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## HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN THE GREAT PLAINS WITH A MICROPOLITAN TWIST: TEN RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS

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*This paper explores the possible uses that the recent creation of Micropolitan Statistical Areas by the U.S. Census Bureau could have for advancing research in the area of Human Resource Management. An example is provided using a sample of five Great Plains states (i.e., North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma). Additionally, ten human resource management research propositions are suggested illustrating possible applications of the micropolitan concept.*

### Introduction

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the vast majority of Americans lives and works in metropolitan areas (Economic Research Service, 2003). As noted in table 1, there are 1,089 counties designated as metropolitan, which account for 82.6% of the total U.S.

population. The remaining 2,052 counties are designated as non-metropolitan and while representing three quarters of the area of the country (74.6%) only account for 17.4% of the total population.

**Table 1: 2000 U.S. Population: Metropolitan and Non-Metropolitan**

	Number of Counties	2000 Population	Percent of Total	Square Miles	Percent of Total
Metropolitan	1,089	232,579,940	82.6	879,094	25.4
Non-metropolitan	2,052	48,881,966	17.4	2,640,344	74.6
Total	3,141	281,421,906		3,537,438	

Source: Derived from Economic Research Service, 2003.

Management theories, including human resource management (HRM) theories, typically do not make a distinction between metropolitan and non-metropolitan contexts. This distinction is simply overlooked or ignored. This paper begins to explore whether or not that making that distinction and others (e.g., micropolitan) is relevant. Given the overwhelming size of the metropolitan population it can be argued that HRM is, by default, metropolitan, in the sense of what is studied, researched, and taught. Are the theories and practices of HRM developed in and for a metropolitan context applicable to the demands and circumstances faced by HR managers in non-metropolitan America – an America much smaller relative to metropolitan America, but certainly not insignificant (i.e., almost 49 million people). Additionally, recent work by the U.S. Census Bureau and other agencies make a finer-grained investigation of the non-metropolitan population possible. This paper explores the extent to which these efforts provide opportunities for the disentanglement and clarification of phenomena potentially confounded through the use of a “one-size fits all” perspective which obscures possible meaningful differentiation.

### Micropolitan Statistical Areas

For many years and census cycles the U. S. Census Bureau has designated some areas of the country as

*metropolitan* – Metropolitan Statistical Areas, and, as noted above, today the vast majority of Americans live in these metropolitan areas. By extension then the rest of the population lives in non-metropolitan areas which, to some extent, have been traditionally assumed to be “rural.” In other areas of research the distinction between urban and rural is seen as potentially crucial, although this author is not aware of any published research that investigates this distinction within the context of HRM. Recently, the Office of Management and Budget (2004) addressed this metropolitan (urban)/non-metropolitan (rural) dichotomy by announcing new definitions (June 6, 2003, reissued February 18, 2004). The Federal government has introduced the notion of a Micropolitan Statistical Area. Essentially, these are urban clusters (“small cities”) in parts of the country previously assumed to be rural and non-metropolitan. Within the broader non-metropolitan designation the micropolitan classification allows for a finer-grained distinction between micropolitan (urban clusters) and non-core areas, where non-core is more likely to correspond to more traditional definitions of rurality. A more detailed explanation of “micropolitan” is supplied below where counties are the unit of analysis and the basis for classification.

The Office of Management and Budget in Bulletin No. 04-03 issued February 18, 2004 explained the new

classification of micropolitan as follows: "Micropolitan Statistical Areas – a new set of statistical areas – have at least one urban cluster of at least 10,000 but less than 50,000 population plus adjacent territory that has a high degree of social and economic integration with the core as measured by commuting ties" (2004: 2 [Appendix]). Thus, the adoption of a finer-grained classification scheme moves beyond the simplistic notion of a metro (urban)/non-metro (rural) dichotomy.

Table 2 below details the 2000 U.S. population as

classified according to these new definitions. The former "non-metropolitan" category is subdivided into non-metropolitan/micropolitan and non-metropolitan/non-core. Micropolitan areas represent 59.2% of the previously undifferentiated non-metropolitan population. Additionally, table 2 provides a finer-grained look at 1990-2000 growth rates. All three classifications experienced growth but growth within non-core was the slowest while growth within metropolitan was the fastest.

Table 2: 2000 U.S. Population: Metropolitan, Micropolitan, and Non-Core

	2000 Population	Percent of Total	1990-2000 Growth Rate
Metropolitan	232,579,940	82.6	14.0
Non-metropolitan – micropolitan	28,955,051	10.3	9.9
Non-metropolitan – non-core	19,886,915	7.1	7.9
United States	281,421,906		13.2

Source: Derived from Economic Research Service, 2003.

The addition of the micropolitan designation recognizes the reality that a stark demarcation does not necessarily exist between metropolitan and non-metropolitan, between urban and rural. A finer-grained gradient is required. Gross absolute population totals may obscure meaningful differences and similarities. Essentially, the micropolitan classification recognizes the existence of "small" cities or small "urban clusters." As noted in table 3 many of these areas are adjacent to metropolitan areas (393 counties, 68.5% of total micropolitan population); however, a still substantial

number are not (282 counties, 31.6% of the total micropolitan population). This second type can be considered to be "stand alone" urbanized clusters which border and transition into "rural" areas/counties and/or other micropolitan areas/counties where the influence of a larger metropolitan area is attenuated. These areas are too small to be truly metropolitan in the traditional sense, but they are also too urban to be considered rural or non-core (leaving aside for the moment the potential importance of economic ties to the agricultural sector).

Table 3: 2000 U.S. Micropolitan Population

	Number of Counties	2000 Population	Percent of total Micropolitan
Micropolitan adjacent to large metro (1+million)	92	5,147,233	17.8
Micropolitan adjacent to small metro (less than 1 million)	301	14,668,144	50.7
Micropolitan not adjacent to large metro area	282	9,139,821	31.6
Total Micropolitan	675	28,955,198	

Source: Derived from Economic Research Service, 2003. Percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding error.

Table 4 offers an illustration of how this new distinction might inform research by considering the state of Nebraska. Charitably, most Americans, if they even consider Nebraska at all, would think of it as an agricultural and rural state in the hinterlands. Nebraska's 2000 population of 1,711,263 represents 0.6% of the nation's population of 281,421,906. However, Nebraska

represents a number of contrasts and extremes relative to population. It consists of 93 counties (the unit of analysis used by the Census Bureau), where the smallest is Arthur County with a population of 444 and the largest is Douglas County (i.e., Omaha) with a population over one thousand times larger (463,585).

Table 4: Example Using the Micropolitan/Non-Core Classifications

	2000 Population	1990 Population	1990-2000 Growth Rate
Nebraska	1,711,263	1,578,417	8.4
Old System			
Metropolitan	942,503	827,213	13.9
Non-Metropolitan	768,760	751,204	2.3
New System			
Metropolitan	942,503	827,213	13.9
Non-Metropolitan			
Micropolitan	596,206	570,372	7.0
Non-Core	572,554	580,832	-2.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2003.

Nine Nebraska counties fall within Metropolitan Statistical Areas, which can also include counties in multiple states (i.e., Omaha NE-Council Bluffs IA, Lincoln, NE, and Sioux City IA-NE-SD). The rest of the state would presumably be non-metropolitan and, hence, "rural." With the new designation ten micropolitan areas are recognized (i.e., Beatrice, Columbus, Fremont, Grand Island, Hastings, Kearney, Lexington, Norfolk, North Platte, and Scottsbluff), which encompass twenty counties. Generally, these communities radiate out from the eastern metropolitan areas of Omaha and Lincoln, with many of them forming an east to west string across the state along the Platte River and Interstate 80. This is a route that parallels the old pioneer trails (e.g., Mormon Trail) and railroads to the West.

An examination of the data in finer detail reveals a number of different situations, each with important implications as to the effect of exogenous forces upon human resource management. The growth rate for the United States from 1990-2000 was 13.2%. Nebraska as a whole grew at a slower rate (8.4%) than did the nation; however, metropolitan Nebraska grew at a faster rate (13.9%), which implies a much slower rate for non-metropolitan Nebraska (2.3%). Upon closer examination this 2.3% rate does not tell the full story. Micropolitan Nebraska representing 51.5% of non-metropolitan Nebraska grew at a 7.0% rate while rural Nebraska representing 48.5% of non-metropolitan Nebraska actually shrunk with a growth rate of -2.2%. At a minimum three very different scenarios and external market environments emerge that human resource managers must consider. By disaggregating them it may be possible to build a truer picture of human resource management practices, and to inform research and policy (e.g., rural development). A major problem facing rural Nebraska is depopulation; confounding micropolitan and rural areas obscures this issue.

Additionally, only two of the micropolitan areas are adjacent to metropolitan areas (i.e., Beatrice [Gage County], and Fremont [Dodge County]) representing only 14.9% of the total micropolitan population. The nonadjacent micropolitan areas represent a substantially higher percentage (85.1%) of the state micropolitan population than the national average (31.6%). Each of these "stand-alone" urban clusters is potentially a self-contained "laboratory" for exploring HRM issues within a micropolitan context where each is generally "free" of metropolitan influence.

**"Great Plains"** Recently, the Economic Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture estimated county-level population change for the period (2000-2004) since the last decennial census (Economic Research Service, 2005). Reporting at the state level of aggregation three broad and identifiable areas of the country experienced low growth (0.4 to 2.1) while the national average was 4.3%. This author has labeled these three low-growth regions as: "Rustbelt" (New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Vermont, Massachusetts, West Virginia, Michigan), "Dixie" (Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama), and "Great Plains" (North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Iowa). Actually, only two "states" experienced an estimated decline in population (i.e., North Dakota at -1.2% and the District of Columbia at -3.2%) for the reporting period. The highest growth rate was estimated for Nevada at 16.8%. The estimated growth rates for the three areas are as follows: Rustbelt: 1.21%, Dixie: 1.60% and the Great Plains: 1.58%, and if Iowa is excluded: 1.77%.

For the sake of illustrating the potential of the micropolitan concept this paper will use a five state sample drawn from the Great Plains (i.e., North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma). This sample straddles the 100<sup>th</sup> meridian, and, as noted above, shares the characteristic of slow growth. Additionally, these states share some other similar population characteristics as discussed below.

### The "Great Plains" From a Micropolitan Perspective

Tables 5 and 6 highlight some general population information for the contiguous five-state "Great Plains" sample. Within this region the percentage of the population that is micropolitan is below the national average while both the micropolitan and non-core are above average. The five-state "Great Plains" area represents 3.3% of the total U.S. population; however, it contains 7.3% of the total U.S. micropolitan population and 9.1% of the non-core population. Also interesting is that while "stand alone" micropolitan areas represent only 31.6% of the total micropolitan population nationwide (see table 2) fully 66.1% of the micropolitan population within the Great Plains resides within a stand-alone micropolitan area. With only 3.3% of the total U.S. population and 9.1% of the total micropolitan population, the region accounts for 15.2% of the total micropolitan "stand-alone" population. Again, this may represent a unique opportunity to test hypotheses related to a micropolitan context.

**Table 5: 2000 Population within a Five-State “Great Plains” Sample**

	2000 Population	Percent of Total
Metropolitan	5,340,286	57.8%
Micropolitan	2,099,041	22.7%
Non-Core	1,808,052	19.5%
Total 5-state area	9,247,379	

Source: Derived from U.S. Census Bureau, 2003.

**Table 6: 2000 Population within a Five-State “Great Plains” Sample Broken Down by County**

	Metropolitan		Micropolitan		Non-Core
	Number of areas	Counties	Number of areas	Counties	Counties
North Dakota	3	4	5	8	41
South Dakota	3	7	9	13	46
Nebraska	3	9	10	20	64
Kansas	5	17	15	19	69
Oklahoma	4	16	17	18	43
Total 5-state area	18	53	46	78	263

Source: Derived from U.S. Census Bureau, 2003.

Note: Seven metropolitan areas extend into states outside of the 5-state area [i.e., Fargo-ND-MN; Fort Smith, AR-OK; Grand Forks, ND-MN; Kansas City, MO-KS; Omaha-Council Bluffs, NE-IA; St. Joseph, MO-KS; Sioux City, IA-NE-SD]. Only those counties within the 5-state area are counted. One micropolitan area extends outside of the five state area [i.e., Wahpeton, ND-MN]. Only the county within the 5-state area is counted.)

Analyzing the growth rates presented in table 7, as with the illustration above using Nebraska, illustrates how the consideration of this new system highlights important differences that would have otherwise been lost. Although there is variation from state to state with North Dakota representing the most deviation, a generally consistent pattern emerges within the Great Plains. The metropolitan areas are growing at near the national average (13.2% vs. 14.0%). Micropolitan areas

are also experiencing growth, however, at a slower rate than the national average (5.1% vs. 9.9%). On the other hand, non-core areas are experiencing an absolute decline (-0.7%), which is in sharp contrast to the national average of 7.9% growth.

Certainly, as with the Nebraska example, making the distinction between micropolitan and non-core within the broader non-metropolitan classification has illuminated a potential confound. From 1990-2000 the aggregate non-metropolitan population grew at a 2.3% rate. Disaggregating the two reveals micropolitan growth at a 5.1% rate, slower growth than the national average, but growth nonetheless, while non-core areas shrunk at a -0.7% growth rate, which is substantially below the national average of 7.9%. As with Nebraska, a major problem facing the five-state sample is rural (non-core) depopulation; a situation which is obscured when micropolitan and non-core populations are confounded.

**Table 7: Population Growth Rates (1990-2000) Within a Five-State “Great Plains” Sample**

	State Growth Rate (1990-2000)	Metropolitan Growth Rate (1990-2000)	Micropolitan Growth Rate (1990-2000)	Non-Core Growth Rate (1990-2000)
North Dakota	0.5	10.3	-1.6	-9.1
South Dakota	8.5	17.1	6.3	0.0
Nebraska	8.4	13.9	7.0	-2.2
Kansas	8.5	13.7	3.6	-1.8
Oklahoma	9.7	12.3	6.5	4.4
5 State area	8.3	13.2	5.1	-0.7
United States	13.2	14.0	9.9	7.9

Source: Derived from U.S. Census Bureau, 2003.

### General HRM Implication of a Micropolitan Perspective

From the five-state Great Plains sample it is obvious that there are some interesting differences and dynamics amongst the three types of areas. Would our

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understanding of HRM improve if we explicitly addressed any confounds that may result from differences between metropolitan and non-metropolitan populations, workforces, and economic and social circumstances? Additionally, would further insight and

clarification be provided by carrying that process further and investigating the distinction within non-metropolitan areas of micropolitan and non-core? At the very least this last suggestion may give a truer picture of HRM within a traditional rural setting.

At a minimum the use of the new census designations causes three very different scenarios and external market environments to emerge, which may be crucial for human resource managers to consider. By disaggregating them it may be possible to build a truer picture of human resource management practices, and to inform other research and policy areas (e.g., education, law enforcement, rural development, rural health).

As Palmer (2004) noted: making [the metropolitan/micropolitan/rural] distinction presupposes that differences in the socioeconomic environment exist, and that these differences would have meaningful human resource management implications. Over the past ten or more years the field of human resource management has evolved a more strategic orientation and focus (e.g., Ulrich, 1997; Walker 1992). This assumes that organizations and their human resource management concerns are embedded within a larger environment, a world external to the organization. Essentially, the management of organizations, within which human resource management is nested, does not take place in a vacuum, isolated from the external world. Thus, it seems prudent to consider the external realities that may surface from a consideration of a micropolitan milieu.

As an illustration consider the example of a 200-person organization. An organization with 200 employees is typically large enough to justify a dedicated human resources department staffed by one or two individuals (assuming the 100 : 1 rule of thumb regarding human resource department staffing) (Mathis & Jackson, 1997). How are human resource issues and practices influenced by the setting? Does this organization face the same issues and use the same practices and strategies in a metropolitan area of 1.5 million people as it would in a micropolitan area of 43,000, or as it would in a non-core/rural area of 2,500? The study of human resource management practices may be greatly informed by disentangling these organizations and by removing macro market confounds.

Considering the distinction between metropolitan, micropolitan, and non-core may offer insights into human resource management theory and practice. At the very least it may provide useful boundary conditions for applying various theories and practices. For example, what works in a rural situation may not be as applicable to a metropolitan situation. Below, ten research propositions are suggested, which illustrate how the use

of a micropolitan perspective might further research and practice in HRM

### Ten Research Propositions

Clearly any research must start with the following caveat that just as there may be important differences among metropolitan, micropolitan, and non-core areas, there may also be important differences within these classes as well. A crucial first step is to work with archival data (e.g., U.S. Census data) to clearly differentiate metropolitan, micropolitan, and non-core areas from each other with respect to a number of potentially relevant variables. These variables could include population, growth rates, economic activity (e.g., mix of sectors—service, manufacturing, agriculture, government), and commuting patterns. Information could also be gathered about relevant employers, such as number of employees. Additionally, information could be gathered reflecting the composition of the (potential) workforce: unemployment rates, educational attainment, and income.

These same analyses could be made within the three types; although areas within a type may share some characteristics they should not be assumed to be homogeneous (e.g., New York City is different from Los Angeles; Kearney, NE is different from Hays, KS). For example, what impact does the existence of a college or university have on an area's economy, human resources, and human resource management practices? Metropolitan areas are assumed to have multiple colleges and universities, while the existence of even one is not necessarily a certainty in micropolitan and, especially, rural communities. An organization's efforts to improve the skills and human capital of its workforce through higher education may depend on access to local educational resources. The success of such HRM initiatives, obviously owe a great deal to the availability of higher education, although the use of distance education technology becomes a potential confounding variable to consider in this instance.

#### Proposition #1

The consideration of a metropolitan/ micropolitan/ non-core variable presents some potentially interesting possibilities especially when also considering organizational size. Arguably, small organizations face market forces that differ from those faced by large organizations. For example, size itself may confer advantages (e.g., market power in both labor and product markets) and disadvantages (e.g., coordination and control problems), which influence human resource management approaches and possibilities. Therefore, it



may be reasonable to also consider the impact that operating in different size markets may have on human resource management. The impact of a given organizational size may depend to a certain extent on the size of the community in which the organization is located. Size may not be an absolute variable but a relative one. The market conditions that similar sized organizations face may differ from metropolitan areas to micropolitan areas to non-core/rural areas. Size may confer market power but a 200-person organization in a small non-metropolitan market may have much greater power due to its size than a like-sized organization would in a major metropolitan area. Does research miss something potentially important by confounding these seemingly similar organizations?

Table 8 helps to illustrate this point. By definition non-metropolitan areas are limited as to how many large and mid-sized employers that a given area can support. Defining small, mid-sized, and large organizations would be an important first step, however; for the purpose of illustration an arbitrary definition of a large employer should suffice. Defining such an organization as one with 10,000 or more employees, and given the population limitations of non-core areas, it becomes

obvious that it is impossible for one to be located in a non-core area, and highly unlikely in a micropolitan area. By definition any study involving a non-core or micropolitan area will be dealing with small or mid-sized organizations exclusively.

Size, however, is relative. An 800-person organization in a micropolitan community may face conditions (e.g., labor markets) vastly different than what that same organization would face in a metropolitan area. Consideration of the micropolitan and non-core/rural distinctions allows for the emergence of scenarios where a market may be dominated by one or a few large employers. This is not really possible in metropolitan areas, although the largest employers may be substantially larger than the largest employers in micropolitan and non-core areas. Researchers may have an opportunity to test hypotheses within a "company town" context. What are the implications for human resource management of an organization that dominates its labor market, or is in a community dominated by another organization? Does being a "big fish in a little pond" lead to meaningful differences when compared to being a similar sized fish (or even a relatively "big fish") in a "bigger pond?"

**Table 8: Likelihood of Occurrence of Various Size Organizations within an Area**

	Small	Mid-sized	Large
Non-Core	√	very few	N/A
Micropolitan	√	few	rare
Metropolitan	√	√	√

An interesting refinement may be to also consider whether the focal organization is part of a multi-unit operation or is an independent, stand alone, self-contained operation. A 200-person organization in a micropolitan setting that is part of a large multinational may have access to plentiful HRM resources, and behave very differently from and use different human resource management philosophies and practices than a similar-sized organization in the same setting that is not part of a larger entity. Are human resource management practices driven by a central office or by the demands of the setting? To what extent does the setting lead to the tailoring of human resource management practices specific to that setting?

**Proposition #2**

Examining HRM within a micropolitan context may afford an opportunity to explore HRM from the perspective of small businesses. Table 8 and Proposition #1 alert us to the need to consider relative size as an important variable; however, investigations of HRM focusing on small businesses may also be advanced by

considering the metropolitan/micropolitan/non-core distinction. Recently, the differences between the human resource management practices in large firms (organizations) and those in small firms (organizations) were investigated (Heneman & Tansky, 2003, Tansky, Heneman, & Cohen, 2002). As Heneman and Tansky noted, "small business leaders seem more interested in ["visionary HR management"] than do the managers in large organizations" (11) where "visionary human resource management" refers to taking a more strategic approach as opposed to "maintenance human resource management" which is concerned with day-to-day operational details. When researchers do not make clear the distinction between small and large organizations in their studies they may confound two fundamentally different human resource management approaches and philosophies. The differences between small and large organizations may potentially be meaningful, and have important practical applications. Lewin (2003) cautioned that the relationship between high-involvement and low-involvement work practices may be more complex than initially thought, and studying this issue while explicitly

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manipulating the metropolitan/micropolitan/non-core variable may yield interesting and theretofore confounded results.

Heneman and Tansky (2003) discussed the possibility of the existence of relevant differences in human resource management practices due to the size of organizations. As noted above it may be possible to consider size as a relative factor. What is small in one situation may be large in another. An investigation into the actual human resource management practices of organizations while simultaneously controlling for organization size and metropolitan/micropolitan/rural setting may be revealing. Another possible way to differentiate organizations may be to consider the various HR Roles discussed by Ulrich (1997): Strategic Partner, Administrative Expert, Employee Champion, and Change Agent.

### Proposition #3

Richard Florida (2002) suggested that economic vitality and innovation may be driven by a "creative class" that essentially is hip, young, well-educated, and urban. This class includes "people in science and engineering, architecture and design, education, arts, music and entertainment, whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or new creative content" (2002: 8). These are the "knowledge workers" that are key to a post-industrial, knowledge based society/economy (Drucker, 1993). Testing a micropolitan perspective may also afford an opportunity to extend and test elements of Florida's hypothesis, which is not without its critics (Malanga, 2004). Following Florida's logic creative communities are subsets of urban communities, which by definition may preclude non-metropolitan communities despite the potential "urban" quality that some micropolitan areas may possess. Florida's analysis did not include any micropolitan areas from the "Great Plains" (with the exception of Enid, OK which was ranked dead last [#268] on his "creativity index" [appendix, table 5: 352]). There would seem to be many opportunities to test aspects of Florida's provocative thesis within a micropolitan context.

### Proposition #4

In a study investigating the concerns of human resource managers in Central Nebraska Auxier (2003) found a "brain drain" of younger, college educated workers that were exacerbated by intrastate competition with metropolitan areas. Do these findings replicate to other non-metropolitan areas? Is making a micropolitan/non-core distinction meaningful? From the

perspective of non-core/rural areas, however, micropolitan areas may represent as big or bigger threats than do metropolitan areas. What are the implications? What can rural development research tell us? Can rural development research and efforts be fine tuned? Additionally, what are the perceptions of young people? Do they perceive a lack of opportunity in non-metropolitan areas? Are their perceptions necessarily valid reflections of the economic realities?

### Proposition #5

Would a consideration of the metropolitan/micropolitan/non-core variable shed any light on the issue of work/family tradeoffs? What are the perceived quality of life issues? Are they influenced by stage of life variables (e.g., single, married, married with children). If there is a "brain drain" from non-metropolitan areas, do those same workers tend to return later in life? The answer to this question would have recruitment implications, certainly as non-metropolitan areas confront slow growth and even depopulation.

### Proposition #6

Is there a "Goldilocks Effect" in that given the greater number of potential employees and potential jobs in metropolitan areas it may be possible to achieve a better match or fit between employee and organization? Simple logic dictates that there are more employment options and opportunities (and one could conceivably argue more entrepreneurial opportunities as well) in large metropolitan areas simply by virtue of their size alone. Conceivably there could be a gradient on this dimension from metropolitan to micropolitan to non-core, where the most leeway, the widest band (i.e., least fit), would be found in non-core areas. Do metropolitan human resource departments strive to maximize fit, because it may be possible, while HR managers in micropolitan and non-core areas sub-optimize simply because the probability of an exact fit is lower? Are staffing and job design in micropolitan and rural organizations more adaptive and flexible, since, by necessity, finding an exact fit is less likely?

As a related question would we find that the forces driving organizational culture convergence as suggested by ASA (Attraction-Selection-Attrition) (Schneider, 1987; Schneider, Goldstein, Smith, 1995) theory is moderated by the metropolitan/micropolitan/non-core variable? If fewer employment options limits the degree of person-organization fit that is possible, then the ASA process may be less powerful in micropolitan, and especially, in non-core situations.



### Proposition #7

Another area where relatively fewer employment opportunities in non-metropolitan areas may have an effect is research that examines dual income/dual career issues. Obviously with fewer employment/career opportunities it becomes more difficult to satisfy the needs of both partners. This may have a deleterious impact on recruitment in that "employers [may experience] some difficulty recruiting highly skilled occupations and technical skills, particularly from outside the area. This is compounded by the limited opportunities available for "trailing spouses"" (accompanying partners) (Wadley-Donovan Group, 2004, p. 4). For dual-income/dual career families this could be a critical issue and would influence the ability of organizations to attract and retain a quality workforce (e.g., Fleig-Palmer, Murrin, Palmer, & Rathert, 2003). As opposed to their metropolitan counterparts do micropolitan (and non-core) human resource managers face increased difficulties in this regard due to dual career concerns?

### Proposition #8

Investigations of underemployment may be another area that would benefit from consideration of the metropolitan/micropolitan/non-core variable. Underemployment can have serious social and economic consequences (Dooley and Prause, 2004). A report prepared for the Central Nebraska I-80 Coalition by The Wadley-Donovan Group (2004), while noting the low unemployment rate in a nine county corridor around Interstate 80, also found a high level of perceived underemployment among the workforce. On the other hand, there is some evidence of a perception among rural (manufacturing) employers that "the quality of local labor hindered their competitiveness" (McGranahan, 1998: 1), although this may not necessarily be the reality (Teixeria, 1998).

Given the conflicting perceptions of employers and workers this appears to be an area where meaningful research could be conducted. It is possible that despite the seeming contradiction both perceptions may be (partially) valid. If a lack of person-job/person-organization fit is more prevalent in non-metropolitan areas, then it may be the case that workers are indeed underemployed/overqualified and under-qualified simultaneously given the narrower range of available jobs.

### Proposition #9

A number of relevant demographic diversity issues may be meaningfully differentiated by including the

metropolitan/micropolitan/noncore variable. The growth of the Hispanic population in rural areas was the focus of a recent Economic Research Service/United States Department of Agriculture report, "New Patterns of Hispanic Settlement in Rural America" (Kandel & Cromartie, 2004). In his study investigating HRM issues in Central Nebraska Auxier (2003) found that HR managers were particularly concerned with how to appropriately deal with issues raised by the growth of the Hispanic population.

### Proposition #10

An important issue in human resource management is the outsourcing of HR activities to outside vendors (Berkshire, 2004). What patterns of outsourcing emerge from a consideration of the metropolitan/micropolitan/non-core variable? Do the suppliers of human resource management expertise tend to be located in metropolitan areas? Is it mostly a metropolitan phenomenon? (With advances in telecommunication technology there is no reason why this should necessarily be the case.) Additionally, broader issues of outsourcing beyond HR tasks (e.g., manufacturing) and their impact on HRM would be legitimate research topics. Would the consideration of the metropolitan/micropolitan/non-core variable inform research in this area as well?

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