Carbado & Gulati, 2003; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), it appears that early educational experiences within the dominant culture enabled the younger participants to possess a better quality education overall, as well as a greater ability to navigate in the dominant culture. As many African American researchers and scholars have documented, there was (and continues to be) a great disparity in the quality of education and access to educational resources between those that attended either all Black schools or predominantly Black schools, particularly in the inner city (Collins, 1997; Guy, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Peterson, 1999). In the early 1950s, there was a move by Civil Rights groups to raise the quality of African American children's education; hence *Brown versus the Board of Education* was delivered by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954. Efforts to raise the quality of the education of African American children continue to this day.

The role of parents in emphasizing the role of education and of understanding the dominant culture was not only a finding of this study, but other studies as well. Just as other researchers have discussed, like the parents of the younger managers in this study, many parents felt that their children would indeed become better prepared by attending

school with the dominant culture (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1999; Peterson, 1999). Their rationale was that there were generally more educational resources made available in such schools. What their parents realized was that capital is unequally distributed amongst social groups, whereby the dominant group has more capital (Kvasny, 2002; Siisiainen, 2000). Thus, early educational experiences, enable a child to learn more readily and gain knowledge about the dominant culture that will help them compete in later life pursuits.

Critical race theorists would suggest that while African Americans may pursue avenues to assimilate within the dominant culture, they are still always viewed as African American (Carbado & Gulati, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1999; West, 1999) by all members of the society. Carbado and Gulati (2003) have conceptualized this as race as a performative identity, meaning that people of the same racial group live out their identity in different ways; however, the stereotypes that are held about African Americans still guide to some extent how they will be treated. In discussing this, they say “the less stereotypically Black she [an individual] is, the more palatable her identity is” (p.1772), and suggest that such an individual is more likely to be hired or placed in management positions. Therefore, the dominant culture still controls who they will let in. This discussion will continue in a later section on negotiating race in the learning organization.

Ongoing Learning within the Learning Organization

A key finding of this study is that these managers took advantage of learning opportunities within their organizations. The prior empirical literature on the manager's role within the learning organization found that supervising managers within the learning organization facilitated the learning of their subordinates (Ellinger et al., 1999; Morrison

& Terziovski, 2001) and that the manager's own supervisors facilitated the learning of their employees. In contrast, an overwhelming majority of the managers in this study reported that for the most part, their supervisor was not someone that encouraged them to learn. Only Denver and Debra identified their supervising managers as mentors.

Therefore, the other managers pursued learning opportunities on their own volition—learning that would enhance their effectiveness as managers or provide them with the knowledge and skills to navigate the career ladder. Perhaps one reason for this was that their own supervisors did not particularly mentor anyone; so whether or not this was related to race would need to be the subject of further research.

The findings of this research uncovered that these African American managers largely took responsibility for their own learning aligns with the previous empirical literature related to African Americans in management (Barrett et al., 2003b; Corsun & Costen, 2001; Palmer, 2002). According to Barrett et al., (2003b) career development is a life long process and is essential to the advancement of an individual's career. The career development of African American managers differs from their White counterparts because America is such a race conscious society. The prevalence of racism within American society is manifested consciously and unconsciously (DeCuir & Dixson 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1999; West, 1999). As a result, the rules of corporate America have been established by the dominant culture, and an individual outside of the dominant culture is not automatically privileged to having the knowledge that will ensure their success (Barrett et al., 2003a, 2003b; Corsun & Costen, 2001; Palmer, 2002).

Therefore, outsiders, such as African Americans, must look for ways to navigate this corporate ladder and gain access to this insider knowledge. There were several

strategies that these managers used to navigate the career ladder or enhance their effectiveness as managers. These strategies included mentoring, and observing other managers.

First, mentoring was the most significant component that the participants used to gain the knowledge that they needed to compete in a setting that was not part of their culture. This is similar to Reid's (1992) previous research whereby she found that formal mentorships were essential to facilitating the career development of minority talent. What was different about the findings in this research was that formal mentoring programs were almost non-existent. Because, with only one exception, the companies did not have formal mentors for anyone of any race, these African American managers were quite pro-active in seeking out mentors. In addition, as Barrett et al., (2003b), Friedman et al. (1998) and Palmer (2002) also found, these mentors were very important in facilitating their career development.

The majority of these managers looked to more experienced managers as mentors to assist them with understanding various aspects of the company. One type of mentoring relationship was cross-cultural mentors. A cross-cultural mentor is typically from the dominant culture, White males, and the protégé is a minority. The managers that were in these mentorships expressed that mentors from the dominant culture had more power within the company. Their power translated for the protégé into having the knowledge and skills to facilitate their movement through the corporate career ladder. Johnson-Bailey (in Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998) also discussed the significance of a White male mentor in navigating her way through the professoriate. Another type of mentoring relationship the participants sought out was cultural mentors. These were other African

American professionals inside or outside the organization who assisted them in their career development.

Lastly, similar to other studies, the managers felt that they could not look to the organization to supply them with a career development plan, but they had to manage their own careers (Hayes, 1998; Palmer, 2002). Even the managers that were part of a management development program emphasized the importance of being self-motivated. Many participants highlighted the fact that they were proactive in discussing their career aspirations with their supervising managers and mentors with the hope of obtaining the guidance they needed to make their next career move. In this regard, this research study is similar to prior literature because it outlines what types of mentors these African American managers valued such as cultural mentors and cross cultural mentors (Barrett et al., 2003b; Palmer, 2002). While formal mentoring programs have been linked to retaining minority talent in some of the literature (Barrett et al., 2003b; Reid, 1992), most organizations in this study did not sponsor formal mentoring programs, and the mentors that the participants utilized were mostly informal. The managers in this study felt that there was little value to formal mentoring programs; mandating that two people form a relationship together was ill suited for African American managers. Most felt that they wanted to form a relationship with someone that had their best interest at heart, and felt more comfortable seeking out their own mentors.

Negotiating Race in the Learning Organization

The participants in this study were satisfied with their employers and most had remained their whole career with the same company. These findings concur with previous literature on supporting the career development of African Americans (Barrett et

al., 2003a, 2003b; Friedman et al., 1998; Palmer, 2002; Reid, 1992). Companies showed their commitment to African Americans by being proactive and responsive to their needs. They sponsored African American networking groups and had diversity managers to respond to them. In spite of some companies implementing these structures, these managers still needed to negotiate issues of race within the organization.

What is striking is that racism was seen as an individual problem and most managers denied that race negatively impacted their careers. Just as others have found, these managers operated from a merit based structure mentality which would purport that an individual's hard work is rewarded (Barrett et al., 2003b). While some of the managers made significant strides in their career progression, they attributed this to their hard work. This response would closely align with the liberal approach which asserts that the individual is responsible for his or her progress (Bell, 1995a; Carbado & Gulati, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1999; West, 1999). However, their unwillingness to acknowledge or even complain about the impact of race, considering African Americans as a whole, could have been related to their inability to change the power structures within corporate America. Hence, these managers had to become bicultural, and learn how to work within the system and existing structures of corporate America (Barrett et al., 2003a).

Even though overt racism was something that they generally did not experience within the organization, the participants did actually go on to discuss how they negotiated race in the organization, and generally saw the White dominant culture as those with power. There were some similarities between this research study and the literature on race and African American managers. Mainly other researchers and scholars have emphasized that the dominant culture still maintains the power within corporate America

(Barrett et al., 2003a; Brief et al., 1997; Corsun & Costen, 2001). This also became obvious in this study through the participants' telling of their own stories. The importance of narrative and storytelling is a main tenet of the critical race theory framework (Bell, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Peterson, 1999; West, 1999). It puts people's stories in a context. In addition, the use of narratives with these African American managers put their lives in a historical and developmental context which uncovered how they perceived that race and other factors impacted their careers.

The power of the dominant culture. The participants in this study all recognized the power of the dominant culture. The majority of the organizations that employed these managers operated with the "managing diversity" framework (Cox, 1991; Cross, 2000). As discussed in chapter 2, "managing diversity" seeks to develop theories and practices that help organizations reduce discrimination and permit employees of diverse backgrounds to integrate into the workplace and work together. However, it tends not to directly challenge the structure of the organization. The managers reported that their organizations were a microcosm of society and corporations sought to employ a workforce that resembled society. However, it didn't overtly challenge power relations in society in any direct way. For example, Shipping Company's website states that they take diversity seriously. Since they have a diverse customer base, they are able to meet the needs of these diverse customers by employing diverse employees. Each company had a diversity vision that resembled Shipping Company and policies in place that discouraged racial discrimination in hiring and promotion. In addition, several companies had a diversity manager in place. For instance, the manager at Technology Company was instrumental in recognizing and giving voice to the concerns of the diverse

employees within. Even with the proactive approach that organizations took to satisfy its constituent groups, there were still some inequities that resulted.

The main problem with “managing diversity” is that it is a liberal approach. It seeks to have minorities integrate the workplace and utilize the rules and structures that the dominant culture has established; thus it maintains the status quo (Bell, 1995a; Carbado & Gulati, 2003; Ladson- Billings, 1999; Peterson, 1999; West, 1999). One way in which the status quo is maintained is in the sheer lack of numbers of African American managers. Overwhelmingly, the managers reported that there was a lack of representation of African American managers in all levels of management. African Americans do not proportionally hold the positions in upper management (Brief et al., 1997; Greenhaus et al., 1990; Page, 1994), and tend to be represented in greater numbers farther down the organizational hierarchy. This lack of managers was due partly to structures such as the glass ceiling that impede the career progression of African American managers

As others have discussed, (Brief et al, 1997; Friedman et al., 1998; Greenhaus et al., 1990; Page, 1994; Palmer, 2002) the glass ceiling serves to block the movement of African Americans into the upper echelons of management no matter how hard they try to outperform their peers. Critical race theorists would suggest that this is a mechanism through which the dominant culture preserves its interest within corporate America (Bell, 1995; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Peterson, 1999). It is not expedient for members of the dominant culture to share their power or resources with African American managers or any other minority, though such unwillingness is typically manifested through implicit or unconscious means.

Another similar structure that impedes the career progression of African American managers is the “good old boys network”. According to Palmer (2002) the “good old boy” network is the mechanism that serves as the conduit for the recruitment and promotion of White males into upper management. This works because of the prevalence of what Peterson (1999) refers to as “racial nepotism”. Which she defines as the way that White males with more seniority in the company help younger White males by facilitating their career progression. It is a measure of preserving the comfort level of the incumbent managers because people tend to gravitate towards those that are most like them. In addition, the “good old boys” network desires to promote a certain image of the organization and the incumbent managers surround themselves with individuals that “fit the image” of the company. Thus the network serves as a mechanism that enables the replication of the dominant culture. An example from this study would be Clarice, who reported that she was recommended for her current role by a former White male employee that she had supervised some years ago. Within this White male’s shorter career within the company, he has surpassed Clarice and she believes that the “good old boy network” has made his success possible.

Critical race theorists would assert that the concept of White privilege can be understood in relation to this network. According to Carbado and Gulati (2003) White privilege helps partially explain discrimination in the workplace; White males, the power brokers in the workplace, are the norm and all others have to measure up to the ways members of this group “do business”. Once again, critical race theorists would argue that the “good old boys” network is a mechanism that serves the interest of the dominant culture. It enables the powerful to continue their reign and thus maintain the status quo.

Another reason for the lack of African American managers was that these managers left for better career opportunities. Many managers spent their entire career within the same organization, gaining the skills that they needed through various promotions within the company. While companies were wise to retain talented African Americans and made efforts to retain them. Several of the managers discussed that when there was a lack of career advancement opportunities beyond a certain point they contemplated leaving their employers. This finding was similar to other research that noted that dissatisfaction among African American managers concerning their career opportunities will prompt them to leave the company (Friedman et al., 1998; Greenhaus et al., 1990; Page, 1994). Critical race theorists would argue that such companies do not have an interest in retaining all of its African American talent, and that the dominant culture wants to reserve positions of power for its own members. While one could easily argue with this position, given that there are simply less positions available at the higher levels of the hierarchy for anyone of any race. It is indeed interesting to note that there were no African American CEOs of Fortune 500 companies until 1998, and currently there are three African American CEOs (Daniels, 2002; Johnson, 1998).

A third plausible explanation for the lack of African Americans in management is that managers wanted to surround themselves with individuals that look like them. This comfort hiring or mentoring was an element that several managers felt hindered the recruitment of the number of African Americans in management. Indeed, such hiring practices are real, though they may at times be unconscious. In fact, such practices have been the case of legal battles (Simmons, Clemons & Bennett, 2003).

In summary, there is a lack of African Americans in management and several plausible explanations were discussed in the preceding sections. What remains as the most glaring basis for the lack of African American managers are the structures, such as the glass ceiling, the “good old boys” network, and comfort hiring and mentoring within the organizations. These structures maintain the status quo by ensuring the power of the dominant culture.

Negotiating their careers. The careers of African American managers were different from their White counterparts (Barrett et al., 2003b; Collins, 1997; Palmer, 2002). In order to remain within corporate America there were concessions that these managers had to make. Several elements surfaced concerning their careers as African American managers. Such as their willingness to take marginalized positions and work harder than their White counterparts. These findings are similar to previous studies (Collins, 1989, 1997; Durr & Logan, 1997) which found that when African Americans moved into management they were offered positions that dealt with either serving African American markets (i.e., affirmative action or brown territories) or positions that would not give them the responsibility they needed to move into senior management roles (i.e., “the relations”). Two of the participants were part of “the relations”; Florence had an operations background but then took a position in human resources (i.e., “the relations”) because she felt that the promotion would facilitate her career progression. An aspect that the managers capitalized upon was that taking a marginalized position (or a position that no one wanted), would enable them to demonstrate their strong work ethic and abilities. Going into these roles the managers understood that the assignment would be challenging; therefore they worked extremely hard to ensure their success. They

rationalized that their success in a challenging role would be a tactic to differentiate themselves from their peers. They felt this strategy would make them known as outstanding performers, whereby they obtain recognition and reward from the company.

Second, while the managers denied that racism hindered their careers, the participants did not forget that they were African American. Their identity as African Americans prompted them to behave in ways that would circumvent how others would view them. These African American managers perceived that they had to work harder than their White counterparts. They were constantly trying to overcome the negative racial stereotypes that are superimposed on the way that African Americans in general are viewed (Wells, 1998). Wells (1998) conceptual research on African American managers asserts that there is a tendency to treat high-performing African Americans as the exception to the rule. Whereby they feel pressured to become exceptional performers and not make mistakes. In addition, African American managers have to constantly assert their authority and show that they are more than capable for leadership. When Debra became a middle manager, she had to address a White male who challenged her authority. Debra had to reaffirm her position as a manager, and her ability to lead the division. This was an additional burden that she had to attend to because of her race. What is striking is that Debra denied that her race impacted her career within the company. However, she relayed this story to me and did not feel that it had anything to do with racism. This is a departure from previous literature which reports that racism negatively impacts an individual's career (Charles & McCleary, 1997; Fazio et al., 1995; Powell & Butterfield, 1997; Thomas & Gabarro, 1999; Tomkiewicz et al., 1998).

An explanation for this perhaps is that the managers did not want to be seen as complainers or threats to the established structures within corporate America. These managers realized that they were chosen by members of the dominant culture and they wanted to remain. In fact, Abraham reported that he felt his stint in corporate American enabled him to provide for his family. Moreover, in order to remain in this setting these managers had to “play the game”; this game was abiding by the norms of corporate America (Carbado & Gulati, 2003). Carbado and Gulati (2003) assert that within the workplace there is a process of first, selecting individuals (i.e., hiring) that are willing and have the capacity to take on the dominant culture’s characteristics. Second, they also suggest that to be successful, the individual needs to integrate and be socialized into the workplace in accordance with the dominant culture. Therefore, these managers knew that their companies had some level of expectation of them and how they should respond to being a part of corporate America. To be too overtly challenging or not to be socialized into the dominant culture could have negative ramifications. Harry, for example, described how an employee at Materials Company was asked to leave because her approach to advocating for the incorporation of more African Americans was too radical. These stories serve as reminders for those within the company of how they are to behave themselves.

Implicit But Not Explicit Knowledge of the “Learning Organization”

The seven companies utilized had been identified as “learning organizations” by either Watkins and Marsick (1993, 1999) and/or Marquardt and Reynolds (1994). However, the framework of the learning organization was a foreign concept to all but one of these managers. Given that a part of the study was to focus on the experiences of these

African American managers, the discussion will focus on the significance of the “learning organization” and its disciplines as defined by Senge (see chapters 1 and 2) thus relayed by the participants. While they were unfamiliar with the concept of the learning organization and its five disciplines, (personal mastery, shared vision, mental models, team learning, systems thinking) they did have implicit knowledge of some of its disciplines. The main premise of the learning organization is to utilize the learning of its members within, in order to become more effective (Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993). There are certain learning activities that support the learning organization and the organization provides access to these activities. One type of learning activity is benchmarking. It is a tool that examines the effective processes or components within a successful competitor and is encouraged because it is a mechanism that enhances the effective of the organization (Ellinger et al., 2000; Jashapara, 2003; Simonin, 1997; Voss et al., 1997). What is similar is that several managers discussed how benchmarking was utilized within their company to incorporate effective processes, such as Six Sigma.

Organizations sponsored other types of learning activities and in fact each company had many learning resources for its employees. The managers reported that their companies offered numerous learning and training opportunities, including, on-line learning, in-classroom training, and self-directed learning. These finding were analogous to Senge’s (1990) conceptualization of this framework.

In line with the spirit of the learning organization these managers were self-directed learners; they sought out learning opportunities that would enhance their effectiveness. Some sought out knowledge that would help them become better managers and this included management development programs and degree programs.

Others pursued learning activities that would give them skills to support the organization achieving its overall goals, such as creating cost cutting measures. The exceptional performance of the learning organization has been documented in the literature (Benabou, 1999; Ellinger et al, 2000; Simonin, 1997; Terziovski et al., 2000; Voss et al., 1997). Therefore, what comes to light is that most of the managers only had time to pursue learning endeavors that would benefit the organization. An overwhelming majority of the managers felt that there were constraints on their time, and the learning programs sponsored by their companies required them to study material during off work hours. Critical race theorists would argue that the interest of the dominant culture was served by the learning activities that they sponsored. The learning sponsored and supported by these companies was for the good of the company. Case in point, if the learning did not add value to the employee's current position, then the company did not provide tuition assistance (financial support to the employee).

Systems thinking. While some components of the learning organization framework were not as important to the managers, systems thinking was integral to how they understood the workings of the company. This is similar to the findings of previous research (Ellinger et al., 1999), which found that managers were integral to getting their employees engaged in systems thinking. They were able to integrate systems thinking with structures that encouraged communication across the company (Armstrong & Foley, 2003; Bierema & Berdish, 1999; Smith & Taylor, 2000). Many companies put structures in place to support systems thinking such as matrix managing and Six Sigma. Matrix managing allowed various departments within the company to work together to achieve a common goal. Not only did companies support structures that would encourage systems

thinking, but they also delivered on-line information about what was occurring in the company, such as stock performance. This dissemination of material helped these managers become cognizant of what was occurring in other areas and within the company as a whole.

It seems that the managers were kept abreast of the profitability of the company or the lack thereof. The managers from Copy Company reported that the company was nearly bankrupt several years ago, and the company made significant cuts in its workforce. As a result, the managers had to shoulder more responsibility within the company. Therefore, the company wanted its employees to feel that their performance had some measure of control in the success or profitability of the organization. West (1999), a critical race theorist, would assert that the company's interests were served by providing the managers with this information because it drove them to respond to meet the needs of the company.

Team learning. Team learning was integral to the managers being able to accomplish many goals for the good of the company. Overall, the managers felt that teams were effective. Managers organized teams to work together collaboratively to accomplish certain goals within the company. For instance, when decisions had to be made concerning contractual arrangements, teams were formed to explore the best options. Some companies provided training courses for its employees to understand how to utilize and interact with teams.

Senge (1990) asserts that team learning encourages discussion and dialogue; this process of collaboration will promote effective decision making. Geri made a fascinating observation about how teams work at her organization. While Fast Goods Company

promotes diversity of thought, little of that occurs because its members are homologous. Since there is little diversity, the majority of the employees were White, most of the dialogue within teams was done by the more senior ranking managers. Critical race theorists, Carbado and Gulati (2003) note that when companies select employees to join the company, they tend to hire similar individuals. “The more an individual appears to be similar to existing employees, the more likely an employer is to conclude that the individual has the potential to be assimilated” (p.1804). Organizations tend to hire individuals that will fit into the established culture. This again would relate to the issue of comfort, and teams forming with similar individuals.

Shared vision. Shared vision was the driving force of each company and within each company top management played an integral role- motivating and energizing the employees around the vision (Coad & Berry, 1998; Hodgkinson, 2000; Johnson, 2002; Morrison & Terziovski, 2001). In turn, the managers in this research study felt that their role was to support the organization realize the vision. These managers reported that the vision came from upper management; previous research cites that shared vision works best when the vision comes from various levels in the company (Bierema & Berdish, 1999; Senge, 1990). While the vision was not created by these members, as Senge (1990) suggests, it was integrated by the managers into their code of behavior. Overall, these managers never questioned the vision and felt that their role was to align themselves with it.

One plausible explanation for this is that there is a power differential between managers. This power differential played out in Steiner’s (1998) research. Whereby Steiner documented the attempt to implement a learning organization at a manufacturing

plant, and found that it was not successful because of competing interest. While the managers wanted to implement a learning organization, doing so required the operators to attend meetings and participate in the process. Therefore, management had an agenda that they imposed on the operators.

The managers in this study worked to obtain a position within management and wanted to remain gainfully employed. While several managers in this study felt that there was a disconnect between the vision of the company and their own personal vision, they did not always voice their concerns. What became evident when speaking with them is that the interests of senior management were paramount. Furthermore, they verbalized that a manager's role within any organization was to comply with the request of top management. Therefore, there was likely the fear of being let go, since management is becoming more of a shrinking entity. As Sharon Collins states, "there has been a move in corporate America to have organizations that are lean, which means functions and operations that are costing the company too much money are cut" (in Hayes, 1998, p.114). Therefore, there is the perceived threat that there is someone else to take one's place. In any case, critical race theorists would assert that the vision of upper management serves to promote their own interest. Just who the "shared vision" is shared by is of some question.

Mental model. Mental models are the assumptions or generalizations that an individual holds about how the world works (Senge, 1990). They are powerful because they guide how an employee will make decisions and interact with others. It was difficult to explore how mental models were actually utilized by these managers. One reason for this perhaps is that the managers needed to have more time to ponder these questions.

However, these managers felt that it was important to engage in discourse that would uncover the truth, but this seemed to be related to content issues. In fact, most managers reported that once one progressed further in the levels of management, one can no longer be a subject matter expert. They had to rely on the strength of the arguments that their subordinates produced to make decisions.

Within the framework of the learning organization there is suppose to be a process of examining a problem or issue and individuals advocating for a certain position (Senge, 1990). This becomes problematic when there is not room for this process to occur, and these managers felt that managers with more seniority made decisions that were not always the most effective. As a result, they did not feel that the companies encouraged this type of examination. One plausible explanation for this was that managers were accustomed to making decisions and they utilized other data to determine what was the best decision.

In sum, uncovering mental models as a discipline was not widely utilized; furthermore, discussion with these managers uncovered that they were kept uninformed about how decisions were made within the company. The structure of corporate America supports that senior management guides how decisions are made, and they rely upon their own wisdom to make the best decisions. For example, management at Fast Goods Company has not grown in the past four years and Geri has attempted to approach upper management in her division about changing their approach to gaining market share. She has suggested that they market their products to minority markets (i.e., Asian or African Americans). However, because senior management is composed of all White males, they

do not see how this will grow the company. Therefore, while one, lone individual can choose to challenge their assumptions, management has to be willing to listen.

Implications for Theory and Practice

The findings of this study suggest several implications for theory and practice. The implications for the learning organization and human resource development theory will be discussed first, followed by a discussion of the implications for adult education and human resource development practice.

The Learning Organization and Human Resource Development Theory

Theory is integral to understanding the mechanisms that operate within the workplace and in order for the workplace to change theory must change. There has been little consideration of race thus far in the learning organization literature and only limited discussion in HRD. The HRD field has been instrumental in providing adult education to the workplace and concentrating on learning and performance of its employees.

According to Bierema (1998), issues related to race and gender, have significant impact on organizational dynamics but they are often ignored. In regard to discussions of frameworks of the learning organization, most authors (Marquardt, 1996; Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993) either ignore race within organizations or only make passing references to it. For instance, Senge (1990) states in a small section of his book that individuals should be race-conscious and understand how their beliefs shape their interactions, but gives no attention to how one might address this. When reporting the findings of empirical studies, most authors do not usually include the race of the participants, thus prompting one to assume that the participants are probably White. Specifically, Dirks (1999) critiqued a research study done on managers and their role in

bringing the learning organization to fruition. He felt that sociocultural factors, such as race and gender, should be explored because they impact the relationship between manager and subordinate. Thus, for the most part in the learning organization literature to date, race is not conveyed as an important issue, though the literature does support that race matters.

Keeping the above points in mind, the findings of this study have significant implications for HRD theory and practice. All of these African American managers were impacted by the learning organization, but more importantly their career experiences were fraught with issues of race. Their race shadowed the types of positions that were offered to them as well as the level in management that they reached. The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this research study.

Racial diversity and the incorporation of it into the modern organization should not occur in vacuum. Gregory (1999) asserts that the learning organization treats racial diversity as a separate, stand alone issue. Diversity training should not be an isolated concern but incorporated into a systems thinking approach. The failed approach that many companies are utilizing now is “managing” diversity, which is largely ineffective because it is a liberal approach that seeks to maintain the existing power structure. Gregory concludes that systems thinking can enhance diversity which is the interconnectedness of the parts. Yet these social factors of race and gender, need to explicitly be made visible both theoretically and practically. Examining why certain inequalities exist can bring some corrective measures to the organization. In addition, Gregory’s critique of the learning organization can be augmented by critical race theory and cultural capital. Applying the tenets of critical race theory to the learning

organization framework will create a different organization, one that is more racially inclusive. Employing critical race theory and cultural capital to the learning organization will bring race to the foreground, thus making the experiences of African American managers and people of color more visible within this organization. Critical race theory and cultural capital complement one another because both recognize White culture as the dominant culture, which can call attention to the dynamics of how White privilege is manifested in organizations. It can make visible how the cultural practices and ways of being in the world of the White dominant culture impacts the culture of the organization where the members of that dominant culture can implicitly assume the right to possess and use resources (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Peterson, 1999; West, 1999). Further, critical race theorists argue that the paradigms that have surfaced to deal with diversity such as affirmative action and managing diversity, have been created to incorporate diversity without disturbing the social systems at present in corporate culture. But how new models can be implemented in practice might be facilitated by human resource development and adult educators in such settings

Human Resource Development and Adult Education Practice

There are also some implications for adult education and training. The field of HRD has largely encompassed an approach that furthers the liberal agenda, with its emphasis on individual rights, and unwillingness to challenge social structures, which largely maintains the power and interest of the dominant culture. The liberal agenda of affirmative action and managing diversity have failed with promoting racial equality within hiring and promotional practices. In addition, HRD's focus on learning and performance (Bierema, 1998) has thwarted its ability to take a systems approach (as

defined by Senge, 1990) to diversity issues. Diversity does not occur as a solitary issue, but runs concurrently within the daily operations of the workplace. A systems thinking approach acknowledges the interrelatedness of the whole organization and that every event within the organization is connected. So one way this can be supported in HRD practice, is that when a company is looking at its ability to retain minority talent, it needs to explore how it can effectively achieve this. Therefore, a first strategy is having the managers that will supervise minority individuals really attend to their career development. HR professionals need to be a part of this process to educate managers on how to be effective in this process. In addition, the diverse employees already within the company can be key to understanding how to effectively facilitate this development. Further, Lisa Delpit (1996) argues that explicitly teaching people the rules of the culture of power helps people navigate systems better and increases cultural capital, so they are not left to figure out the rules alone. This is as true in corporate America as it is in educational systems, and explicitly teaching this as part of career development is crucial.

Secondly, education and training programs need to find ways to make the experiences of African American managers and other people of color visible in the organization. Much of the career development literature does not take into account the experiences of African Americans (Barrett et al., 2003b; Johnson- Bailey & Tisdell, 1998; Palmer, 2002). Critical race theory supports the incorporation of storytelling in order to understand the experience of individuals that are not a part of the mainstream (Bell, 1995; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Peterson, 1999; West, 1999). The storytelling would ideally occur within the safety of African American networking groups (affinity groups). Having members from various levels in the

company can help the individual deconstruct their narrative and understand how to deal with issues in the workplace. Hearing the stories of managers with more seniority can help aspiring employees conceptualize an effective plan for their career. Furthermore, for too long the voices of African Americans in management have been marginalized and their tumultuous experiences within the workplace denied. While we do not want this to be a negative experience for managers with more seniority, sharing their stories would shed some light for the younger managers on how difficulties can be overcome.

Third, mentorships are integral to the career development of any individual (Barrett et al., 2000; Palmer, 2002) and individuals need to be educated on how this process works best. Cross-cultural mentorships are integral when members from a minority group are trying to participate in a setting that is unfamiliar to them (Barrett, et al., 2003a; Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998). Members of the dominant culture must be educated on how to mentor African Americans and other people of color. Therefore, mentors need to be open to sharing their knowledge with someone that possesses less cultural capital, especially because they are from a different cultural background. What remains true is that mentors transfer cultural capital to outsiders; this is one way that the structures can be softened that hinder the career progression of African Americans.

In addition, alternate opportunities need to be supported when there is a lack of mentors; African American networking groups provide support to minority individuals (Barrett et al., 2003a; Palmer 2002). But more importantly, African Americans need to be open to the mentoring experience. As Johnson-Bailey and Tisdell (1998) have concluded, since White males occupy more positions of power, African Americans need to be open to being mentored by someone of a different race.

Fourth, education and training programs need to be created that will further the learning opportunities of African American managers. Management training programs need to be instituted because they will educate employees on how to become effective managers. These programs need to account for the fact that there are differences between the career development of African Americans and the dominant culture. Companies need to understand how to deal with these issues in an equitable manner. Managers need to have diversity training that would focus on: how to facilitate the career development experiences of minorities, how to not practice racial nepotism, how to engage in cross cultural mentoring.

Fifth, educators need to inform senior management of the significance of their role in incorporating a strong commitment to racial diversity. As with incorporating the learning organization senior management sets the tone for how its members will follow (Coad & Berry, 1998; Hodgkinson, 2000; Johnson, 2002; Morrison & Terziowski, 2001). Prior diversity approaches, such as managing diversity, have failed to change the power structures; the dominant culture still controls who gets in and how many they will let in. Thus, having the buy in of senior management is crucial; after all, as was noted above it appears that senior management really shapes the vision of the organization. It is more likely to be a “shared vision” of the organization, if it’s shared at the top. Furthermore, such managers need also to be educated about how the mechanisms of White privilege, which are largely unconscious, work in organizations and in society (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Peterson, 1999; West, 1999). There are numerous discussions in the field of adult education that suggest specific strategies for making White privilege more visible in educational settings that can also be applied to these settings (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero,

1998; Manglitz 2003). As many adult educators and trainers in the field of adult education have noted, we need to be comfortable discussing sociocultural issues such as race and gender and how each relates to the workplace. In order to understand where we stand we must assess our cultural values to uncover what generalizations or stereotypes impact our practice. Understanding the empirical literature as it relates or not to African Americans is important; race does indeed impact the careers of minorities (Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998). Connecting the relevant research with practice can assist the effectiveness of organizations.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of the study, it is clear that more research needs to be done in this area. The findings of this study, as well as some of its limitations offer suggestions for further research. It was difficult to recruit willing participants for this study. There is only a limited number of African American managers in corporate America employed by companies identified as learning organizations. Consequently, not everyone is comfortable discussing the impact that race has had on them. Durr and Logan (1997) found when completing their research study that they could not have permission to interview White managers to compare their experiences with that of the Black managers in the organization. Furthermore, Hansen (2003) reported that companies do not want researchers to uncover possible discrimination issues. This makes doing research in this area difficult. In addition, there were questions that I did not present to the participants and it is possible that having more structured questions about race related issues would have provided more data. Inquiring about affirmative action was not my intent when I began these interviews; however, I did obtain some relevant

information in this regard. The older managers discussed it directly, without my asking about it. It would have been interesting to see if the younger managers considered affirmative action as a factor that impacted their career. Thus, a first suggestion for further research might be to explore how younger African American managers feel that affirmative action, and its recent curtailment affected their career.

Secondly, this study made use of a small sample. Given the small sample size of qualitative research studies, in the future similar studies might be conducted that will utilize a larger pool of participants, perhaps using a mixed method design. A survey could be conducted, and then a smaller sub-sample of participants could be interviewed in greater depth. In addition, studies could be done in settings not specifically identified as “learning organizations.”

Third, further research among HR professionals and senior managers concerning their conceptualization of race and White privilege in organizations can provide more in-depth understanding to this research. White privilege has been a part of the literature in adult education, and it would be interesting to explore if White senior managers or HR professionals have any understanding of it. Studies related to White privilege in organizations can uncover what it means to be a White manager (i.e., what are managers consciousness about whiteness) and how they perceive it impacts the experiences of others (i.e., African Americans). Data from such studies would provide more understanding to how certain companies chose to implement strategies related to incorporating racial diversity.

Fourth, more research needs to be done on how the learning organization impacts gender issues, and the simultaneous impact of gender and race. The learning

organization proposes that there needs to be a balance between work and family (Marquardt, 1993; Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993). The working mothers in this research study discussed the challenges associated with balancing the demands of family and work. Mothers who had young children described that their time with their families was valuable, but there were aspects of raising a family that they had to relinquish, such as employing full-time caregivers. In addition, the career development literature on women notes that there is a difference between the career development of White and Black women. Such that White women disproportionately benefit from affirmative action (Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998); thus it would be worthwhile to pursue how African American women perceive that the dual impacts of gender and race affect their career.

Fifth, there was no information collected about how the participants' role was perceived by others in the company. Self-report measures impact the type of information that one is able to collect and at times individuals can give inaccurate information. Bierema and Berdish (1999) utilized many forms of data to explore the learning organization such as, email communication, and memorandums. Having this information would have uncovered more information about certain aspects pertaining to the learning organization. Thus conducting further studies that could include not only a greater numbers of participants, but also further types of data from other sources in the organization would glean further insight into these issues.

Lastly, it is clear that the framework of the learning organization was not widely understood by these managers. Their employers did not educate them about the framework nor its stated benefits. However, these managers did resonate with certain

component such as team learning, systems thinking and shared vision. What became evident was that the vision came from senior leadership and these managers supported this vision.

In conclusion, the learning organization as a framework, like most other HRD theories, does not take into account the significance of race. This study was informed by the theoretical lens of critical race theory, which provided a way to analyze issues related to race within the learning organization. Analyzing the findings of the study through this lens, has offered some implications for potential solutions to really begin to address the components of race that should be a part of the systems thinking of a learning organization. The application of the findings of this study can hopefully contribute to making learning organizations more equitable, and more attentive to issues of race in corporate America.

Final Remarks

Completing this research study was an eye opening experience for me. While I wanted to explore the experiences of these managers I also learned something about myself. When I began this journey I thought what would I have to offer these managers? And why should they want to share their experiences with me? I was overwhelmed by their kindness and willingness to share. What I was able to offer them was someone that wanted to listen and hear their experiences. For many of these managers this was the first time that someone actually documented their experiences surrounding race and their careers.

When I interviewed the first participant, he talked about his journey and transition into the workplace. This led me to ponder how his educational background impacted

what he was able to accomplish in his later life. I recall conversations with my parents about the reason they chose to move to the suburbs; they wanted my brothers and I to receive a quality education. My mother stated that she would have conversations with her White co-workers about education and how to ensure that your children are successful. What became evident was that the parents of the younger managers had also done the same. I had a lot in common with these managers.

What also became evident was the older managers possessed a rich history. They were pioneers in entering corporate America and had to face insurmountable odds. When my father migrated from the South to Philadelphia to look for more promising job opportunities, there were little. While he never discussed the hardships that he had to overcome, the pictures that remain of this period in his life speak for themselves: pictures of him picketing with unions for fair wages and pictures with the Reverend Doctor Leon Sullivan, who was a champion for Civil Rights and led many of the charges to fight racial discrimination.

When my father became a manager he faced much opposition, but I only recall one time that he ever talked about how his race impacted his career. The pain that I heard in his voice led me to vow that I would do something about this one day. I now realized how important it was to have the voices of these African American managers heard and for me to relay their stories.

Now that I have reached the end of this journey I realize that this dissertation was a labor of love. The wisdom and knowledge that I gained from these managers will be passed on. I hope that organizations will examine the approaches that they have utilized

in the past and work to make significant changes for the inclusion of more equitable hiring and promotional practices.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Background:

1. Can you tell me about your educational background?
2. How long have you been at the organization?
3. What is your current position? And what prepared you for this position?
4. Can you describe the culture of the organization? What phrases, mottoes are unique to your organization?

Management:

5. Where are you in the hierarchy of management?
6. Can you describe your relationship with your supervising manager? (Is it one of he/she coaching or mentoring you?)
7. Can you describe your relationship with your subordinates? How many employees do you manager?
8. How do you handle problems with management?

Organization's view on learning:

9. How does the organization promote learning? What are some learning activities that the organization sponsors?
10. What is the most valuable learning activity or experience that you have had inside and outside of the organization?
11. How does your organization benefit from your learning? How have you used your learning experiences inside and outside of the organization?
12. How does the organization look for opportunities to learn, (critical incident)- describe a time that your co-workers used an experience that you learned from to make the business operation better?

Systems thinking:

13. When a problem arises in the workplace, such as a decrease in productivity, how has the organization chosen to identify the problem and address the issue?
14. Have you ever identified a problem that your subordinates were having and that required you to request additional funding for more resources?

Personal mastery:

15. Do you find any pleasure in your work at this organization? And if so can you describe the connection that you have to your work?

Mental models:

16. In business or team meetings is there an opportunity to examine faulty thought patterns or assumptions, for instance, has there ever been a time that policies or practices that negatively affected the organization were examined or changed?

Shared vision:

17. What is the vision of your organization and when considering this vision, as a manager how do you feel that you contribute to it?
18. What are your own personal goals, both in your career and in society? What are the ways in which your own personal goals and vision are congruent with the vision of the organization, and what are the ways your own goals or vision may diverge from that of the organization?

Team learning:

19. When working in teams at your organization, do you feel that you are treated as an equal, regardless of your color?
20. Do you feel that your voice is heard and factored into the decision making process when working with other team members?

Diversity and the learning organization:

21. What has been your prior career experience as an African American and how would you rate this organization with preparing career development opportunities for African Americans?
22. In terms of racial diversity, what is your organization's approach to getting people to work together most effectively? Do you feel that there is a better way?
23. Is there diversity in upper management?
24. Can you tell me about your public school experience? What was your neighborhood like?

Appendix B
Consent Form

ORP USE ONLY:
**The Pennsylvania State University
 Office for Research Protections**

Approval Date: 6/11/04 – J. Mathieu

Expiration Date: 6/3/05 – J. Mathieu

Social Science Institutional Review Board

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: The experiences of African American managers in the learning organization (IRB# 18863)

Principal Investigator: Trammell Bristol, Graduate Candidate in Adult Education, Penn State Capital College, School of Behavioral Sciences, W314 Olmsted Bldg., Middletown, PA 17057
 e-mail: tlb909@psu.edu

Advisor: Dr. Elizabeth Tisdell, Associate Professor in Adult Education, Penn State Capital College School of Behavioral Sciences, W314 Olmsted Bldg., Middletown, PA 17057, e-mail ejt11@psu.edu; Telephone: 717-948-6640

1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to explore how the learning organization (LO) impacts black managers. Black managers that have been employed at a LO for the at least three years will be utilized.
2. **Procedures to be followed:** You will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview (60-90 minutes in length that will be audio tape-recorded. You may also be asked to share your resume (that will list your achievements within the learning organization) and potentially to share some of your experiences in this organization. Only the interviewer will have access to the interview tapes.
3. **Discomforts and Risks:** There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Also, participation or non-participation will not have any effect on your employment status.
4. **Benefits:** You might learn more about how the learning organization impacts the black manager. Also, this research might provide a better understanding of how the learning organization deals with the issue of race.
5. **Duration/Time:** The interview will take between 60-90minutes in length.

6. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Only the primary investigator, who will conduct your interview, will know your true identity. Further, in order to protect your identity, all audio recordings will be stored in a file cabinet in the office of the investigator and will be destroyed at the completion of the study in December 31, 2005. Your employer will not know of your participation and will not have access to any of the audio recordings.
7. **Right to Ask Questions:** You can ask questions about the research. Contact Trammell Bristol at email tlb909@psu.edu with questions. My advisor is Dr. Elizabeth J. Tisdell she can be contacted at 717-948-6640 with questions, or via e-mail at ejt11@psu.edu. If you have questions about the rights of research participants you can contact the Office for Research Protections at 814-865-1775.
8. **Compensation:** You will not be compensated for participating in this study.
9. **Voluntary Participation:** Participation is voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time by notifying the principal investigator. You can decline to answer specific questions.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below. You will be given a copy for your records.

Participant Signature

Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

Investigator Signature

Date

VITA

Trammell L. Bristol

Education:

Pennsylvania State University, D. Ed., Adult Education, May 2005

La Salle University, Master of Arts, May 2000

Temple University, Bachelor of Arts, January 1996

Academic Positions:

The Pennsylvania State University, Middletown, PA
Graduate Assistant (August 2002- May 2004)

The Pennsylvania State University, Middletown, PA
Instructor (January 2003- May 2003)

Conference Presentations:

The learning that Black managers' value within the learning organization. Presented at the 7th Annual Pennsylvania and Continuing Education Research Conference. Middletown, PA, 2005.

African American managers' experiences in companies identified as "learning organizations". Presented at the 46th Annual Adult Education Research Conference. June, 2005. Athens, GA.

What's critical race theory got to do with Human Resource Development? Presented at the 13th Annual Pre-Conference on the African Diaspora at the Adult Education Research Conference. June, 2005. Athens, GA.