The Political Capital of Trustees and Stakeholder Satisfaction At Four Tribal Colleges and Universities

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Why are some tribal organizations more effective than others? Does political capital—connections, influence and power—enable or constrain the ability of a tribal organization to work successfully within its Native community? This paper explores these questions within the context of American Indian higher education by using political capital theory to examine trustee relationships at more and less effective tribal colleges and universities (TCUs). Interviews (n=87) were conducted with college administrators, staff, trustees, and influential community members at four TCU sites in 2002. A mixed-method research design used in-depth interviews, direct observation, and secondary data sources. Trustees who expressed greater political capital corresponded to less effective TCUs from a social constructionist perspective that measured community satisfaction. Findings suggest that de-politicizing boards of trustees at TCUs may increase organizational effectiveness in terms of community satisfaction. Leadership models that incorporate traditional tribal characteristics of collective action should be explored in future research.

Tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) serve specific American Indian communities, which have unique social and cultural ways of relating to each other and to outsiders. TCUs are tribally chartered institutions governed by majority American Indian boards of trustees and serve majority American Indian student populations.[1] They are typically located on American Indian reservations and staffed by local tribal members.

Because TCUs serve both students and communities, they have characteristics of both nonprofit organizations and institutions of higher education. Evaluating organizational effectiveness usually involves assessing leadership and, in the nonprofit and higher education sectors, this involves boards of directors or trustees and chief executive officers or presidents. Although presidents handle the daily operations of the organization, trustees have the legal authority to govern

(Martorana, 1963). Boards oversee the organization, represent the critical intersection of internal and external interests (Richardson, Blocker, & Bender, 1972), provide expertise, and project the organization's identity to the public (Abzug & Galaskiewicz, 2001).

Community colleges commonly have close relationships with their communities and their boards are often locally controlled (Richardson et al., 1972). As such, their boards are often susceptible to local politics and short-term interests (Vaughan, 1989). Some have found community college trustees to be largely ignorant and incompetent (Moore, 1973), of enforcing trivialities (Vaughan, 1989), and of unethical behavior (Davis, 1992). Therefore many leadership development efforts have focused on improving the performance of governing boards (Chait, Holland, & Taylor, 1996).

TCU board members are usually selected by reservation elections or tribal council (Stein, 2003). TCUs maintain boards that are almost exclusively American Indian and most colleges try to maintain board independence from tribal politics (Boyer, 1997). Stein (2003) found that the critical factor for a successful TCU was that "its board of trustees must act as a buffer between the college and the local governing body (the tribal council)" (p. 43). Wabaunsee (1998) noted:

> It appears that as a college becomes more successful a tribal government may move to control the college. When a tribal government experiences economic setbacks, the tribal college becomes an attractive source of potential funds. Sometimes, it seems for no reason other than the tribal college catches the eye of the tribal government, a tribal government may move to reassert control over a tribal college (pp. 127-128).

The TCU's dilemma then, is to be "an intimate part of its local community, yet...remain administratively separate from the local governing body. What we have learned over time is that [the college's involvement] in the daily business of tribal governance is a sure formula for failure" (Stein, Shanley, & Sanchez, 2003, p. 79).

This paper examines how the political capital of trustees support or hinder TCU effectiveness. Political capital is "the ability of a group to influence the distribution or resources within a social unit" and "consists of organization, connections, voice, and power" (Flora, Flora, & Fey, 2004, p. 108). To date, studies on TCU trustees or American Indian political capital have been lacking. If the political capital of trustees affects the performance of TCUs, then TCUs would be wise to consider political capital in their governance strategies.

Literature Review

Tribal Governance Then and Now

Historically, understanding American Indian/Alaska Native leadership has been perplexing to Euro-Americans oriented to the concept of hierarchical authority. Deloria and Lytle (1984) described the early confusion:

> No formal institutions were apparent. Leaders seemed to come and go almost whimsically. One might be negotiating with one chief on one occasion and be faced with a different person for no apparent reason except that the Indian council had designated the new man to speak for them. In tracing the source of political authority, whites were really baffled. No one seemed to be in charge of anything. A promise need not even be written down, and there seemed to be no appeal to any formal authority when things went wrong (pp. 9-10).

But in fact, Indian leadership and governance was active, effective, and diverse. Governing structures varied from simple bodies, where all tribal members met in a general council, to highly sophisticated confederacies like the Iroquois League (O'Brien, 1989). Tribal leaders derived authority and power from spiritual values that emphasized group harmony and responsibility. Personal traits such as integrity, generosity, and charisma accorded one prestige and respect and led to leadership within the tribe. Yet, the people ultimately held power. Leaders were expected to lead by example, to suggest, encourage, and entreat—never to dictate by command or force. Leaders knew they would be removed if the people lost confidence in them (Deloria & Lytle, 1984; Grahn, Swenson, & O'Leary, 2001; O'Brien, 1989).

In this tribal context, power was a complex, multi-dimensional concept. Anthropologist Walter B. Miller (1955) described power within traditional Fox (Mesquakie) society as:

> Power is universally available and unlimited; it does not have a unitary locus; it is everywhere, and equally available to all.
>
> The possession of power is temporary and contingent; it is not a quality permanently possessed by any being, but can be gained and lost, possession being demonstrated by successful performance in specific situations.
>
> Demonstrated power does not grant to its possessor the subsequent right to direct the actions of any other being.
>
> Power is not hierarchical; since its possession is temporary and contingent, fixed and varying amounts of power are not distributed among a group of beings arranged in a stable hierarchy.
>
> The control of power is dangerous; powerful beings are to be feared, not adored or admired (pp. 282-283).

Over time, with increased contact with European-styled political systems, American Indian/Alaska Native leadership and governance changed fundamentally. Traditional tribal authority was eroded through deceit, conquest, assimilation, and paternalism (Deloria & Lytle, 1984; O'Brien, 1989). Central to efforts to shape, and allegedly strengthen, Indian governance in the United States was the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934. Although the consequences of the IRA are still debated today, it is clear that for those tribes that adopted its provisions (about half of all tribes), leadership and governance changed drastically.

The typical IRA constitution established a governing board, often referred to as a tribal council. Although tribes were given the opportunity to design their

own constitutions, lack of local legal expertise and experience meant that most tribes adopted a model constitution drafted by BIA (then the Indian Bureau) lawyers. Given that, Deloria and Lytle (1984) ask rhetorically, "Is it little wonder that so many of the newly established constitutions had a distinct Anglo-American flavor? Or that they resembled one another so much?" (p.173). These constitutions specified that new IRA governing bodies had the authority to exercise *all* of the existing powers that Indian governments possessed. Hence tribal councils, specified by IRA constitutions as including executive, legislative and judicial authorities, had immense powers (Meredith, 1993). The dynamics of political capital for Indian tribes had indeed changed.

Political Capital Theory

The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) spoke of cultural capital as the maintenance of social groups or classes. Individuals are born into their respective social classes and accumulate particular cultural identities. They are socialized to assimilate their cultural inheritance and to pass it to the next generation. Cultural capital shapes the way individuals, classes, and ethnic groups view the world and many times differing worldviews clash (Flora et al., 2004).

Political capital—the means to control the resources of a given group—builds upon cultural capital in the sense that culture helps shape the institutional framework of society and hence the choice-set for organizations and actors (North, 1990). Actors make decisions based on available choices, and these choices are in turn defined by societal institutions, which are themselves shaped by a society's cultural worldview. For example, a tribal norm emphasizing the group over the individual (the culture) might influence tribal government (the institution) toward unanimous decision-making, which would then dictate that actors seek consensus (the choice-set) when allocating resources (the political capital).

Political capital also builds upon social network characteristics associated with bonding social capital. Social capital (e.g. Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) builds upon concepts of social network structure and norms of trust and reciprocity. *Bonding* social capital consists of dense and exclusive relationships based on homogenous group solidarity. Putnam (2000) called bonding social capital a "kind of sociological superglue" that creates powerful intra-group loyalties that mobilize support (pp. 22-23).

Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) studied bonding social capital in immigrant communities. Immigrants used interpersonal networks where obligations, information channels, and social norms provided access to resources. But social capital could limit as well as expand opportunity. While very useful in providing group support, bonding social capital can cause a "gigantic free-riding problem" where less ambitious members of the group can exact demands on those more successful. Limits to personal freedoms in interacting with cultural outsiders and negative leveling pressures that block upward mobility are also potential downsides to bonding social capital (pp. 1340-1344).

Flora et al. (2004) described political capital in terms of the structure and exercise of power. Power is the ability to make something happen or to stop something from occurring. It can be exercised through positional authority or through informal influence. Although power has been widely studied, there is a lack of consensus among organizational and sociological scholars on how to measure it. Reed (1992) describes the "chequered and disputatious" history of power studies that included "controversy and disagreement over appropriate conceptualization, methodology and interpretation" (p. 62).

Social network analysis has helped provide tools to examine the structure of power relationships. Among measures of network exclusivity and density, one measure of power used has been the size of one's ego network. Theoretically, actors in central network positions have greater access to, and potential control over, relevant resources, including information (Krackhardt & Brass, 1994). The size of a social group is one way to measure the amount of potential or latent resources and information that is available, which in turn places actors in more powerful bargaining positions. Wrong (1979) writes that:

> the size of a group, the sheer numbers of people composing it, is a crucial collective resource. The group's size often determines the total amount of resources of wealth, reputation, strength *et al.* it controls, because this depends considerably on the number of persons contributing their quanta of individually owned or controlled resources to the common pool (pp. 135-136).

Individually-owned or controlled resources include the relationship ties that we foster that provide us information and resources.

Several studies have looked at the size of social networks vis-à-vis power. In a study of rural community leaders, O'Brien, Hassinger, Brown and Pinkerton (1991) found that leaders in more viable communities were more likely to have worked with other community leaders, as measured by the number of relationship ties, than leaders in less viable communities. Brass (1984) measured influence in a newspaper publishing company by asking respondents to list the number of people who had "pull, weight, or clout" in the company (p. 529). The network variable, transaction alternatives, or the availability of alternate paths to resources, was significantly and positively associated with influence.

Brass' measure of transaction alternatives is also known as improving the quality of a bargainer's alternatives, or extending the power network (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980). Extending the power network is a key concept related to an actor's or group's power. By extending one's power network through increasing the number of relationships, a person expands the sources of supply or information he or she desires. Michener and Suchner (1972) say that extending the power network, "may be the most frequently used of the power tactics. In many situations, it emerges as the tactic that is not only the least costly, but also the most likely to succeed" (p. 247). Yamagishi, Gillmore and Cook (1988) theorized that as network connections (and alternative sources of supply/information) increased, power concentrates to the receiver, creating a sort

of buyer's market. Alternatively, as network connections decrease (less alternative sources), power shifts to the providers of resources/information, moving toward sole sources of goods, as in a seller's market.

An employee, who increases her contacts to alternative employment opportunities, enhances her power position relative to her current employer. Likewise, trustees who maintain more network connections within the community have more alternative sources of supply/information than those trustees with fewer connections. Greater alternative sources of supply/information can bring more power, and trustees with more connections may be more successful in pursuing or blocking organizational strategies.

Organizational Effectiveness

Organizations in traditional tribal societies operated, as do contemporary ones, in matters of collective action. Yet given the fluid characteristics of tribal leadership, how did tribal organizations function? Miller (1955) identified factors in Fox society that enabled collective action without centralized control. First, he found that the range of coordinated activities was limited and that they recurred with regularity. Second, group size was relatively small. Third, societal stability ensured that participants learned their roles and responsibilities and passed their knowledge to subsequent generations. Finally, there were no elaborate divisions of labor and few specialists or experts, so that the entire population contributed to the collective effort. The sophisticated Iroquois League operated similarly: regularly scheduled gatherings, councils no greater than 50 (and typically fewer), and stable social structures (O'Brien, 1989).

Today, organizations operate in a very different environment, one that is in constant flux and that demands efficient collective action and expertise. Organizational effectiveness has therefore been a subject of great scholarly interest. Organizational effectiveness assessments have included goal-attainment benchmarks, systems resources analysis, multi-dimensional approaches, multiple constituency models, perception-based/reputational assessments, and many others (e.g., Forbes, 1998; Scott, 1981; Seashore, 1983; Zammuto, 1982).

Herman and Renz (1997, 1999) proposed a social constructionist model of effectiveness. In their view, "effectiveness is socially created by the actions and interactions of stakeholders" (Herman & Renz, 1999, p. 109). Judgments of effectiveness from multiple stakeholders are fluid, negotiated over time, and changed. The best measure of effectiveness may depend on an organization's goals and environment. Organizations with diffuse goals, and that operate in multiple domains with many constituents might apply a social constructionist model. Organizations that have specific and measurable goals with consensual agreement and well-defined functions might prefer goal-attainment models.

Notions of leadership are intertwined with organizational effectiveness. Leaders set the policy and strategic direction of the organization, and they are in the best position, as individuals with authority and influence, to affect organizational performance. As stated earlier, effectiveness and leadership studies

in higher education and nonprofit organizations cannot ignore board performance. Boards are the critical leadership sites at these institutions.

The Research Question

This paper seeks to understand how TCU trustees use political capital in college business, and how political capital relates to the effectiveness of the college. If trustees represent the critical leadership site at the TCU, then their political capital could play a major role in the effectiveness of a TCU as a community-based organization. Therefore the following research question is posed: How do TCU trustees use political capital in college business, and how does their political capital relate to the organizational effectiveness of the college?

Methods

This study used a mixed methodological approach that generally fits within a pragmatist paradigm (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). A mixed method research design was employed because, while TCUs possess characteristics that can be generalized to the larger TCU and higher education community, they also have unique cultural characteristics of significance. TCUs are viewed generally as organizations operating within unique tribal contexts.

Four sites were selected to include a variety of TCUs while ensuring descriptive depth at each location. Of a total of 30 TCUs (in 2000), five intertribal TCUs were excluded from study because their Boards of trustees or regents were comprised nationally or, in one case statewide, and did not correspond to a specific place-bound community. This does not mean that these TCUs do not serve local constituents, but rather, that our survey of trustees and influential community members could not accommodate national or regional boards due to our limited resources. The remaining TCUs were ranked on a combined index of public service expenses and diversity of revenue sources, and two top-ranked and two bottom-ranked TCUs were selected. Public service expense and revenue data were used as indicators of intra- and extra-community engagement respectively, and so TCUs that ranked especially high or low in their ability to work with both locals and outsiders were chosen.

Financial data were found in the 2000 Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Public service is one category of expenditures in IPEDS, and includes all expenses specifically for services and activities established to provide non-instructional services for groups external to the institution. It was considered an objective indicator of community involvement. A TCU with no IPED-reported public service expenditures might not necessarily mean that there was no local activity whatsoever. The IPED measure was only used to objectively rank low levels of engagement. A revenue diversity index was considered an indicator of activity in accessing external resources that enable a TCU's work in the community. The index was created by assigning equal values for each of 14 IPEDS categories of revenue that a TCU could access, and weighting those values by the percentage of total revenue that particular revenue source represents.

In the most diverse case, a TCU accesses all 14 IPEDS revenue categories exactly evenly. In the most non-diversified case, a TCU only accesses a single revenue category.[2]

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured instrument (see Appendix A). Respondents were asked structured questions regarding their relationships and associations, and were encouraged to expand their comments when appropriate through probing questions. Qualitative comments were then recorded on the blank sides of the questionnaire. Interviews were conducted in-person and, in some cases, over the telephone.

The Colleges

Eagle College[3] sits on the vast range of open prairie. Nationwide, 6,298 individuals are tribal members; while the reservation has a population of 4,470 of which 91.9% is American Indian (US Census Bureau, 2000). The tribe chartered Eagle College in 1975, and the college matured slowly thereafter, receiving accreditation for two-year degrees in 1996. In 2000, Eagle College received nearly $3 million in revenue from four sources. Federal grants were the largest source, 90% of total revenue. The college reported no public service expenditures (IPEDS, 2000). Full- and part-student enrollment was 465 in the fall 2001 academic term for all programs and, in that year, 17 students graduated (AIHEC, 2003). The college employed 54 full-time faculty and staff and about nine adjunct faculty.

Bear College lies in a high-mountain valley surrounded by thick evergreen forests. Nationwide, 4,203 individuals are tribal members. The reservation has a total population of 26,172 of which 7,883 (30.1%) are American Indian (US Census Bureau, 2000). These population figures suggest that many Native residents of the reservation may be members from other tribes. In 1976, the tribal council chartered Bear College and it was accredited in 1984. In 2000, Bear College received nearly $15.7 million in revenue from 10 sources. Federal grants were the largest source, 38% of total revenue. Public service expenditures comprised 17.5% of all expenses (IPEDS, 2000). Full- and part-time student enrollment for the fall 2001 academic term was 890 students, and 180 students graduated that year (AIHEC, 2003). The college employed 171 full-time faculty and staff and about 18 adjunct faculty.

Buffalo College is nestled within the hills and valleys bordering the bank of a continental river. Nationwide, 381 individuals are tribal members, while a second band of the tribe has 4,621 members in a different location. The reservation has a population of 2,588 of which 56.7% are American Indian (US Census Bureau, 2000). Buffalo College and Elk College (discussed next) were first chartered by their respective tribes as a single college in 1979. Buffalo College's tribe separated from Elk College in 1996, chartered Buffalo College separately, and received its two-year degree accreditation in 1998. In 2000, Buffalo College received about $1.8 million in revenue from nine sources. "Other" revenue constituted the largest source, almost 25% of total revenue.

Public service expenditures comprised 2.2% of all expenses (IPEDS, 2000). Full- and part-time student enrollment for the fall 2001 academic term was 88 students, and three students graduated that year (AIHEC, 2003). The college employed 34 full-time faculty and staff and about 18 adjunct faculty.

Elk College is chartered by two tribes, referred to in this study as the Southern and Northern tribes. The college has a satellite campus system with learning centers on two reservations and in two off-reservation urban centers. Elk College's Southern tribal campus lies near the banks of a major river. Nationwide, 5,298 individuals are Southern tribal members, while the reservation has a population of 5,194, of which 45.5% are American Indian. The Northern campus is about 120 miles from its Southern counterpart. Nationwide, 2,869 individuals are Northern tribal members, while the reservation has a population of 878, of which 64.8% are American Indians (US Census Bureau, 2000).

Elk College was originally chartered in 1979, and was accredited in 1981. In 2000, Elk College received about $1.9 million in revenue from seven sources. Federal grants were the largest source, over 30% of total revenue. There were no public service expenses (IPEDS, 2000). Full- and part-time student enrollment for the fall 2001 term was 194 students, and 12 students graduated that year (AIHEC, 2003). The college employed about 40 full-time faculty and staff and about 35 adjunct faculty.

Respondent Selection

At each TCU site, 22 "key influentials" were interviewed—12 college respondents and 10 community leaders. Key influentials were individuals "who are most influential" in getting things done or in stopping things from happening, and were selected by both position and reputation. College respondents included presidents, administrators, trustees, faculty and staff, and also allowed for those who might be influential in informal, traditional, or cultural ways. These individuals were identified during the first interview with the college president.

Community "key influentials" were identified by seven independent advisors who represented functional areas within the community (agriculture, business, social/health services, culture, religion, media, and education). Advisors were asked to name up to five people who are most influential in the community and their combined lists were pared down to the 10 individuals in the community with the most votes. Influential community members included tribal chairs, council members, department heads, elders, and in some cases, college trustees.

A standard questionnaire collected quantitative data on the social characteristics of actors and their relationships. Qualitative data were also collected during in-depth interviews and through direct field observations. Additional data were gathered from secondary sources including newspapers, college web sites, government databases, and tribal publications.

The research produced 87 cases for analysis[4] and descriptive statistics were tabulated. Social network analysis determined the structural characteristics of

social networks, and variables such as network exclusivity and density. Qualitative field data were used to complement and interpret the quantitative data.

Results

Table 1 shows selected demographic characteristics of trustees. Generally, trustees possessed homogenous attributes, with some exceptions. Trustees at Buffalo College were more often women, and were not graduates of the TCU. Eagle College trustees had longer tenure in the community, including as a birthplace. Bear College trustees felt less a part of the community than did other trustees.

Power Structure

Trustees' political capital was examined by the structure and exercise of power. First, did evidence of relationships exist and, if so, to what extent? That is, did trustees work with influential community members, college administrators, faculty, or staff on college-related business? If trustees were absent in college business, whatever political capital they may have possessed would have limited influence on the TCU's performance. If trustees did work with others, what was the reach of their social networks? The size of social networks could determine the potential power that actors could wield.

Trustees were named most often as involved in college business at Elk College, 26 times of 62 total relational ties (42%). Trustees were named 13 times of 63 total ties (21%) at Buffalo College, while trustees at Eagle College were named eight times of 81 total ties (10%). Trustees were named only twice at Bear College, of 77 identified ties (3%). The proportion of ties involving trustees at Elk College (42%) suggests that they had the greatest structural opportunity to obtain and exercise power, about twice as much as Buffalo College trustees and about four times as much as Eagle College trustees. Bear College trustees did not appear to be active in this area.

Network exclusivity indicates how closed a social network is around a particular group of individuals (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Exclusivity was

Table 1
Demographic Characters of Trustees at Four Tribal Colleges

	Buffalo College (n=6)	**Eagle College (n=5)**	**Bear College (n=6)**	**Elk College (n=8)**	**Total (n=25)**
Selected Demographic Characteristics					
Gender (% Male)	33	80	50	62	56
Age (mean)	52	51.6	50.3	53.9	52.1
Education (0-7)	3.0	3.4	3.5	3.0	3.2
Ethnicity (% American Indian)	100	100	100	100	100
Years lived in community (mean)	32	46	29.5	29.1	33.3
Born in community (%)	66	100	67	63	72
Graduate of tribal college (%)	0	60	50	25	32
Feel part of community (1-7)	6.8	6.8	5.3	7.0	6.5

calculated by dividing the number of trustees by the total number of actors identified in trustees' social networks. The fewer the outside actors, the larger the value, and the more exclusive the network. Trustee network rankings, from most to least exclusive, were as follows: Elk (0.36), Buffalo (0.30), Bear (0.25), and Eagle College (0.23). Group exclusivity is typically associated with bonding social capital, and can hamper broad community action by limiting participation to an elite clique.

Network density was calculated as the number of relational ties identified by trustees divided by all possible ties given a number of actors (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Rankings of trustee networks, from least to most dense, are as follows: Bear and Eagle (0.09), Buffalo (0.14), and Elk College (0.17). Dense social networks indicate complex multi-stranded relationships. Elk College trustees had the densest social networks, slightly more so than Buffalo College trustees, and almost twice as dense as trustees at Bear and Eagle Colleges.

Social network measures showed differences in how trustees interacted with college staff and influential community members. In particular, Elk College respondents showed notable intra-organizational networking within the college, accounting for more than half of all ties, primarily from college staff to trustees. Said another way, fewer than half of trustee relationships actually involved the community. Elk College trustees had the most exclusive and the densest social networks. Buffalo College ranked next in measures of connectivity, exclusivity, and density.

Power Exercised

To measure power exercised, respondents were asked the following questions once they identified someone with whom they interacted with on college business: "Do you need their support to get things done?" "Can they stop things from getting done?" and "Do they represent a large constituency in the Indian community?"

At Elk College, 85% of the 26 responses involving trustees indicated their support was needed, 64% of responses said trustees could stop things from happening, and 81% of responses said trustees represented a large constituency in the Indian community. At Buffalo College, 92% of the 13 responses relating to trustees indicated their support was needed, 100% of responses said trustees could stop things from happening, and 91% of responses said trustees represented a large constituency in the Indian community. At Eagle College, 100% of the eight responses related to trustees were positive to all three questions. These findings suggest that when trustee relationships exist, power is a common component. Furthermore, when power is common among actors, then the number of relationship ties, or the size of the social network, plays a large role in the potential to exercise power. Finally, the two trustee-related responses at Bear College both indicated that support was needed and that trustees represented large constituencies, while responses were split on whether they could stop things from happening.

The usefulness of these power exercised indicators must be tempered by the wide variation of size of social networks among the tribal college trustees in this study. Bear College trustees were identified only twice out of 77 total ties and so the responses have limited value. However, because trustees were only named twice in college business, there is evidence of low trustee power at this site—relationships must first exist to exercise power and social network size can increase sources of power.

To determine if power was derived through positional authority and/or informal influence, additional data were examined. First, all trustees likely derive some authoritative power through their position on the board. However, at Elk College, *all* trustees were tribal council members, and the trustee Chairperson was tribal Chairman. Three trustees at Eagle College were tribal council members; the trustee Chairperson was tribal Vice President. No trustees at either Buffalo or Bear Colleges sat as tribal council members.

Informal ties are ways individuals relate to each other outside of formal contexts and include relationships forged through kinship, community groups, and communal events. They can represent political influence through multi-stranded relationships. Trustees named the informal ties they maintained, with the following ranking of mean informal ties per trustee: Elk (4.2), Buffalo (3.2), Eagle (2.7) and Bear College (2.0).

Table 2 summarizes the political capital characteristics discussed. By qualitatively interpreting network connectivity, size, exclusivity, density, support, blocking and community representation, and informal ties, Elk College trustees appear to possess and express more political capital, followed by Buffalo, Eagle, and then Bear College trustees. Furthermore, trustees at Elk College utilize both positional authority and informal influence to derive their power, as do Eagle College trustees, albeit to a lesser degree. Trustees at Buffalo College primarily use informal influence to derive power.

Organizational Effectiveness

Having determined the character of political capital of trustees, it can now be discussed vis-à-vis organizational effectiveness. Effectiveness was assessed using a social constructionist approach, which measured community, or stakeholder, satisfaction.

Respondents were asked their agreement (scaled 1 for "complete disagreement" and 7 for "complete agreement") for each of the nine statements below (α=0.92). Scores for each item were summed for a total satisfaction score for each respondent. The statements were as follows: "The college works to strengthen our culture," "prepares our students for career opportunities," "provides resources that allow us to serve our community," "provides needed services to our community," "does a good job listening to us," "knows what's going on in our community," "does a good job educating our people," "does a good job representing the interests of our American Indian community," and "is an important member of our community." Trustees and influential community

Table 2
Political Capital Characteristics of Trustees at Four Tribal Colleges

Political Capital Characteristics	**Bear College (n=6)**	**Buffalo College (n=6)**	**Eagle College (n=5)**	**Elk College (n=8)**
Network size (number and percent of ties identified to trustees related to college business)	2 of 77 ties (3%)	13 of 63 ties (21%)	8 of 81 ties (10%)	26 of 62 ties (42%)
Network exclusivity (proportion of actors within trustee network)	inclusive (0.25)	mixed (0.30)	inclusive (0.23)	exclusive (0.36)
Trustee network density (proportion of ties of all possible ties)	less dense (0.09)	more dense (0.14)	less dense (0.09)	more dense (0.17)
Support, blocking, and community representation respectively (% and number of ties of trustees)	100 / 50 / 100 of 2 ties	92 / 100 / 91 of 13 ties	100 / 100 / 100 of 8 ties	85 / 64 / 81 of 26 ties
Informal ties (mean informal ties per trustee relationship)	lower (2.0)	medium-high (3.2)	medium-low (2.7)	higher (4.2)

members responded to the college satisfaction questions while college faculty and staff were not asked, and thus there is a smaller sample size for these indicators. Satisfaction was highest at Eagle College (*M*=55.9, *SD*=6.8, n=14), followed by Bear (*M*=54.4, *SD*=7.4, n=16), Buffalo (*M*=49.4, *SD*=8.5, n=14,), and Elk College (*M*=40.7, *SD*=11.2, n=15).

Higher community satisfaction coincided with lower indications of political capital. TCUs that ranked higher in community satisfaction ranked lower in political capital. Network exclusivity had a strong relationship to community satisfaction (Figure 1), and indicated that the more inclusive (less exclusive) trustee social networks, the greater the satisfaction. Trustees at the more satisfied college, Eagle College, were less exclusive in their social networks. Trustees at the next most satisfied college, Bear College, followed a similar pattern. Finally, at the least satisfied college, Elk College, trustees were most exclusive in their social relationships. The political capital of trustees, it seems, correlated negatively with community satisfaction.

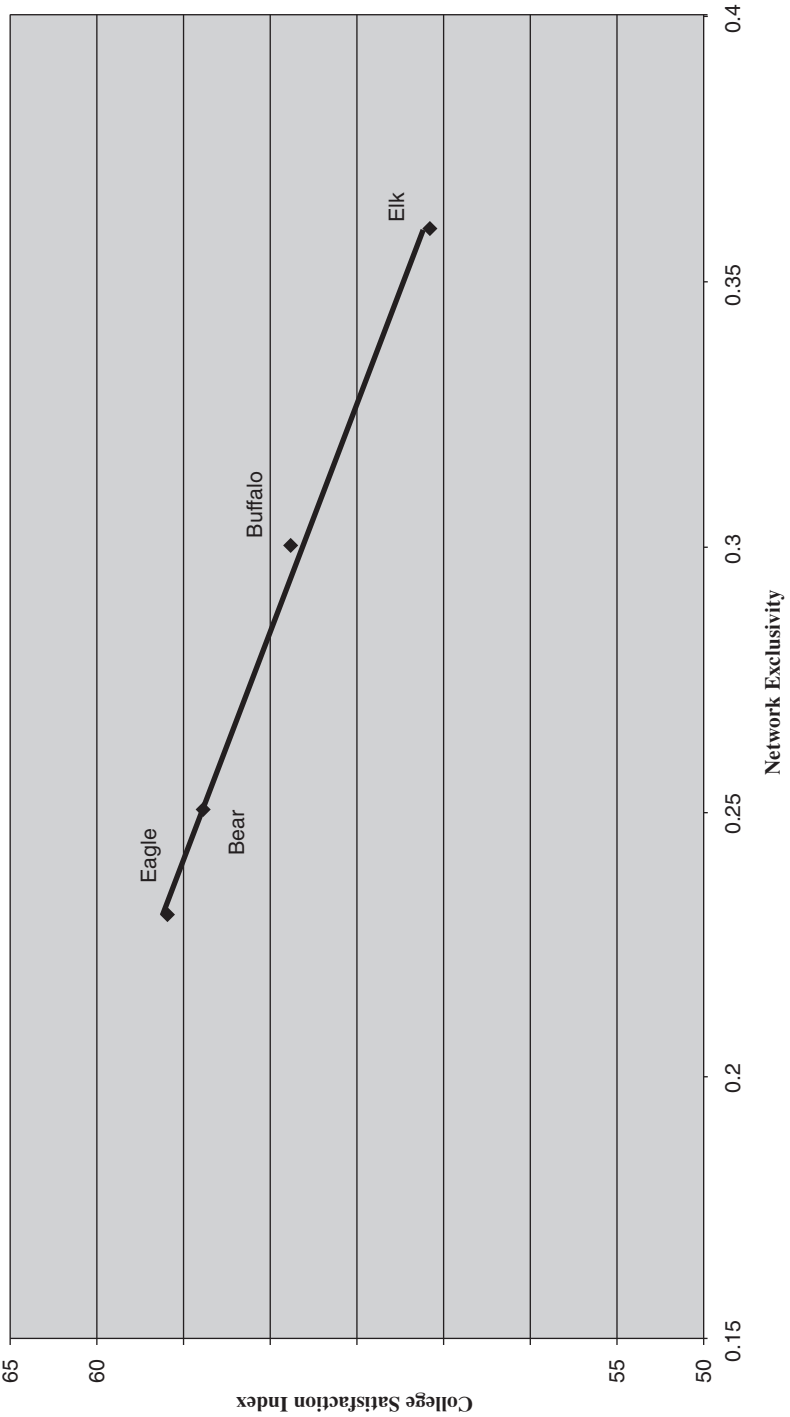
Discussion

For Indian post-secondary educators, some general patterns of tribal political engagement have emerged. At two colleges in this study, trustees exhibited greater characteristics of political capital. Greater political capital of trustees corresponded to lower effectiveness as measured by community satisfaction. At Elk College, where power and connections were greatest, and all trustees were tribal council members, the community was least satisfied. At Buffalo College, where trustees had the second-most political capital, community satisfaction was second lowest. At Eagle and Bear Colleges, trustees did not exhibit much political capital and both colleges received relatively high marks in community satisfaction.

Elk College is chartered by two historically separate tribes, and trustees are politically appointed by their respective tribal councils. At the time of this study, all eight trustees were tribal council members. Tribal council routinely granted re-appointments and, in one case, a trustee had served for 18 years. Trustees, as both tribal council members and influential community members, used their positions to maintain control. That is, it was their location within the college's social network structure that directed significant relational traffic through them. With trustees as tribal council office-holders, tribal government and college governance were intimately tied. Perhaps when two tribes share a single organization, control becomes the dominant leadership characteristic. As one community member explained, "[The other tribes] wanted, and still do, to control us."

Trustees at Buffalo College had longstanding links with their tribe, but were not tribal council members. A trustee said, "all [trustees] were previous council members, [I] probably voted for them, [my] family has always supported them." Trustees felt their strength was "their ability to keep a good positive relationship with the [tribal council]" (Buffalo College, 2003, p. 29). Less relational traffic

Figure 1. Trustee Network Exclusivity & Community Level of Satisfaction with Four Tribal Colleges



flowed through trustee positions, but it appeared that trustees carried strong informal political influence within their tribe. Because trustees were mostly women, it is interesting that power was derived more informally than from formal positions.

Political capital was especially low with trustees at Bear College. Perhaps trustees facilitated a bridging, rather than bonding role. Bridging social ties are especially useful for information diffusion, access to external resources, and macro-level social cohesion (Granovetter, 1973). A trustee explained, "I taught and worked at the college for years. I wanted to be a *bridge* between the tribal government and the college." Five of seven trustees worked in tribal departments yet none were political officials. Although tribally appointed, trustees did not wield the political clout of others in this study. In this sense, they were apolitical buffers between the college and the tribal politic. Another facet of trustees' bridging role may be related to the non-Indian community. Respondents noted a dual community on the reservation, "[we're] looking at two communities, tribal and non-tribal," and, "it's a close community, [tribal] members and non-members are working together well."

Eagle College trustees maintained a close working relationship with the college and spent time interacting with faculty and staff. Confirming this interactive approach, a college staff said, "[the board] is very responsive. What needs to be done, [we] can meet informally or formally relatively quickly," while another added, "[the board] might also meet informally as individual members with faculty/staff here and there. Just communicating things." Trustees appeared to support their college in a participatory and responsive manner.

But based on interviews, the community is politically charged. A respondent said that trust is "up among community members, but down in politics." A college staff warned, "whenever we have elections and dynamics change, sometimes [those elected are] not supportive of the college." Therefore a strategy of transparency keeps interactions between the college and tribe in the open and raises trust. The college president summed up his open-book policy as "keep community informed, hide nothing, financial budgets in the open, give reports whenever requested." This approach minimizes opportunities for free-riding behavior from within and outside the college. Trustees were links to the political system, not for purposes of control but rather as an open and supportive link to the tribe. The trustees were most inclusive, and thus the influential community was most satisfied.

Conclusion

This study has presented the finding that, if trustees represent the critical intersection of internal and external interests at TCUs, then trustees who are apolitical and have inclusive relationships within their communities will lead their colleges toward effective community engagement. Therefore, this study supports the calls upon trustees to act as a buffer between the TCU and the tribal politic.

The character of tribal leadership has changed dramatically since first contact with Europeans. Today's tribes operate primarily under European-styled political and organizational structures that emphasize hierarchical command and control authorities. Yet tribes must also acknowledge cultural traditions that emphasize group harmony and responsibility. To be effective, tribal organizations must strike a delicate balance between their cultural capital and the institutional framework of the non-Indian world. This study shows that political capital, as defined by European-styled concepts of power and authority, is an inadequate response.

Oftentimes, political capital is perceived as an unfortunate but necessary way to access resources. Yet, in this study the political capital of trustees did not correspond to an increased ability to access revenue. If political capital is assessed by the ability to garner and distribute resources, then trustees who exhibited greater political capital did not show a corresponding ability to access resources. Further research in this area could identify what trustee characteristics are associated with resources.

Research should also identify leadership models that draw upon traditional Indian notions of power that can be adapted to the contemporary organizational environment. Given that today's organizations operate within increasingly dynamic and challenging settings, how might an organization draw upon its tribal traditions? One can possibly think of no greater an organizational challenge than the "fog of war." Yet, how did the tribal "war party" operate effectively under these conditions? War parties were formed voluntarily around leaders who envisioned a plan and who offered an opportunity for followers to distinguish themselves. The power and authority to lead was drawn from spiritual values; it was temporary, contingent on the task at hand and the group's confidence (Deloria & Lytle, 1984; Miller, 1955). Could tribal organizations follow similar leadership patterns?

For instance, some emerging theories view organizations as self-organizing systems, with strong *self-reference*, a common identity that each individual knows and believes in, and *stability over time* through embracing change and fluctuation. Wheatley (1999) warns that when "leaders strive for equilibrium and stability by imposing control, constricting people's freedom and inhibiting local change, they only create the conditions that threaten the organization's survival" (p. 89). As the world becomes increasingly complex, research into organizational models that incorporate tribal traditions could be important for both tribal and non-tribal entities.

Research into new leadership models must also include an examination of gender. Why did predominately female trustees at one college use more informal rather than formal influence? Were there institutional barriers for women to exercise positional authority at this college? Do female leaders rely upon strategies that more closely resemble traditional models?

Future research should also explore whether a TCU's life stage is related to the political capital of trustees. One hypothesis might suggest that TCUs in

early stages of maturation have trustees with greater political capital, middle aged TCUs have trustees with less political capital, and fully matured TCUs have apolitical trustees. If true, board training would be insufficient for increased performance—reform of board selection criteria would be required.

The underlying issue here is what allows the TCU to evolve in an apolitical manner? One answer might be trust. When the tribal politic trusts the TCU enough to relinquish control and its politically-appointed trustees, it allows more autonomous TCU leadership. In the early days of the TCU movement, tribal governments represented by the National Congress of American Indians were concerned that TCUs might undermine tribal sovereignty, and so they lobbied for control mechanisms (e.g. politically appointed trustees, tribal charters) over the TCUs (Pease-Pretty On Top, 2003). As time passed, some tribal governments have given their TCUs a measure of political autonomy while others have not. In this study, we have seen some of the consequences of those political decisions.

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Endnotes

[1]P.L. 95-471, Tribally-Controlled College or University Assistance Act.

[2]For a detailed description of the selection methods used, see Phillips (2003).

[3]Pseudonyms are used for the TCUs in this study to protect the anonymity of respondents.

[4]Four colleges x (12 college interviews + 10 community interviews). At one site a respondent was identified as both an influential community member and college staff, resulting in one less interview than the target sample size of n=88.

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Appendix A

Survey Questionnaire

Questionnaire No. 4: Community Influentials **version 13, 3/18/02**

Who are the most influential persons in the Historically Black/Tribal college with whom you work on University/College related business? This includes people who help you get projects completed or people who you must deal with in order that projects are not blocked. Name as many people as you like. **(* Record names and titles/positions first. Then ask respondent to rank them from most to least influential. Proceed with top 5 influentials. *)**

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
		Person 1	Person 2	Person 3	Person 4	Person 5
Specifically, why are these people influential?						
Do they provide financial resources?		_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Do they provide non-financial material resources?		_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Do they provide needed information? **(*i.e. information on potential funders, community resources, key contacts, important facts, etc.)**		_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Do you need their support to get things done? **(*i.e. their consultation; support is important, helpful; although support is not necessary, project is more difficult without it)**		_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Can they stop things from getting done?		_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Do they represent a large constituency in the Indian/Black community?		_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Do they represent a bridge to the non-Indian/Black community?		_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
In College/University business, have you worked on a community project with these people?		_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
If yes, What type of funding did you receive?		_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Do you know this person outside of college/university related business?	Yes _____ No _____	Yes _____ No _____	Yes _____ No _____	Yes _____ No _____	Yes _____ No _____

If yes, continue to next question. If no, skip questions a-m for this person.

Other than in College/University business, how are you connected to these people?

a. Kin	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
b. Do business with them	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
c. Church	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
d. Sorority/Fraternity	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
e. Veterans	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
f. Service organizations or clubs	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
g. Business/professional associations	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
h. Community development boards	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
i. Issue-based community coalitions	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
j. Alumni	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
k. Community events (softball leagues, fairs, parades, pow wows.)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
l. Cultural committees (Pow wow, Black History month, rodeo, etc.)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
m. Other (describe:)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

On a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being not very close and 7 being very close, how close a friend are you to this person:

_____ _____ _____ _____ _____

(*for each influential, continue to next page*)

On average, how frequently do you interact with this person?

[ ] Daily	[ ] Daily	[ ] Daily	[ ] Daily	[ ] Daily
[ ] Weekly	[ ] Weekly	[ ] Weekly	[ ] Weekly	[ ] Weekly
[ ] Monthly	[ ] Monthly	[ ] Monthly	[ ] Monthly	[ ] Monthly
[ ] < Monthly	[ ] < Monthly	[ ] < Monthly	[ ] < Monthly	[ ] < Monthly

********** **(*end of influential questions, repeat for 5 top influentials *)** **********

I am going to read several statements about the historically black college/tribal college. Please indicate your degree of disagreement or agreement with each of these statements by giving a number from 1 to 7, with 1 meaning "complete disagreement," with 7 being "complete agreement," and numbers between 1 and 7 indicating varying degrees of disagreement or agreement.

1. The college works to strengthen our culture.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. The college prepares our students for career opportunities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. The college provides resources that allow us to serve our community.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. The college provides needed services to our community.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. The college does a good job listening to us.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. The college knows what's going on in our community.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. The college does a good job educating our people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. The college does a good job representing the interests of our African American/Native American community.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. The college is an important member of our community.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Vertical Linkages to State and National Organizations of Person being interviewed

What Organizations do you participate in (current membership only)?
(*Prompts: Include organizations in college related business and outside of college business. Includes youth groups, sports, churches, veteran groups, chambers of commerce, fraternal orders, sororities, business and professional associations, etc. *)

Local	M/O/B*	State	M/O/B*	National	M/O/B*

* M = member, O = Officer, B = Board member

I am going to read several statements about ways that the historically black college/tribal college might be more effective.

Please indicate your degree of disagreement or agreement with each of these statements by giving a number from 1 to 7, with 1 meaning "complete disagreement," with 7 being "complete agreement," and numbers between 1 and 7 indicating varying degrees of disagreement or agreement.

The college/university needs more contacts with the *local* Native American/African American business community.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The college/university needs more contacts with the *national* Native American/African American business community.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The college/university needs more contacts in the Native American/African American community who are under-represented in the college/university.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The college/university needs more contacts with national private foundations.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The college/university needs more contacts with USDA.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

The college/university needs more contacts with other historically black college/tribal college. **(refer to the group that this school is NOT in).**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The college/university needs more contacts with the mainstream land-grant school in our state.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The college/university needs more contacts with national Native American/African American educational groups.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
In general, people in the college can be trusted	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
In general, people in the African American/Indian community can be trusted	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
In general, people in the non-African American/ Indian community can be trusted	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
In general, people in this world can be trusted	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Now I am going to ask you some questions about how you feel about the community you live in.

People here look out mainly for the welfare of their own families and they are not much concerned with community welfare. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

[ ] Strongly Agree
[ ] Agree
[ ] Disagree
[ ] Strongly disagree
[ ] Don't know / not sure
[ ] No answer

If a community project does not directly benefit your neighbor but has benefits for others in the community, then do you think your neighbor would contribute *time* for this project?

[ ] Will not contribute time
[ ] Will contribute time
[ ] Don't know / not sure
[ ] No answer

If a community project does not directly benefit your neighbor but has benefits for others in the community, then do you think your neighbor would contribute *money* for this project?

[ ] Will not contribute money
[ ] Will contribute money
[ ] Don't know / not sure
[ ] No answer

Do you think that in this community people generally trust one another in matters of lending and borrowing?

[ ] Do trust
[ ] Don't trust
[ ] Don't know / not sure
[ ] No answer

Do you think over the last few years this level of trust in this community has gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same?

[ ] Better
[ ] The same
[ ] Worse
[ ] Don't know / not sure
[ ] No answer

If there were a problem that affected the entire community, for instance youth problems, who do you think would work together to deal with the situation? **(Code all that apply)**

[ ] Each person/household would deal with the problem individually
[ ] Neighbors among themselves
[ ] Local government/municipal political leaders
[ ] All community leaders acting together
[ ] The entire community
[ ] Other (describe):
[ ] Don't know / not sure
[ ] No answer

Demographic characteristics of influentials

Gender:

Age

Education (highest degree obtained): Where from?

Ethnicity/National Origin: **(*for Native Americans, first ask if tribal member, then if Native American, then non-Native ethnicity*)**

Horizontal Linkages of Influentials to local Native American/African American Community

Number of Years lived in this community?

Born in this Community?

Are you a student or former student of the tribal college/historically black college?

Are you a employee or former employee of the tribal college/historically black college?

On a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being "not at all" to 7 being "very much a part of," I feel like I am part of the Native American/African American community in _____ **(place where school is located).**