

LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES IN HIGH PERFORMING COMMUNITY

COLLEGES: A QUALITATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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Abstract

Effective community college leaders make a difference in the culture and performance of the institution. The research study sought to discover leadership strategies that lead to the achievement of high performance outcomes in community colleges. In 2013, the American Association of Community Colleges *Competencies for effective leadership criteria* defined the constructs of effective leadership in community colleges. The criteria and study defined effective leadership strategies as the organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013) present in the lived experiences of leaders in high performing community colleges. The study explored how leader strategies impact high performance in community college outcomes. The exploratory phenomenological study involved interviewing 17 community college presidents who led the highest performing community colleges in the nation (as identified by the Aspen Institute in 2013). The 27 thematic findings align, to greater or lesser degree, with the American Association of Community College-defined and literature-defined leadership strategies. The results reinforce the impact of leadership strategies on community college performance, standards, reputation, purpose, strategic direction, and focus and emphasize the need for community college presidents seeking to increase performance to employ the strategies discussed in the study findings. High performing leaders focus on people, identify a few major initiatives each year, find the right fit, harness the energy of the people who are ready to achieve greatness, remain focused on the success of students, focus on issues rather than people or organizational status, take

time to develop thoughtful communications, maintain an unwavering focus on the community college, and remain humbly aware of their impact.

Dedication

First and foremost, this dissertation is dedicated to my husband. Without your support and encouragement, completing my PhD would have been impossible. Your constant love, support, and encouragement carried me through the ups and downs of this journey. I am so grateful for the commitment you have made to our children, our marriage, and our dreams.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my children. You have been patient and understanding throughout this entire process. Your unconditional love and support helped me in so many ways. I hope this dissertation is an inspiration for your life. I want you to live with passion and sparkle – always being fun, kind, compassionate, and purposeful. You can do anything you set your mind to – and when you do, I hope to be right there with you, encouraging you through all of your ups and downs.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents. Your commitment to making me pave my own way, seek my own dreams, carve my own path, and work for what I believe in helped guide me through this process. You have always made me believe in the value of hard work. Your support of this dissertation, and all aspects of my life, mean more than you will ever know.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

College leaders are scheduled to retire at an astonishing rate over the next 10 years. How to address the impending gap poses a significant problem as the need grows for leaders who can navigate a myriad of challenges: the influx of non-traditional students, mounting accountability measures, scarce resources, and ever-changing workforce needs. Such demands are not for the fainthearted or ill-prepared. (Mathis, 2013, para. 2)

Community colleges are in a unique position to educate and train the people who will fill workforce demands in the next decade. With their policies of open enrollment, many students who enter community colleges are academically underprepared and economically disadvantaged, yet society demands community colleges train workers to be productive immediately. For many years, community colleges have been under pressure to increase enrollment. More recently, the pressure has been expanded to increases in performance measures such as graduation and completion. At the same time, community colleges need to be flexible enough to meet the needs of regional industries (ACT, 2013). As demands for performance are increasing, there is a shortage of leaders who have the necessary leadership skills to navigate the challenges of the future.

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, 2013) Competencies

for Effective Leadership criteria define the constructs of strategic leadership within high performing community colleges. The focus on leadership development is central to the AACC mission and has greater urgency as the level of turnover in senior leadership positions drastically elevates. In a meeting of leading community college organizations and associations sponsored by the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT), Josh Wyner, executive director of the College Excellence Program, recently said:

The stakes are enormous. Community colleges can and must achieve much higher levels of student success in learning, completion, and in the labor market if our nation is to achieve the twin goals of economic growth and social mobility.

Deeply committed and capable executive leaders at community colleges are critically important in meeting those goals. For these reasons, it is important that everyone who cares about these issues join us in identifying new strategies to recruit, hire, and develop the next generation of exceptional presidents who can deliver the leadership community colleges — and their students — deserve and need. (Wyner, 2013 as cited by Lewis, 2013, para. 7)

The performance of community colleges throughout the nation depends on the strategies of the institutions' leaders (Murray & Hammons, 1995). The current study seeks to discover leadership strategies that lead to the achievement of high performance outcomes in community colleges.

Background of the Study

Effective community college leaders make a difference in the culture and performance of their institutions. The AACC leadership competencies are indicators of effective leadership in community colleges. The current study is guided by strategic

leadership theory because of the impact of the institutions' leaders on the achievement of community college outcomes (Sosik, Jung, Berson, Dionne, & Jaussi, 2005). Strategic leadership theory is predicated on the premise that the characteristics, backgrounds, and experiences of leaders within an organization impact how they view organizational opportunities and make decisions; consequently, these individual characteristics and elements, in turn, impact organizational performance.

Successful strategic leaders navigate the organization to survive and thrive. Leaders create and sustain a vision, make decisions, build organizational capacity, and create meaning and purpose throughout the organization. The leader's ability to build and maintain those elements may impact organizational performance. The rate of change, globalization, and collaboration occurring throughout the organizational world will continue to require enhanced skills of strategic leaders. Molinsky, Davenport, Iyer, and Davidson (2012) suggested those enhanced skills will include the ability to value and engage all cultures, modify behaviors to accommodate varying cultural norms, utilize technology to build online networks, and divide attention deliberately to embrace all possibilities. Strategic leadership is based in the context of the organizational environment; as long as leaders remain focused on the steps in strategic leadership, the organization is likely to succeed through the dynamic changes ahead.

Strategic leadership is critical for long-term organizational success: When a leader within an organization fails, there is an immediate consequence in market capitalization and, in a matter of weeks, a floundering leadership strategy can destroy the reputation and value which it took decades for an organization to build (Conger & Nadler, 2004). Strategic leadership activities include everything from making strategic decisions and

developing organizational structures to choosing and mentoring the next generation of leaders while supporting an effective organizational culture (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001). Strategic leadership occurs in environments that are ambiguous, complex, and laden with information — environments much like those within community colleges. High organizational performance in such environments requires leadership competencies to steer the organization through complex and ambiguous situations.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the research study was to discover leadership strategies that led to the achievement of high performance outcomes in community colleges. In the past, four-year college models provided the data and leadership models used to measure community college performance; however, when considering the unique aspects of community college environments and stakeholders, these measurements and leadership models are ineffective in describing the interplay between individual leadership and organizational performance (Boggs, 2009). Frameworks for high performance and effective leadership were developed independently in the last few decades; yet even though the frameworks exist, a gap in knowledge remains because the development of leadership frameworks has not included direct solicitation of the lived experiences, direct actions, and leadership strategies of individuals leading high performance community colleges.

The goal of this study was to explore effective leadership strategies for achieving high performance outcomes in community colleges. The study focused on providing a critical contribution to the field of community college leadership because a framework defining effective leadership strategies that directly influence high performance in community colleges does not yet exist (Campbell, Syed, & Morris, 2010). Two different

organizations developed frameworks for high performance of community colleges and effective leadership strategies for community college leaders. The Aspen Institute (2013) provided a study of the characteristics of high performing community colleges and annually names the top 120 community colleges in the nation. Each college identified as a *top college* achieves high standards in graduate completion, labor market, learning, and equitable outcomes (Aspen Institute, 2013). According to the Aspen Institute, high performing community colleges are more successful in achieving those outcomes than peer institutions. The AACC (2013) defined a framework for effective leadership to identify the elements of effective and strategic leadership within community colleges. The AACC leadership constructs include organizational strategy, resource management, leader communication, collaboration, leader advocacy, and professionalism (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013; Campbell et al., 2010). The Aspen Institute (2013) and AACC (2013) developed frameworks for measuring high performance and leadership competencies, yet an understanding of the effective leadership actions and strategies directly influencing high performance outcomes in community colleges remains unavailable.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore effective leadership strategies for achieving high performance in community college outcomes. Effective strategies for leaders are defined as the organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism (Aspen Institute, 2013) present in the lived experiences of leaders in high performance community colleges. The leadership strategies identified in this study may

provide guidance for leaders seeking to implement strategies to evince higher performance outcomes at community colleges around the nation. The findings of this study may also create a basic understanding of the impact of leadership strategies on community college outcomes. Leaders in community colleges not listed by the Aspen Institute as the highest performing in the nation have the potential to mimic the leadership strategies used by leaders within the community colleges that achieve high performance outcomes (Eddy, 2013).

Significance of the Study

The education and training required to meet the skill requirements of the workplace requires community colleges to play a critical role. Community colleges need to train workers to be immediately productive because of the changing technology and skill requirements in our economy. While recognizing their multi-faceted missions, community colleges will increasingly be valued and held accountable for how well exiting students perform in the workplace (ACT, 2013).

Community colleges serve as a critical point of access to higher education for several million students each year, and it is crucial to understand leadership strategies used by leaders at top-performing community colleges. If community colleges were not available, many individuals would not have the opportunity to enroll in postsecondary education, and the availability of skilled workers such as nurses, police officers, computer technicians, and electricians needed to fill workforce needs would decrease drastically (Calcagno, Bailey, Jenkins, Kienzl, & Leinbach, 2008). Organizational performance has been studied for many years, but gaps in knowledge and theory remain. The narrow focus on four-year colleges and universities limits transferability of research

findings to community colleges.

Community colleges have four distinct elements which make them unique among institutions of higher education. First, many students who attend community colleges have unusual life circumstances that have significant negative impact on the students' potential for academic success. Second, community colleges have a responsibility to maintain extensive industry partnerships as well as service to the larger community where the colleges reside. Third, community college student-learning outcomes vary based on students' prior educational experiences and can be as vast as the academic abilities of the students who enroll. Finally, the dual technical and liberal arts mission of community colleges challenges leaders to balance employment and industry skill requirements with broader learning outcomes, such as communication and critical thinking skills (Hicks & Jones, 2011). Based on the distinct elements, community colleges often struggle to reach high performance when measured with traditional data elements.

In 2011, the Aspen Institute defined measures of high performance in community colleges. Providing access to students is no longer enough: Community college performance needs to be defined more broadly than the number of students enrolled in courses (Alfred, 2011). Community colleges cannot narrowly accept enrollment figures as measures of high performance. Community college stakeholders such as legislators, students, parents, community members, and employers have helped shift accountability measures for community colleges. The stakeholders have shifted accountability measures from enrollment numbers to rates of completion, labor market impact, measurable learning outcomes, and success for all students. Leaders who achieve higher performance in community college outcomes are expected to affect student completion to graduation

and stakeholder satisfaction positively. Additional community college graduates will increase the number of skilled workers and fill the employment gap to stimulate the economy (Murray, 2010).

Nature of the Study

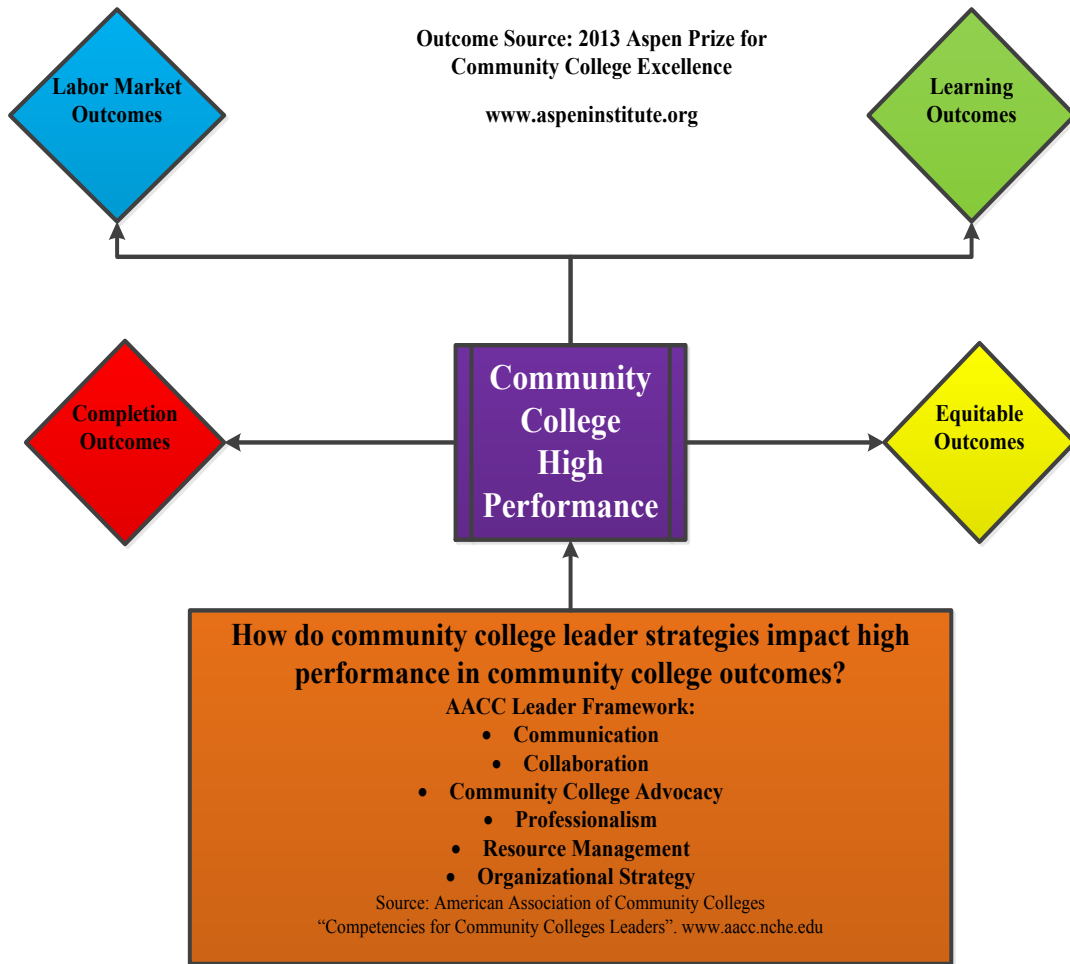
This phenomenological study involved interviewing community college presidents who led the highest-performing community colleges in the nation (as identified by the Aspen Institute in 2013). The 17 semi-structured interviews were in-depth and sought to discover leadership strategies that led to the achievement of high performance outcomes in community colleges. The research question and subsequent interview questions facilitated the topic inquiry.

Research Question

The research question informing the data collection for this study was: How do community college leader strategies impact high performance in community college outcomes?

The research question addressed the gap in the literature and guided the semi-structured interview process. In addition, the conceptual framework model (Figure 1) illustrates the pre-research conceptual framework approach for the study. Participants included leaders of community colleges identified by the Aspen Institute as high performing in labor market, learning, equitable, and completion outcomes. The Aspen Institute's (2013) list of the top 120 community colleges in the nation identified the sample from which interview participants were selected, and the AACC leadership competencies guided the semi-structured interview process and leadership constructs. The foundation of the investigative topics included the AACC leadership competencies

because leaders impact organizational performance (McFarlin, Crittenden, & Ebberts, 1999). The interview questions explored the strategies related to the leadership constructs of organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism in community colleges.



Conceptual Framework © Carrie Brimhall

Figure 1. Initial conceptual framework

Note. Community College Outcome Source: Aspen Institute (2013).

Note. Leader Competency Source: American Association of Community Colleges (2013).

Assumptions and Limitations

There were three key assumptions in this research project. One key theoretical assumption of the study was that leadership strategies have an impact on performance and that performance outcomes in community colleges can be increased: Leaders' interventions, planning, strategies, or cultural changes may improve community college performance. Leaders' strategies and lived experiences are not linear, and literature regarding leadership strategy examines leadership through a variety of lenses. The leadership strategy discipline has made significant strides since its inception, but the irregularity in language continues to limit cross-disciplinary dialogue and systematic building of understanding (Elenkov, Judge, & Wright, 2005; Hill, Kern, & White, 2012; House & Aditya, 1997). This study maintains the broad assumption that leadership strategy impacts organizational performance regardless of the strategic leadership theory leaders use in forming their strategies, actions, and beliefs.

A key topical assumption of the study is that strategic leadership in high performance community colleges also must be defined in framework elements separate from other, more mature leadership theories. There are increasing concerns regarding the hiring and development of effective leaders for high performance in community colleges. Due to projected retirements, decreases in the number of advanced degrees, and the progressive intricacies of community colleges ripe with barriers to advancement, a shortage of effective leaders is anticipated (McNair, Duree, & Ebbers, 2011). In 2006, AACC reported that 86% of community college presidents were expected to retire within a decade (Aspen Institute, 2013). Furthermore, if projections come to fruition, 500 community colleges will be led by different presidents in 2017 (American Association of

Community Colleges, 2013). At the same time, community colleges enroll about 45 % of college students within the United States (Tucker, 2013). The AACCC leadership competencies address the unique aspects of leading a community college to high performance; thus, it is assumed the framework elements are more appropriate for the study than a traditional and more mature leadership theory.

A key methodological assumption of the study is that meaning is constructed between the researcher and the consenting participant during the in-depth interview process. The goal of the qualitative interviews is to depict the participants' experiences using their own words along with observations (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). The interviews conducted were authentic and accurately captured the complexity of the leaders' perspectives related to leading a community college. The leaders were candid and honest sharing their experiences. In addition, the study was conducted to guard against bias and distortion adequately (Buchbinder, 2010). The methodological assumption of give and take during the interview process protected the integrity of the research data and the research process.

Examining a topic through various lenses of theory can challenge biases and deepen understanding of the topic elements. One of the limitations to a qualitative approach is the question of generalization. Along these lines, qualitative methodology is limited in generalizability due to the use of small samples. The second limitation in this study is the geographic disbursement of the population. High performing community colleges are located throughout the nation, and the researcher lacked the resources and time to conduct in-person interviews with each community college leader. The lived experience of a leader encompasses many elements including mannerisms, emotions, and

the uniquenesses of each individual. Those elements are best witnessed in the individual environment of the leader (Engelsrud, 2005). Technology was utilized to reach a representative population for the sample. Not having physical access to the environment of the leader posed a slight challenge, yet video conferencing allowed for clarification of questions to illuminate unique elements of the leader experience.

Definition of Terms

The American Association of Community Colleges Competencies for Effective Leadership criteria provided the framework and operational definitions for effective strategic leadership (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). The Aspen Institute defined a framework and operational definitions for the outcomes for high performance in community colleges (Aspen Institute, 2013). The leadership constructs defined by the AACC model are organizational strategy, resource management, leader communication, collaboration, leader advocacy, and professionalism. The Aspen Institute defined community college high performance as occurring when a college achieves outcomes higher than peer institutions in the areas of student success in persistence, completion, and transfer; consistent improvement in outcomes over time; and equity in outcomes for students of all racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds (Aspen Institute, 2013).

Completion outcomes are defined as high levels of student completion of workforce certificates, two-year degrees, and transfer to four-year colleges driven by institutional practices and policies that promote completion (Aspen Institute, 2013).

Effective collaboration in leadership is defined as embracing and employing the diversity of individuals and cultures, demonstrating cultural competencies, catalyzing

involvement and commitment of all stakeholders, and building and leveraging networks and partnerships to advance the goals of the college (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013).

Effective leader advocacy is defined as valuing and promoting diversity and inclusion, demonstrating a passion for and a commitment to the mission of community colleges, advancing lifelong learning, supporting a learner-centered environment, and representing the community college in the local community and throughout the broader educational community (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013).

Effective leader communication is defined as disseminating and supporting policies and strategies; creating and maintaining open communications regarding resources, priorities, and expectations; listening actively to understand, comprehend, analyze, and engage; and projecting confidence and responding responsibly (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013).

Effective organizational strategy in leadership is defined as the successful assessment, monitoring, and improvement of the college; proven data-driven strategy alignment; development of an innovative culture; and alignment of the organization's mission, structure, and resources (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013).

Effective resource management in leadership is defined as the successful development and management of resources, an entrepreneurial approach to alternative funding sources, efficient human resource practices and performance management systems, and positive management of conflict (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013).

Equitable outcomes are defined as high levels of access and success for students

who are often underserved, including those from three underrepresented racial/ethnic groups — African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Native Americans — and students from low-income backgrounds, stemming from an institutional commitment to close achievement gaps (Aspen Institute, 2013).

Labor market outcomes are defined as high rates of employment and earnings for graduates achieved through institutional practices and policies aligned with labor market needs and student labor market success (Aspen Institute, 2013).

Learning outcomes are defined as evidence that students learn at high levels, resulting from institutional practices and policies leading to strong and improving levels of student learning in courses, within programs, and at the collegewide level (Aspen Institute, 2013).

Professionalism is defined as being authentic and visionary, understanding and endorsing the culture of community colleges, managing stress through self-care and balance, and promoting and maintaining high standards for personal and organizational integrity, honesty, and respect for people (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013).

Strategic leadership theory is defined as the decisions of leaders that influence the organization and make a direct impact on outcomes (Canella & Monroe, 1997).

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Following chapter 1's introduction to the problem and the purpose and significance of the study, the remainder of the dissertation has a purposeful organization. Chapter 2 is a literature review that examines the history and role of community colleges,

strategic leadership theory, and frameworks for high performance and effective leadership strategies in community colleges. Chapter 3 provides study details about the methodological components of the study, and chapter 4 presents the results of participant interviews. The study concludes with chapter 5's discussion, implications, and recommendations of the research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of community college development, leadership, and organizational performance literature. The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to explore effective leadership strategies for achieving high performance in community college outcomes. In the literature review and throughout the study, effective strategies for leaders are defined as the organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism (Aspen Institute, 2013) utilized within the lived experiences of leaders in high performance community colleges. By exploring the effective leadership strategies of community college administrators, the results of this study may provide guidance for leaders wishing to achieve high performance at community colleges around the nation. The findings of this study also may create a foundational understanding of the impact of leadership strategies on community college outcomes.

The review transitions between three distinct elements of scholarship to provide background information regarding the impact of leadership strategy on high performance outcomes in community colleges. The chapter begins with the history of community

colleges, the role of community colleges, and the structural and environmental elements which make community colleges unique from other educational environments. After expanding upon the historical and contextual factors surrounding the emergence of community colleges in the United States, the literature review addresses the factors increasing accountability for community colleges and reviews a developed framework for the measurement of high performance leadership.

In the final section of the literature review, theories related to strategic leadership provide a conceptual framework for effective leadership. Illustrating the impact of leader strategies on high performance leadership is essential to guide the literature review of each effective leadership strategy listed in the purpose of the research study.

History and Role of Community Colleges

Although community colleges were created in the mid-1800s in the United States, it was not until the early 20th century when American leaders defined a distinct role for community colleges (Weisberger, 2005). Community colleges were designed to separate the first two years of the college experience, and the purpose of the community college movement was to increase access to higher education and lighten the burden of increased enrollments at universities (Rouse, 1995).

The introduction of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (known as the G.I. Bill) after World War II gave millions of military personnel a tuition voucher to attend college, increased access to higher education, and began to define the role of community colleges in the higher education system (Kane & Rouse, 1999). At the end of subsequent wars, the United States experienced an influx of veterans and an expansion of a baby boom generation seeking higher education options (Kane & Rouse, 1999). This

forced community colleges to broaden their educational mission beyond transfer education to include vocational education.

Community colleges address the training needs for a skilled workforce and provide liberal arts education opportunities for individuals who might not be able to access four-year institutions (Rouse, 1995). Additionally, community colleges serve as the primary producer of graduates in skill and human service areas. For example, community colleges certify nearly 80% of all first responders in the United States and more than 50% of all healthcare workers, fulfilling the needs of technical, skill-based, and human service careers which require a certificate, diploma, or degree (Jurgens, 2010). Historically, community colleges are open access institutions that serve students with academic challenges by providing remedial and developmental educational opportunities. Both the open access nature of community colleges and the recognition that most career options require some level of training beyond high school have created an influx of community college enrollments over the last several decades.

As the United States addresses unprecedented economic challenges, community colleges have been identified by the federal government as part of the solution. The challenge for community colleges, however, is that very few community college students succeed in completing their classes or in graduating from their intended degree programs (Burns, 2010). There is an undeniable and profound connection between the success of community college students and the strength and vitality of the nation (Aspen Institute, 2013). As community college environments evolve, the mission, purpose, and stakeholder expectations for results have matured, and the unique aspects of community colleges are under scrutiny as they redefine high performance.

Unique Aspects of Community Colleges

Community colleges have three distinct environmental elements which make them unique among institutions of higher education. Many community college students have extraordinary life circumstances. The life circumstances often make it less likely they will succeed academically and complete their degrees (Burns, 2010). Proportionally, community colleges enroll a significantly higher number of students of color, non-traditional-aged students, first-generation students, and lower-income students compared to other institutions of higher education. A small number of entering first-year students will earn a community college degree (Ewell, 2011; Weisberger, 2005). The circumstances and backgrounds of enrolled students impact the programmatic, academic, environmental, and service components of community colleges. The student characteristics also influence the stakeholder relationships and requirements of community colleges.

The second aspect of community college uniqueness is the responsibility for extensive industry partnerships and service to the larger communities within which the colleges reside. Community colleges are regional service providers: In addition to state and accreditation accountabilities, community colleges are expected to deliver education and training to a defined geographic region. Regional stakeholders expect market-driven contract training, educational opportunities for the region's economic needs, financial contributions to the region through employment opportunities, and other economic impacts (Ewell, 2011). In turn, economic, social, and environmental changes in regions can significantly influence community college enrollments and expectations. The

regional responsibilities add unique consideration for leadership strategies and efforts to achieve high performance.

The final aspect that makes community colleges unique is the variation in student-learning outcomes based on students' prior educational experiences. The learning outcomes can be as varied as the academic abilities of the students who enroll. The dual technical and liberal arts missions of community colleges challenge leaders to balance employment and industry skill requirements with broader learning outcomes such as communication and critical thinking skills (Ewell, 2008; Hicks & Jones, 2011). The academic abilities of community college students and evolving feedback from employers and transfer partners create constant flux and necessitate evolution in leadership strategy development. The dual mission of community colleges, along with students' characteristics and abilities and regional demands, pose a challenge to measuring high performance because these standards tend to assume a unitary measure of effectiveness.

Based on the distinct environmental elements, community colleges often struggle to reach high performance when measured with traditional university-developed data elements (Jenkins, 2007). For example, only 30% of first-time students who enroll in community colleges graduate with a degree, whereas the remaining students leave college without the credentials required for employment and are burdened with student loan debt (Burns, 2010). Community college leaders face the challenge of maneuvering through the unique aspects of community colleges with effective leadership strategies designed to achieve high performance in outcomes such as graduation rates.

Community college leaders must consider the unique aspects of community colleges when developing leadership strategies and determining performance measures.

As educational and societal needs shift, community colleges are a vital component of the workforce solution (Jurgens, 2010; Kuh, 2005). Achieving the workforce demands of business and industry amid environmental challenges requires community college leaders to increase their performance levels. Amid those challenges, there exists a heightened sense of accountability and expectation within which community college leaders are expected to meet higher performance in mutually defined outcomes.

High Performance Framework for Community Colleges

Community colleges have struggled to find appropriate metrics to capture their unique contexts while simultaneously measuring high performance. Community colleges have open enrollment admission policies; therefore, the factors found to minimize barriers and maximize success cannot be controlled as they can in a university setting. Community colleges have to work with the populations that they enroll, placing limitations on the impact of interventions for non-traditional students (Burns, 2010; Ewell, 2011). Metrics derived from traditional four-year institutions do not accurately portray the success of a community college or its students. For example, retention or persistence rates are reported using the rate of persistence of the first-time, full-time students enrolled even though 60 percent of community college students do not fit within this criterion of measurement (NCES, 2008). The perfect storm of declining funding, increased accountability, and a lack of measurements for effectiveness created a national demand for a unified framework for community college high performance. As noted by the Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream (2013),

What we find today are student success rates that are unacceptably low, employment preparation that is inadequately connected to job market needs, and

disconnects in transitions between high schools, community colleges, and baccalaureate institutions. (p. 2)

In response to President Barack Obama's position on the critical role of community colleges, the Aspen Institute heightened public awareness of education and workforce imperatives facing the country. The Aspen Institute collaborated with the Joyce, Lumina, and W.K. Kellogg foundations and the Bank of America Charitable Foundation to define appropriate metrics to capture the unique aspects of community colleges and measure high performance (Aspen Institute, 2013). Community colleges cannot continue to approach the definition and impact of high performance strategies narrowly: High performance has to be defined more broadly than the number of students enrolled in courses (Alfred, 2011). The high performance framework allows stakeholders including legislators, students, parents, community members, and employers to shift community college accountability measures from simply student enrollment to rates of completion, labor market impact, measurable learning, and success for all students.

Completion Outcomes

Burns (2010) and Kuh (2001) suggested there are several reasons why students may be unable to navigate the culture of higher education and successfully complete a degree. Students' characteristics, risk factors, and educational preparedness impact degree completion and subsequently impact employment and earnings. Factors and conditions related to student completion may include shifting economic conditions, college support, or other factors completely outside the scope of the student or the college. Literature supports the dismal completion rates at community colleges, yet research does not provide an explanation for the community colleges that are achieving

high performance, against all odds, with an increasingly high-risk student population. Completion outcomes are defined as the number of students who complete workforce certificates or two-year degrees or who transfer to four-year colleges. The completion outcomes are driven by institutional practices and policies that promote completion (Aspen Institute, 2013).

Labor Market Outcomes

Once students complete a community college degree, certificate, or diploma, the next phase of measured success for community colleges is labor market outcomes. Labor market outcomes are defined as high rates of employment and earnings for graduates achieved through institutional practices and policies aligned with labor market needs and student labor market success (Aspen Institute, 2013). High performance in labor market outcomes can be the result of effective industry partners, relevant programs, and intensive career placement assistance. Community colleges are designed to help students achieve their next steps after college; after all, the mission of many community colleges is to help students transfer to four-year institutions or gain immediate employment. High performance in completion and labor market outcomes can help community colleges achieve those missions.

Learning Outcomes

Students who complete certificates, degrees, and diplomas and obtain a job or successfully transfer to a university have an opportunity to demonstrate the learning and training that occurred in the community college. Learning outcomes are defined as evidence that students learn at high levels as a result of institutional practices and policies leading to strong and improving levels of student learning in courses within programs and

at the collegewide level (Aspen Institute, 2013). Students who cannot meet the academic requirements of the university or the skill and technical requirements of a career reflect poorly on the reputation of the community college; therefore, learning outcomes ultimately determine the success of the community college student. Learning outcomes often were overlooked in the accountability metric development of previous frameworks.

Equitable Outcomes

Community colleges must be concerned with the facets of the experience of all students from the first point of contact through graduation, placement, or transfer. Equitable outcomes are defined as high levels of access and success for students who are underserved, including those from three underrepresented racial/ethnic groups — African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American — and students from low-income backgrounds (Aspen Institute, 2013). The definition of equitable outcome success has created a requirement for multiple data points for measuring characteristics and behaviors for all student groups. Achieving high performance in the framework outcomes requires effective leadership.

Strategic Leadership Theory

Effective leadership is critical for long-term community college success. Strategic leadership is founded in the premise that the characteristics, backgrounds, and experiences of leaders within a community college impact how they view community college opportunities and make decisions — elements which, in turn, impact community college performance. Since Hambrick and Mason's (1984) upper echelons theory was introduced at a time when the ambiguity of leadership theories was viewed with a critical eye, there has been an interest in strategic leadership theory. Strategic leadership research

has focused on individual experiences, personal values, cognitive styles, and personality traits of leaders as well as the impact of those factors on strategic choices, decisions, and community college performance (Wang, Waldman, & Zhang, 2012). When a community college or a leader within a community college fails, there is an immediate consequence in market capitalization (Conger & Nadler, 2004). Community colleges cannot afford a miscalculation in strategy or a misstep from top leaders. News media outlets and the interconnectedness of social media networks almost guarantee these mistakes will become widely known to all stakeholders.

The strategy discipline has made significant strides since its inception, although the irregularity in strategic language continues to limit cross-disciplinary dialogue and systematic building of theory (Elenkov et al., 2005; Hill et al., 2012; House & Aditya, 1997). Even with this incongruence in the field, the value of strategic leadership remains critical to organizational performance. Leaders impact organizational performance by employing effective strategies.

Based on the upper echelons theory of organizational leadership, Finkelstein and Hambrick's (1996) premise was that organizational strategies cannot be understood without clearly understanding the strategists who develop them. Strategic leadership theories focus on the leaders within the organization who have influence and responsibility in the organization, and community college presidents meet this criterion. Strategic leadership theory considers the leaders' characteristics, actions, and behaviors, as well as the impact of those factors on organizational outcomes (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996; Heifetz, 1994). Given the same organizational circumstances, very few leaders would identify a similar list of options and strategies for the organization; instead,

each would consider his or her background, experiences, and beliefs in the strategic options. The options have differentiated impacts on organizational performance. Canella and Monroe (1997) further defined leaders' impact on organizational performance as containing the elements leading to the past success of the organization as well as the requirements for launching the organization forward to a successful future. Leaders' decisions influence the organization and have a direct impact on outcomes (Canella & Monroe, 1997; Morgan, 2006).

Building on strategic leadership theories defined prior to this work, Boal and Hooijberg (2001) enhanced the model of strategic development to include a stronger emphasis on the impact of organizational culture on organizational performance. Effective leadership activities include everything from making decisions and developing organizational structures to choosing and mentoring the next generation of leaders while supporting an effective organizational culture. All of those activities and strategies impact the culture of the organization, which in turn impacts the organization's performance (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001). Most organizational environments are ambiguous, complex, and overloaded with information, and leaders who are effectively strategic can drive the organization through those challenges to reach high performance outcomes.

Impact of Leadership Strategies on Organizational Performance

Implementation of effective leadership strategies can assist an organization in achieving high performance (Bass, 1985, 1991; Waldman & Yammarino, 1999). The literature illustrates key contributions to the importance of further developing an understanding of the impact of leadership strategy in high performance community colleges. When leaders successfully implement effective strategies, they facilitate high

performance and continually meet objectives and measures (Peters & Austin, 1985). The outcomes of high performance leadership extend beyond meeting metrics and objectives. High performance organizations experience expanded knowledge bases, integrated communications, and increased political influence (Day & Lord, 1988; Sosik et al., 2005). Right now, community colleges cannot ignore those outcomes.

Effective leadership strategies build an organizational culture primed for high performance (Padolny, Khurana, & Hill-Popper, 2005). Internal consistency, vision, decision-making, and relationships create a synergy that lead to an organizational culture focused on high performance. Effective leaders remain focused on partnerships with stakeholders who can help build the culture. They recognize there are influences in a high performance culture including the competitive fitness of the organization, the leaders' conception of the external environment, and the leaders' perception of the value of the organization's human and social capital (Flood, Hannan, Smith, Turner, West, & Dawson, 2000; Lovas & Ghoshal, 2000). Effective leaders navigate those influences to build a culture that fosters the organizational capacity for high performance.

Effective leadership strategies are contextual: The strategies for organizational survival and high performance are fluid. Successful leadership strategies align with organizational context, condition, strengths, and opportunities (Wang et al., 2012). Effective leaders understand the importance of context in all leadership strategies and utilize capacity-building activities to incorporate contextual elements. The understanding of community college context and the leadership strategies utilized to build capacity have a positive impact on organizational culture and performance (Shahzad, Luqman, Khan, & Shabbir, 2012). Effective leaders use their contextual understanding to prepare for any

shift, enhancement, or radical change that might negatively impact the performance of the organization.

Preparing for organizational changes that impact performance outcomes requires a leader to facilitate leadership capacity throughout the community college (Peterson, Martorana, Smith, & Owens, 2003). Effective leaders influence group and organizational performance in hiring, developing, and leading administrators and managers throughout the organization (O'Reilly, Caldwell, Chatman, Lapid, & Self, 2010). Organizational performance is a reflection of the aggregate strategies of all leaders in the community college. Effective leaders communicate the vision and strategy of the college with clarity and consistency and create organizational understanding and meaning that leads to high performance (Cha & Edmondson, 2006; Osborn, Hunt, & Jauch, 2002). Effective leaders understand they cannot impact organizational performance without strong leadership throughout the community college.

Effective community college leaders also nurture high performance through satisfied stakeholders and partners. The rate of change, globalization, and collaboration occurring throughout higher education will continue to demand effective leadership strategies (Molinsky et al., 2012). Effective leadership strategies include valuing and engaging stakeholders, modifying behaviors to accommodate varying cultural norms, utilizing technology to build online networks, and dividing attention deliberately to embrace all possibilities (Berson & Aviola, 2004). Effective leadership strategies are based in the context of the community college environment; as long as leaders remain focused on the strategies, the community college is likely to be successful through the dynamic changes ahead.

Effective Leadership Strategies for High Performance

Community colleges are becoming much more complex to lead. Community college leaders no longer have the luxury of planned change, certain futures, or the predictable elements of competition. In 2003, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation awarded a grant to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) to address the national need for leaders to focus on the complexities and changes in the community college environment. The AACC Competencies for Effective Leadership criteria defined the constructs of effective leadership strategies in high performing community colleges. The focus on leadership development is central to the AACC mission and has greater urgency as the level of turnover is drastically elevated (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). The literature review makes it clear that effective leadership strategies are critical to achieving high performance in community college outcomes.

Organizational Strategy

Successful implementation of organizational strategies can assist a community college in achieving high performance. Effective organizational strategy in leadership is defined as the successful assessment, monitoring, and improvement of the community college; use of proven data-driven strategy alignment; development of an innovative culture; and alignment of the community college's mission, structures, and resources (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). Problems with strategy implementation can cause serious and possibly long-term consequences for a community college. Indeed, the results can be disastrous; for example, community colleges can have ineffectively trained members or poorly coordinated strategies, lose the ability to respond

effectively to external pressures or events, and become inadequate in monitoring and defining the strategy (Schaap, 2006).

As noted by AACC (2013), “an effective community college leader promotes the success of all students, strategically improves the quality of the institution, and sustains the community college mission based on knowledge of the organization, its environment, and future trends” (p. 6). Leaders contribute to the surviving and thriving of the community college by implementing an effective organizational strategy. There are several strategies for effective leaders supported in literature, in addition to the AACC definition. Those elements include building a high performance culture, articulating a vision for high performance, putting systems in place to guide the college to high performance collectively, fully understanding the internal and external factors that impact performance, and building risk, innovation, change management, and an entrepreneurial approach as part of the organizational strategy. Effective leaders build and sustain a high performance culture as part of the organizational strategy. Effective leaders create a culture in which people understand how they bring value to the organization (Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005). A leader who is effective in creating and sustaining a culture can positively influence innovation, purpose, and, in many cases, significant organizational performance (Eisenstat et al, 2008). Effective leaders navigate the challenges successfully. Challenges to building and sustaining a culture as a part of the high performance organizational strategy include balancing the expansion of ideas, organizations, and profits; managing a shortage of resources; and managing the emotions involved with risk, innovation, and complexity (Chopra & Kanji, 2010; Simkins, 2005). Effective leaders are intentional, have an ability to build culture deliberately and with

emotional resilience, are passionate, and create cultural synergy, all of which drives continued improvements toward high performance.

Effective leaders articulate vision as a key component of organizational strategy. The vision, while fluid in nature, is aligned with the core values of the community college. Those core values are not fluid, and, if those values are articulated clearly, the leader will continue to align strategies with the vision for high performance (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Cannella Jr. & Monroe, 1997; Hambrick & Mason, 1984). In ambiguous, complex, and overloaded community college environments, a consistent vision is a critical component of success (Shore, Sy, & Strauss, 2006). Effective leaders define the vision as the organizational strategy to achieve high performance.

Effective leadership strategies put systems in place to guide the organization toward high performance collectively. Effective strategies align with the organizational design and supported by stakeholders (Cooper & Burrell, 1988; Murray, 2010). To gain support for the strategy, leaders share their strategic ideas with stakeholders, and effective leaders ask stakeholders for analysis, feedback, and understanding regarding the organizational strategies (Arbnor & Bjerke, 1997; Cooper & Burrell, 1988). Effective leaders use a systems thinking strategy to inform the decision-making processes and guide the organization toward its vision for the future (Townsend & Bassoppo-Moyo, 1997). Designing systems to align the strategy with the organizational vision and ensure the input and support of stakeholders leads to collective movement toward increased performance.

Effective leaders have a solid understanding of the internal and external factors which may inhibit organizational performance. Not only do leaders continuously improve

quality and consistently meet stakeholder expectations, they also understand how increased demands for accountability impact the organization (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Ertel, 1999). Organizational strategy requires a thorough understanding of the impact of changes in socio-political, economic, and technological factors on the organization (Huang, Hsu, & Xhuan, 2011). Stakeholders will continue to stay engaged through changes in organizational strategy if they are confident the leader has insight regarding the impact of those factors on organizational performance.

Effective leaders build risk, innovation, change management, and an entrepreneurial approach as part of the organizational strategy, and they understand these factors are essential to high performance ((Bhattacharayya, 2006; Christensen, 2002). Innovation and risk require hard work and, in higher education, these strategies are not easy, natural, or historical. Effective leaders help stakeholders recognize the value of an innovative approach and become receptive to risk and the opportunity to make significant changes (Voelpel, Leibold, & Tekie, 2004). Stakeholders play a critical role in creating the culture of innovation; they participate in communicating the rationale for change or risk, supporting mistakes, and advocating for bold ideas as part of the organizational strategy (Baum & Locke, 2004; Dixit, 2006). Effective leaders also separate existing elements of the community college from the innovative ventures. Leaders cannot blend existing elements of service and learning with entrepreneurial and innovative ventures, nor should they make innovation and risk objectives for employees who are responsible for serving and teaching students.

Resource Management

Effective resource management in leadership is defined as the successful development and management of resources, an entrepreneurial approach to alternative funding sources, efficient human resource practices and performance management systems, and positive management of conflict. The American Association of Community Colleges (2013) described an effective community college leader as one who “equitably and ethically sustains people, processes, and information as well as physical and financial assets to fulfill the mission, vision, and goals of the community college” (p. 8). Strategic resource management balances the capacity of a leader to exercise discretion with the capability to seize an opportunity.

Leaders who effectively communicate with employees and stakeholders will have the knowledge base required to determine the balance. Effective leaders recognize resource management as having two distinct divisions: financial resource management and people resource management. There are several elements of effective resource management supported in literature which add to the AACC definition. The strategies for effective financial resource management supported in literature are building organizational capacity and developing a holistic fiscal management model. The strategies for effective people resource management include focusing on people as the largest community college resource. This focus entails hiring people who fit in the organization, mentoring high performing people, and developing engagement with employees.

Effective leaders develop the organizational capacity for resource management and create an organization with breadth and depth to withstand instabilities, competitive

changes, or personnel changes. Embracing organizational capacity fully, focusing on the institution, and effectively managing resources produces creative insights when making resource decisions (Cannella Jr., & Monroe, 1997; Lim, 1995). Leaders take latitude in defining the balance between people and financial resource management in order to achieve high performance.

Effective leaders develop a holistic fiscal management model to lead the community college to high performance. There are several strategies in effective leadership that are relational in nature, however, effective leaders also deploy several strategies that align more closely with management strategies; developing a holistic fiscal management model includes both strategy skill sets (Henry, 2007; Roe & Baker, 1989). The continuous reductions in funding for community colleges are forcing leaders to develop a much more sophisticated fiscal management model to achieve high performance. Joch (2011) described the resource challenges facing community colleges: “State coffers, once relied on for a third of community college budgets nationwide, are hemorrhaging” (p. 34). Effective leaders develop a fiscal management model that is flexible and future-focused. Rather than simply making cuts, effective leaders invest in prioritized strategies to move the organization toward high performance. Leaders strike a balance between cutting programs or services that are not leading to high performance and tapping new revenue streams and investing in programs and services that lead to high performance.

Effective leaders hire people who lead the community college to higher performance and mission achievement. More than 2,500 presidents and administrators are expected to be hired within community colleges during ten years (Fulton-Calkins &

Milling, 2005). Leaders look broadly for talent and align hiring practices with organizational strategies, and effective leaders are purposeful in the hiring, supporting, and growing of people who are the right fit for the organization — those who embrace learning from the past while embracing the future direction of the college (Boroski & Greif, 2009; Mankins, Bird, & Root, 2013). Beyond filling the hiring gap, effective leaders create better organizational performance by hiring and supporting people who make a difference in the performance of the college.

Effective leaders mentor and develop people who fit within the organization. Mentoring is not just gathering information from a more experienced person — it involves engaging people in discussions about complex issues. Mentoring programs enhance productivity, ensure a diverse workforce, build trust between business units, and enhance communication (Megginson, 2000; Pearch, Craig, & Willits, 2005). Effective leaders identify peak-performing employees and develop them to build leadership capacity. The keys to developing peak employee performance are training, motivating, and supporting. Mentoring programs bring the best and brightest people together to infuse energy and new ideas into the organizational environment (Smith & Crawford, 2007; Solansky, 2010). Mentors can ensure novices develop into competent, enthusiastic practitioners who can respond to the changing needs of education.

Communication

Effective leader communication is defined as disseminating and supporting policies and strategies; creating and maintaining open communication regarding resources, priorities, and expectations; listening actively to understand, comprehend, analyze and engage; and projecting confidence and responding responsibly (American

Association of Community Colleges, 2013). The American Association of Community Colleges (2013) described the communication skills of an effective community college leader as one who

uses clear listening, speaking, and writing skills to engage in honest, open dialogue at all levels of the college and its surrounding community; promotes the success of all students; ensures the safety and security of students and the surrounding college community; and sustains the community college mission. (p. 9).

Involvement in the communication process via either direct feedback or instant access to the message builds trust and then engagement. A communication structure without involvement can minimize employee voice and value (Roe & Baker, 1989). There are several effective communication strategies supported in literature that add to the AACC definition. Those strategies include broad involvement in communication, communication throughout decision-making processes, motivating and inspiring through communication, authenticity in communication, and recognizing communication protocol.

Effective leaders create a communication strategy with broad involvement. Thomas, Zolin, and Hartman (2009) suggested employees who are involved in the communication process and perceive it to be timely, accurate, and relevant are likely to rely on their team. In contrast, when employees are not involved in the communication process or the information they receive is inaccurate, irrelevant or untimely, they become more guarded and less trusting, and therefore, not engaged. High engagement levels are

the result of strong, involved communication (Raina, 2010). Employees who are aware of the organizational strategies and decisions collaborate to achieve high performance.

Effective leaders are strategic in their communication strategies throughout decision-making processes. Decision-making in organizations is complex and varies greatly from the textbook examples given in business courses or training. In reality, community college situations lack structure and are open to varying interpretations. Most often, the provided information is elusive or contradictory (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996; Roe & Baker, 1989). Timing is critical in decision-making: *When* a leader communicates the decision is just as critical as the definition of the decision. Effective leaders balance the timing of key communication points of every decision (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Amey, 2010).

Effective leaders employ communication strategies to build organizational engagement through motivation and inspiration. Organizational engagement is characterized as high energy, mental resilience, strong identification with work, enthusiasm, inspiration, and pride (Lin, 2010). Effective leaders build an engaged culture through frequent and direct communication. Consistent communication builds organizational trust and a higher level of engagement. Effective leaders frame the issues, identify loyalties, stay connected to a purpose, inspire people, run experiments, and thrive (Fear, Adamek, & Imig, 2002; Heifetz, Grashow, Linsky, 2009). Effective leaders communicate with clarity; they understand the goals and outcomes of the community college in depth so they can communicate the details to the entire organization (Howard & Rafferty, 2009; Kotter, 1995). Engagement is created when leaders facilitate

commitments to the emotions, finances, outcomes, and processes of the community college.

Additionally, effective leaders also communicate authentically with recognition that message tone is critical. Authentic communication builds transparency in relationships and an opportunity for leaders to self-reflect and develop; quality of information and tone are critical elements of authentic communication (Thomas et al., 2009). Effective leaders use authentic communication to connect emotionally with those they want to lead, and the message resonates in a way that others can share the leader's enthusiasm for the community college mission and drive toward high performance (Avolio, 2007; Rausch, 2004). Authentic leader messages with the right tone build organizational engagement because employees can see how they fit within the organization as it achieves high performance (Dan-Shang & Chia-Chun, 2013). The employees view themselves in the present as well as the projected high performance future, and stakeholders see a clear path for their involvement in the future of the community college.

Effective leaders recognize communication protocol matters, and message delivery occurs throughout the entire communication process. Effective leaders employ a communication protocol within the organization to ensure key messages are delivered consistently and by the most appropriate team member (Neufeld, Wan, & Fang, 2008). Presidents are visible because they are the face of the community college. The visibility leads to expectations about communication of concerns, ideas, and responsiveness (Carlson, 2003; Kirkland & Ratcliff, 1994). Leaders can find themselves becoming the key point of contact for every idea or concern, when in fact many discussions can occur

within a department or team prior to coming directly to the president. Effective leaders follow protocol and find the balance between listening to stakeholders and not overstepping protocol boundaries with team members.

Collaboration

Effective collaboration in leadership is defined as embracing and employing the diversity of individuals and cultures, demonstrating cultural competencies, catalyzing involvement and commitment of all stakeholders, and building and leveraging networks and partnerships to advance the goals of the college (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). Strategic leadership occurs at all levels of the community college, and the disbursement of leadership is critical to the survival of a community college. Addressing those aspects of effective community college leaders, the American Association of Community Colleges (2013) suggested “an effective community college leader develops and maintains responsive, cooperative, mutually beneficial, and ethical internal and external relationships that nurture diversity, promote the success of all students, and sustain the community college mission” (p. 7). Effective leaders collaborate to use the skills and talents of members to influence community college outcomes positively. Collaboration must occur at all levels of the community college in order to achieve high performance. The strategies for effective community college collaboration supported in literature are being aware of key stakeholder groups, having strategy in partnerships and collaboration efforts, recognizing the value of internal collaboration, having a clear purpose for every collaborate arrangement and partnership, and serving as the champion of community college collaborations.

In addition, effective leaders are aware of key stakeholder groups critical to the performance of the community college. The community college has unlimited opportunities to partner with external organizations, businesses, and people to achieve high performance. Unfortunately, due to time, financial and human resource constraints, not all partnerships will come to fruition. Effective leaders collaborate with internal and external partners that are critical to achieving high performance and meeting strategic directions (Baus & Ramsbottom, 1999; Huxham & Vangen, 2000). Effective leaders identify key stakeholder groups that can benefit from the collaboration. The collaborative effort will be successful if both partners can experience positive movement toward meeting mission achievement and high performance (Stephens & Bolt, 2004). Collaborations with stakeholder groups that do not benefit from the partnership are not as likely to succeed.

Effective leaders are strategic in partnerships and collaboration efforts — they do not collaborate just to document collaboration. Just as effective leaders identify key stakeholder groups, they also identify strategic collaborations with those key stakeholders. Community colleges cannot afford to waste time and financial resources; instead, collaborative efforts must lead to increased performance (Pisano & Verganti, 2008). Strategy in partnerships is an essential strategy for high performance (Leary, 2012). Amey (2010) described the importance of collaborative relationships by writing that

The abilities to include all constituents and create win-win partnerships are important attributes for community college leaders. Often overlooked in discussion about collaboration, however, are power differentials between

partnering groups that may undermine cooperative efforts. Leaders need to be adept at negotiating between parties and developing trusting relationships that foster collaborations. (p. 97)

Effective leaders recognize the value of internal collaboration. Building a culture of collaboration with employees is essential to the achievement of high performance outcomes. Effective leaders support discussions and unite teams across the community college (Roe & Baker, 1989). Governance is a unique aspect of educational environments; therefore, effective community college leaders clearly define the shared governance process with faculty and staff groups as collaborative functions in the community college (Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2007; McNair et al., 2011). External collaborations and partnerships are most beneficial when the culture understands and appreciates the validity and outcomes of collaboration.

Furthermore, effective leaders have a clear purpose for every collaborative arrangement and partnership. There are several types of collaborations, and not all collaborative efforts are right for every community college or every situation (Gray, 1989; Pisano & Verganti, 2008). Defining the collaboration purpose helps the leader determine if the collaboration will help the community college achieve high performance. The purpose, once established, is the focus of the collaboration. Effective leaders continue to navigate collaborative conversations and activities toward the purpose (O'Leary, Bingham, & Choi, 2010). The purpose of the partnership aligns with the mission and strategic direction of the college because the collaborative activities, outcomes, and progress expectations ultimately impact internal constituents (Amey, 2010; Weick, 1976).

Effective leaders serve as the champion of community college collaborations. As a highly visible member of the college community, the president becomes the face of the college. Effective leaders are strategic about collaborative efforts, choosing efforts with a clear benefit to the college and a purpose aligned with the college mission and high performance (Dovey, 2009; Farihurst & Sarr 1996). Once the leader has identified a partner with whom the organization should collaborate, effective leaders become the champion of the collaboration (Amey, 2010; Watson, 2007). Effective leaders make the most out of the partnership opportunity, embedding themselves directly in the processes and dialogue and remaining transparent and visible in all collaborative stages.

Community College Advocacy

Leading in a complex and ambiguous environment involves a broad understanding of how to advocate for community college needs while increasing performance. Successful leader advocacy is defined as valuing and promoting diversity and inclusion, demonstrating a passion for and a commitment to the mission of community colleges, advancing lifelong learning, supporting a learner-centered environment, and representing the community college in the local community and throughout the broader educational community (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). Community college advocacy requires a thorough understanding of the impact of changes in socio-political, economic, and technological factors on the community college. An effective community college leader must be one who “understands, commits to, and advocates for the mission, vision, and goals of the community college on the local, state, and national level” (American Associate of Community College, 2013, p. 11). The strategies for effective community college

advocacy supported in literature are building meaning and a shared purpose, focusing on learning and inquisition, developing a core message to inspire commitment, building strong partnerships, and concentrating on solid relationships with key stakeholders.

Community college leaders advocate for the needs of the institution and for the story of the diverse learners whom the college serves to build meaning and a shared purpose. Leaders who are ambiguous, unprofessional, or unwilling to advocate risk the ability to build meaning and purpose for members. Leaders who are unable to advocate with members and stakeholders with conviction, charisma, and clarity may not achieve high performance. Effective leaders advocate engagement, meaning, and a shared purpose throughout the organization and with key stakeholders (Boggs, 2008; Canella Jr., & Monroe, 1997; Nunley, 2006). Stakeholders will continue to support the college if the leader has successfully advocated meaning and developed a shared purpose.

Additionally, leaders who are effective in community college advocacy focus on learning and inquisition in the advocacy approach. Effective advocates create an environment in which learning occurs with stakeholders in an effort to create a mutually beneficial connection; effective leaders are inquisitive throughout advocacy efforts to build partnerships and connections and to facilitate mutual learning (Nevis, DiBella, & Gould, 1995). The environment is created by encouraging inquisition (Lattuca & Creamer, 2005). Partners should be comfortable asking why the community college operates in a particular way, and advocates should have a dialogue rich with genuine inquiry (Isaacs, 1993; Mintzberg, 2009). The focus on learning and inquisition allows the community college advocate always to be mindful of the missions and values of all stakeholders.

Effective leaders focus on a core advocacy message to inspire commitment with internal and external stakeholders. This core message fosters motivation and confidence in the community college thereby inspiring outstanding performance (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Heifetz & Laurie, 2001). A core advocacy message illustrates vision for the advocacy efforts, communicates the decisions and intricacies of community college outcomes, inspires alignment with those outcomes, and demonstrates the action steps to achieve high performance (Campbell et al., 2010; Toll, 2010).

Finally, leaders who are effective in community college advocacy concentrate on solid relationship skills with stakeholders. Dialogue is an under-recognized feature of advocacy; without dialogue, a community college cannot build relationships with members and stakeholders. The community college dialogue links the past to the present and the present to the future. Dialogue builds relationships as stakeholders can see continuity in the community college history and can begin to see the shifts that need to occur to meet the strategic objectives (Boal & Schultz, 2007; Riggs, 2009). Relationships create continuity in the vision of the community college: As stakeholders share dialogue and build relationships, high performance can be realized.

Professionalism

Professionalism is defined as being authentic and visionary, understanding and endorsing the culture of community colleges, managing stress through self-care and balance, and promoting and maintaining high standards for personal and community college integrity, honesty, and respect for people (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). Articulating a vision for the community college with clarity, conviction, and professionalism is a key foundation for high performance in the community college.

Leaders who are ambiguous in their communications risk not being able to build meaning and purpose for members. Leaders who are unable to communicate with members and stakeholders with conviction, charisma, and clarity may not achieve community college success, even if the vision for the community college is strategic (Canella Jr. & Monroe, 1997). “Effective community college leaders work ethically to set high standards for self and others, continuously improve self and surroundings, demonstrate accountability to and for the institution and ensure the long-term viability of the college and community” (American Association of Community College, 2013, p. 6). The strategies for effective community college professionalism supported in literature are employing strategies to build the community college reputation, exuding wisdom and emotional intelligence, building trust, and developing and maintaining high expectations and accountability for high performance.

Effective leaders employ professionalism strategies to build the community college reputation. Economic and non-economic factors predict the college reputation (Flatt & Kowalczyk, 2008). Financial performance accounts for a small percent of reputation impact; assets, skills, and capacities of the community college also create value through the organization and build the community college reputation (Lipka, 2013; Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). A strong culture leads to a higher reputation with stakeholders, and the reputation leads to high performance. Effective leaders seize the opportunity to develop a positive reputation, leading to sustainable high performance.

Furthermore, effective leaders are emotionally intelligent, and they exude wisdom and professionalism in all interactions. Professionalism strategies include self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Bennis, 2004; Goleman, 1998).

Measurement of emotional intelligence and professionalism include aspects such as a leader's desire to achieve trustworthiness, sensitivity, commitment, and integrity (Palmer, Walls, Burgess, & Stough, 2001; Quay, 1999). Professional, emotionally intelligent leaders are those who are wise in their approach to organizational community and culture. They mentor those around them, utilize the contributions of team members, build relationships, and value the insight of those within the organization (Rubin, Dierdorff, & Brown, 2010). Those actions lead to stakeholder confidence and high performance.

Effective leaders also build trust as a key strategy in professionalism. Dirks and Ferring (2001) explored the relationship between organizational trust and leadership effectiveness. Trust is considered a fundamental factor in effective organizations: When employees have a high level of trust within the organization, job satisfaction, productivity, confidence, data sharing, problem solving, and organizational commitment increase (Elangovan, Auer-Rizzi, & Szabo, 2007; Tan & Lim, 2009). Effective leaders improve employee performance, efficiency, and prominence by building organizational trust. Leaders' reliability, honesty, attention to staff, and commitment positively impact the level of trust within the organization (Lau, Lam, & Salamon, 2008). If trust erosion increases, the willingness of employees to engage in high performance initiatives grows increasingly dim.

Additionally, effective leaders have high expectations and hold employees accountable for high performance. One of the biggest challenges of high performance leadership is holding high expectations and keeping everyone moving toward high performance. As community colleges face increased accountability measures and pressures, it may be far too easy for leaders to default to a check-box approach to

leadership (Bassi & McMurrer, 2007). Leaders can fall into a trap of rushing to demonstrate they are doing something to meet accountability challenges (checking a box); however, leaders who keep high standards and who keep everyone focused on the institutional mission will see results (Collins, 2005). Effective leaders never compromise integrity or institutional values in order to see increased performance in a metric or measurement; instead, effective leaders move quickly to work with an employee who is not meeting the standards of high performance (Katzenbach & Santamaria, 1999). Accountability extends beyond external stakeholders: A culture of high performance depends on all employees meeting high standards of performance.

Summary

The demands on community college leaders to meet accountability standards for high performance are unprecedented, and the number of projected administrative openings is startling. At the same time, the retirements of baby boomers, declining resources, and increased leader demands are shrinking the candidate pool for community college presidents. Individuals who accept leadership positions must have effective strategies to lead community colleges to high performance in defined outcomes. The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Competencies for Effective Leadership criteria define the constructs of effective leadership strategies in high performing community colleges as organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, advocacy, and professionalism (2013). Community college leaders of tomorrow may be able to learn from concrete examples of strategies that have contributed to or led to high performance in community colleges. The leaders

who have achieved high performance in community college outcomes may be able to provide those strategies.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore effective leadership strategies for achieving high performance in community college outcomes. Effective strategies for leaders were defined as the organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism within the lived experiences of leaders in high performance community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). The participants in the study were presidents leading some of the top 120 community colleges identified by the Aspen Institute as the highest-performing community colleges in the nation.

Research Design

The qualitative study explored effective leadership strategies for achieving high performance in community college outcomes. The qualitative phenomenological study was based in the interpretive approach, and the methodological procedure approach was transcendental phenomenology (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). Meaning was the core of the study, and the process of collecting data illuminated the essence of the leader experience in high performing community colleges (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). The qualitative study followed the phenomenological model of reduction, description, and a search for the essence of lived experiences.

The first stage of the research design involved setting aside prejudgment through epoché. To achieve that goal, the phenomenon was seen without judgment; the study was open entirely to its totality. Once reflection was complete and bracketed through epoché, literature was used to frame the research problem and set the stage for inquiry (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Semi-structured interviews investigated the processes of reflection and description with which the leaders in high performance community colleges experienced the phenomenon (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The phenomenological approach allowed the lived experiences of multiple leaders to be explored in the investigation of the topic (Moustakas, 1990). The participants were leaders of community colleges who were identified by the Aspen Institute as high performing in labor market, completion, equitable, and learning outcomes. The study included interviews with 17 leaders in community colleges included in the list of the top 120 community colleges in the nation in 2013. The interviews focused on effective leadership strategies for achieving high performance in community college outcomes. The Aspen Institute's list of the top 120 community colleges in the nation identified the sample from which interview participants were selected, and the AACC leadership competencies guided the interview process and leadership constructs. The semi-structured interview questions focused on effective strategies for leaders defined as the organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism within high performing community colleges. The findings may not be transferrable or generalizable beyond those leaders who met the identified criteria.

Interviews were conducted using audio and visual technology. Once the leaders signed a confidentiality agreement, the interviews were recorded using Webex©

technology and transcribed using a professional transcription service. Narrative data collected in the interviews was reviewed and analyzed through the horizontalization process and utilized NVivo® software for data analysis (QSR International, 2012). The NVivo® software has many capabilities; however, the hard analytic work was the responsibility of the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In-depth interviewing is most often the sole data collection method in phenomenological research because the objective of the interview is to elicit the lived experience of the phenomenon (Starks & Trinidad, 2007); therefore, the research interviewer was the instrument of data collection.

In data analysis, statements were identified from the transcripts that provided information about the experiences of the leaders (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Once those significant statements were identified, themes, meaning units, and evidence were identified by clustering statements. The themes provided a description of what was experienced and how leaders in high performance community colleges experienced it. In the final stage of the conducted phenomenological study, the essence or intuitive integration of leaders' experiences was explored. This process can be compared to the thematic analysis in case study analysis and in the search for a theoretical contribution in grounded theory. Phenomenology is unlike the traditional methods of scientific inquiry because it returns things to the experience and meanings of that experience, allowing users to yield astonishing new insights into a complex process (Ehrich, 2005). Phenomenological research is most appropriate for research topics with a strong human dimension.

Sample

Given the limited number of community colleges that can be studied, the study used purposeful sampling to isolate leaders with a transparently observable situation — those who were community college leaders in Aspen Institute’s list of top 120 community colleges (Eisenhardt, 1989). The primary data source was interviews with top leaders at community colleges identified by the Aspen Institute as the 120 highest performing in the nation in 2013.

Participants were contacted regarding the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the reason the participants were chosen. The inclusion criteria utilized the Aspen Institute of Community College Excellence program, which names the top 120 community colleges based on completion, labor market, learning and equitable outcomes (Aspen Institute, 2013). The name of the president at each institution was located through website directory searches. Permission was obtained from the appropriate official(s) at the Aspen Institute and from those presidents in the top 120 community colleges in the nation identified by the Aspen Institute by sending an email directly to the college presidents requesting their participation in the study.

Once the presidents initially agreed to participate in the study, they were sent additional information about the study and its purpose. After an initial review of the information, interviews were scheduled, contact information was confirmed, and the informed consent form was sent via email. With follow-up emails, participants were encouraged to return the signed consent form via email, fax, or postal mail prior to the scheduled interview.

Considerations regarding budget, detail requirements, time commitment,

availability of the participants, and data collection methods contributed to the sample size of 17 community college leaders. As suggested by Salmons (2010), a standard guideline for qualitative research was not used because phenomena need to be discussed only once in order to have a significant finding. The purpose of seeking 17 community college leaders for participation was to provide the depth recommended in the investigation of the topic; however, the final sample size was determined by the point at which the data categories developed in this study met saturation (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Measures

Exploring effective strategies for achieving high performance in community college outcomes may be beneficial in understanding leadership in high performing community colleges. Qualitative research seeks to describe, decode, translate, and find meaning in phenomena and does not focus on frequencies (Cooper & Schindler, 2011). To date, the issue of high performance has not been explored through the lens of leadership practices and strategies. Research confirms the impact of leader behaviors and strategies on organizational performance and outcome achievement. In community colleges, student completion and student learning can be described as key measures of organizational performance (Wang, Tsui, & Xin, 2011).

In educational research, scholars have identified student factors which impact student completion, created prediction models for student risk, and suggested institutional intervention strategies to help students find success, yet performance in outcomes such as student completion and learning at community colleges remains sub-optimal. The research does not provide an explanation for the community colleges that are achieving high performance, against all odds, with an increasingly high-risk population (Burns,

2010). Similarly, there are other measures of high performance in community colleges (e.g., high performance in course completion or labor market alignment); however, scholars still lack a framework or theoretical foundation for the lived experience of leaders at high performing community colleges. The themes of those lived experiences may provide insight into the impact of leader strategies on community college performance. The present research project describes the lived experience of the top leaders in an effort to identify the strategies which may contribute to high performance in community college outcomes.

The interview data provided the essence of the leader experience, and the approach provided depth and detailed descriptions of the strategies included in the leaders' lived experiences. The themes analyzed from the interview data illustrate those leader strategies, which may impact high performance. The phenomenological study was most appropriate because it seeks to describe, and therefore the interview questions did not define what is known but rather sought a description of the leaders' lived experiences and effective strategies for achieving high performance in community college outcomes (Ehrich, 2005). The participants viewed the phenomenon of leadership strategy as a conscious experience; therefore, the leaders were able to report how they felt, thought about, observed, or responded to the phenomena (Dowling, 2007). The approach also fit the topic because phenomenology assumes there is no subject-object split (Moustakas, 1994); the research is based on the experiences of the leader. High performance strategies have not been examined through the lens of the experiences and strategies of the leader.

Leadership is context-sensitive because it is a relationship among persons embedded within a setting at any given moment (Bryman, Stephens, & Campo, 1996).

The Aspen Institute's performance metrics removed the leader experience from high performance outcomes. The lived experiences of the leaders inform the context and impact the environment for all stakeholders. The phenomenological methodological approach aligns with the topic of interest for several reasons, including a lack of research in this area.

In the present study, the essence of the leaders described their lived experience and provided an in-depth description of leadership strategies in community colleges. The study also assumed the lived experience of the leader cannot be separated from high performance, an assumption that aligns the study with the phenomenological methodological approach.

Data Collection

In-depth interviewing is most often the primary data collection method in phenomenological research; consequently, the objective of the interviews is to elicit the lived experience of the phenomenon (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). In this study, the researcher served as the instrument of data collection. There are several goals in phenomenological research, which include describing the phenomenon, apprehending the structure of the phenomena, and understanding the foundation or the essences of the phenomenon (Ehrich, 2005). Permission was obtained from the appropriate official(s) at the Aspen Institute and from those presidents in the top 120 community colleges in the nation identified by the Aspen Institute by sending an email directly to the college presidents requesting their participation in the study. The email included an email address and phone number as a follow-up to the conversation so the research candidate could ask follow-up questions.

Three data collection instruments were identified for this study:

1. Field notes,
2. Interview guide,
3. Member checking notes.

Leaders were contacted via their email address and asked if they were willing to participate in the interview process. When the response was affirmative, participants were sent consent documents, a brief description of the interview process, and the AACCC leadership framework definitions. Then an interview time was arranged with study participants. The interview process document included information stating that the interview would also be audio recorded and transcribed, and the research participants had the opportunity to review the transcribed interview event. Interviews were conducted using Webex©. Study participants were asked to schedule the interview in a private location during a time when they were free of distractions and would not be overheard or otherwise compromised during the interview process. Every effort was made to establish and maintain a positive rapport with the participants throughout the entire research process.

An interview guide was created (Appendix B) using open-ended questions to invite study participants to explore effective leadership strategies for achieving high performance in community college outcomes (Osborne, 1994). The questions focused on effective strategies for leaders defined as the organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism within the lived experiences of leaders in high performance community colleges. The interview questions were designed to explore these factors without leading

participants to conclusions or responses. The same initial questions were asked of all consenting participants, and different follow-up questions were asked of each participant based on his or her responses to the initial questions using a ladder approach. The semi-formal interview guide was developed for submission to the Institutional Review Board and used during audio and visual interviews.

Field notes were written during and immediately after each interview; field notes of each interview were reviewed before and after the transcription (Van Manen, 1990). Additions to the field notes were dated to keep track of the differences between immediate impressions and analytic impressions. Typed memos identified significant statements and began to establish clusters; memos were iteratively developed over the course of the study. The memos became more complex as data clustering increased in complexity.

Research clusters were developed as the audio files and transcriptions of each interview were reviewed. The notes consisted of the impressions of each study participant's views and experiences of strategies that contribute to high performance outcomes in community colleges (Van Manen, 1990), questions that were not answered, or any other observations. The research process included a formal clustering process, which took place during and after the review of the audio files and typed transcripts of interviews. The clustering process included the identification of significant statements in the lived experiences of participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The data collection process ended with member checking to establish credibility. Following data collection, preliminary findings were reported to the participants, asking for critical commentary on findings; the critiques of the findings were included in data

analysis. Participants evaluated and provided feedback about the accuracy of the initial understanding of the phenomenon; additionally, they confirmed the analysis was accurate and authentically captured the complexity of their lives without including my own bias and distortion (Buchbinder, 2010). Member checking information was transcribed to include handwritten notes in data analysis. The purpose of the methods was to pursue data collection to support the categorical development to the point of concept saturation, occurring when the data are stable and patterns are unlikely to change (Hansen, 2005). The digital recording of the interviews, the field notes, and the member checking comprised the methodological triangulation technique to corroborate evidence among the research participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data Analysis

A rigorous data collection and analysis plan was followed by coding, creating themes, and using triangulation methods to validate the themes. The data analysis process used the modified Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994). Six steps were followed throughout the data analysis procedure: Coding, re-reading, and member checking were conducted while data was still being collected to make the process immersive and authentic (Liamputtong, 2009). Triangulation evaluated the data and drew conclusions by verifying the data with other kinds of data. The semi-structured interview data was also triangulated (Konecki, 2008) during the analysis stage. Feedback from participants was used to determine areas of agreement as well as areas of divergence. Triangulation aimed for the generation of more knowledge because confidence levels increase in the outcomes when triangulation methods are employed (Konecki, 2008). The study avoided the potential pitfalls of lack of rigor, ethical issues,

and integration by following a strict data analysis process.

The following steps were repeated for each field note, interview, and member checking data element collected during the study:

1. *Reading and re-reading the full transcription.* Each data element was read several times for immersion in the data. Audio recordings were listened to and notes were read to enter the participant's world and become actively engaged in the data (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).
2. *Initial coding in NVivo10.* Naming sets/chunks of the data with a label or a name coded each piece of data. The codes are phrases or words which symbolically assign a summative and salient phrase to capture the essence of the data (Liamputtong, 2009). The initial coding compared data to data, data to code, code to code, code to category, category to category, and relationships between category both within the same interview event and between/across two or more interview events.
3. *Developing emergent themes and searching for connections across emergent themes through horizontalization* (Moustakas, 1994). The interpretive thematic analysis phase of the data analysis process encompassed the identifying, analyzing, and reporting of patterns and themes within the data (Thorne, Reimer Kirkham & MacDonald-Eames, 1997). Once each transcript was read and sense was made from the data, the data was read across each participant to see repeated patterns of meaning (Jacelon & O'Dell, 2005). Coding played a significant role in thematic analysis.

4. *Moving to the data from the next interview.* Each step was repeated with the leader's interview, and then patterns were looked at across interview data. The pattern and theme analysis occurred across all data sets to revise the initially developed themes. The analysis was mapped to define and name the themes until the point at which the themes were refined and presented with clarity (Williamson & Long, 2005).
5. *Interpretation.* There are several levels of analysis and interpretation in qualitative research. Qualitative data requires the researcher to push beyond the presentation of data or theme summaries to explore hidden meanings (Jacelon & O'Dell, 2005).

Credibility and Transferability

In qualitative research, the data analysis, categorization, and coding methods can affect the accuracy and validity of the findings. Several strategies were employed to increase accuracy, dependability, and validity of findings, including developing a personal disclosure statement, using multiple sources of data, collecting new information from new informants to confirm findings, and creating and holding several rival explanations to explain the findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). The validity of qualitative research was defined by the trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility of the research and the findings as accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, and the readers.

Procedures for judging the quality of qualitative research emphasize procedural, methodological, interpretive, and presentation rigor. The standards of rigor capture the means by which the study procedures show integrity and competence. Research with

rigor presents statements about initial methodological considerations and prior experiences, rationale for the qualitative approach, explanations of sampling and data collection methods, analysis of bias, relationships, and implications for professional practice (Kline, 2008). In this study, multiple methods were used to ensure validity of the research study and to avoid the risk of bias.

Sample selection, rigor, valid procedures, bias avoidance, trustworthiness, and quality are all critical considerations throughout the research process. Problems are encountered in qualitative research when a researcher does not take the time to master the basic principles of research procedures (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2005). In the present study, there was a focus on clarity and thoroughness in each phase as the risk was far too great to abandon any principle or procedural guideline.

Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board in September, 2013. It exemplified the highest ideals of professional conduct. The highest ethical ideals include strong relationships of trust, integrity defined as accuracy, honesty, and truthfulness, and respect for the dignity and worth of all people and their rights (Academy of Management, 2012). The clarity and comprehensiveness of the design contributed to the effectiveness and ethical principles of the research. Kuriloff, Andrus, and Ravitch (2011) suggested qualitative research is an act of interpretation; every interpretation is an ethical act. The focus of the interpretations is the lives of people. The study results may have implications for policies, procedures, and processes in higher education beyond those institutions that

participate in the study; therefore, understanding the breadth of ethical considerations within an organization is essential.

A critical consideration in the study included protecting the rights of participants; therefore, each participant was treated equally, and the process was free from coercion. The individuals in this study voluntarily entered into the research after they received adequate information on which to base their decision (Bryant, 2005). Participants were guaranteed confidentiality. Any information obtained in connection with this study remained confidential and would be disclosed only with permission or as required by law. In addition, participants were guaranteed that employees from their community colleges would not be present at the interview nor have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution prevented individual comments from having any negative repercussions.

The aspects of ethical research included in this study were intellectual honesty and due diligence in referencing and including previous research. All aspects of the American Psychological Association (APA) ethical standards, including the boundaries of competence, were followed during the study. The boundaries of competence guidelines require researchers to receive training, experience, consultation, or supervision necessary to ensure compliance with the factors associated with differences in participants. Problems, duties, or research that would cause harm to any individual involved in the process were avoided (APA, 2011).

In addition to avoiding harm, a mentor supported the research study to ensure adequate training and education in establishing participant rapport, sensitivity, and useful and appropriate expansion of participant responses. The potential for bias exists in all studies but can be more significant when researchers have historical interest or

experience in the subject area. Given those perspectives, all sources are either primary sources or sources that have been thoroughly analyzed for quality. In addition, all data were included because omitting data would be considered falsifying results (Bryant, 2005). Considering the study parameters, the risk to participants was minimal. The benefits of the research outweigh the risks to participants as long as the research is conducted with the highest ethical standards.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore effective leadership strategies for achieving high performance in community college outcomes. The study followed the phenomenological model of reduction, description, and a search for the essence of lived experiences. The study included interviews with 17 leaders in community colleges included in the list of the top 120 community colleges in the nation in 2013. The interviews focused on effective leadership strategies for achieving high performance in community college outcomes. Coding, creating themes, and using triangulation methods to validate the themes followed a rigorous data collection and analysis plan. The study exemplified the highest ideals of professional conduct including strong relationships of trust, integrity defined as accuracy, honesty, and truthfulness, and respect for the dignity and worth of all people and their rights. The following chapter presents a summary of participants' responses to questions posed during a one-hour scheduled WebEx© interview. The analysis of major themes is presented through the participant responses to questions presented in the interview guide.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

Introduction

The qualitative phenomenological study explored effective leadership strategies for achieving high performance in community college outcomes. The study defined effective leadership strategies as the organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013) present in the lived experiences of leaders in high performance community colleges. All 17 participants were presidents currently leading high performance community colleges listed as some of the top 120 community colleges in the nation by the Aspen Institute (2013). The presidents participated in a semi-structured interview that lasted approximately one hour.

This chapter presents a summary of participants' responses to questions posed during one-hour scheduled WebEx© interviews. The analysis of major themes is presented through the participant responses to questions presented in the interview guide. The interview guide was framed by the American Association of Community College's guidelines for leadership competencies: advocacy, collaboration, communication, organizational strategy, resource management, and professionalism (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). This chapter builds on the previous chapters

by providing a description of the sample, a summary of leaders' lived experiences, and a detailed analysis of themes by leadership competency.

Research Question

The research question emerged from the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 1 (Figure 1). The study sought to address the research question: How do community college leaders' strategies impact high performance in community college outcomes? The interview questions explored the strategies related to the leadership constructs of organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism in high performance community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013):

1. What collaborative processes do you employ as a leader?
2. What advocacy strategies do you consider most important for a community college leader?
3. What resource management and development strategies are important to employ on a regular basis?
4. What communication strategies influence high performance outcomes in community colleges?
5. What aspects of professionalism impact and promote high performance outcomes in community colleges?
6. What do you believe are the most effective organizational strategies for promoting high performance outcomes in community colleges?
7. What specific actions (from those strategies) have contributed most to high performance at your community college?

Description of the Sample

Seventeen presidents of high performing community colleges were interviewed for the study. The interviews were conducted between October 7 and October 25, 2013.

Email invitations were sent to each president of the 120 top community colleges in the nation identified by the Aspen Institute (2013). Of the total sample, 21 presidents agreed to participate in the study and five declined based on personal or professional circumstances. Four presidents were not interviewed because of schedule conflicts or lack of response to follow-up information.

The participants' years of experience in the presidential role ranged from 2-21 years; 11 of the participants were male and six were female. The location of the colleges was dispersed throughout the United States, and their enrollment ranged from 1,400 students to 13,114 students (Table 1).

Table 1. *Geographic and Enrollment Characteristics of Community Colleges*

U.S. Quadrant	Enrollment (2012)
Central	1176
North-central	1400
Southeast	1498
Central	1621
North-central	2725
Southwest	3748
Central	3804
North-central	3958
North-central	4068
North-central	4481
Central	5006
Central	5251
Northeast	6811
Northwest	8669
Northeast	10,048
Southwest	10,282

Note. Student enrollment source: IPEDS (2013).

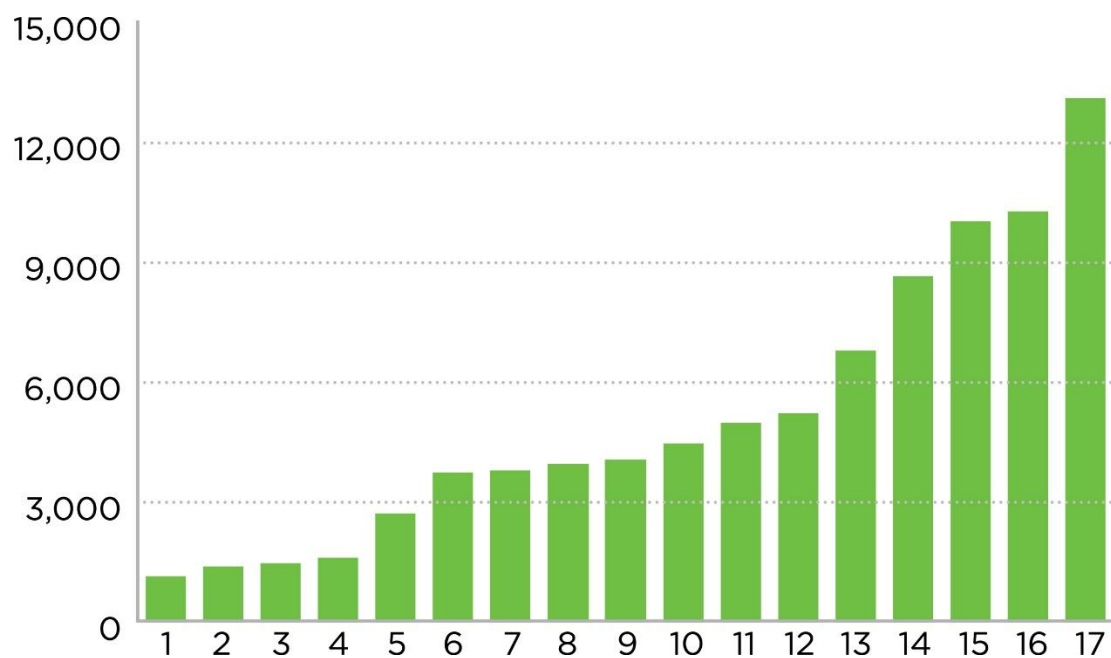


Figure 2. *Enrollment characteristics of community colleges*

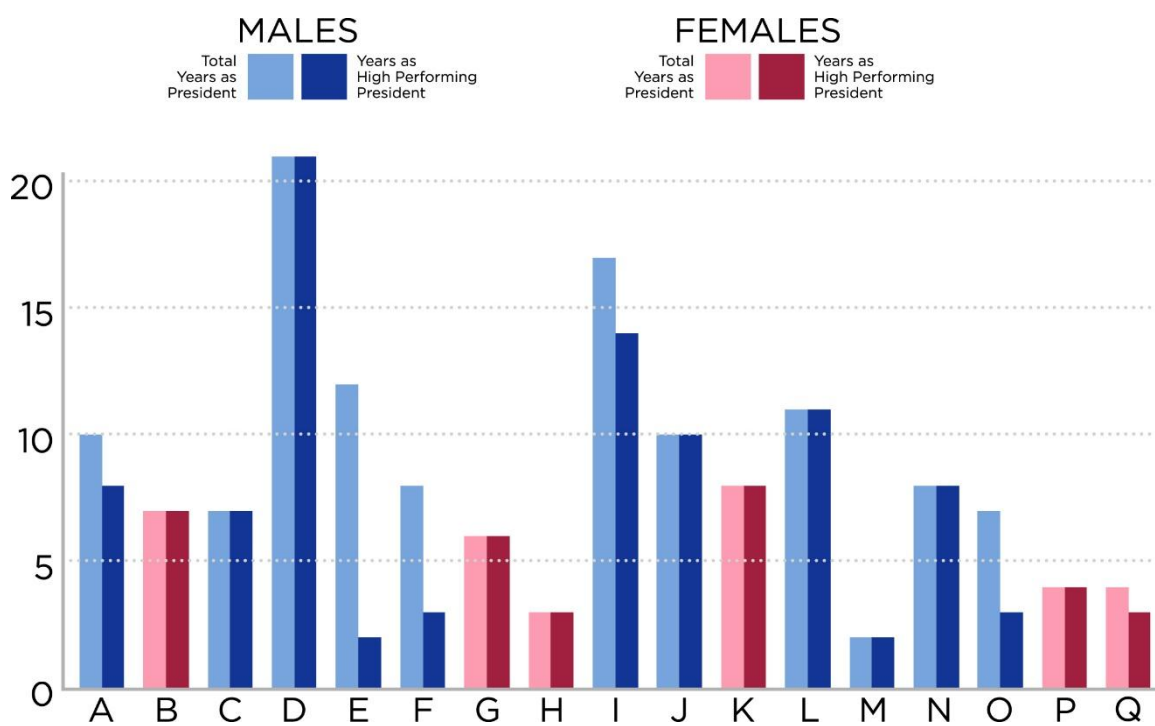


Figure 3. *Tenure and gender of community college president participants*

Table 2. *Tenure of Participants*

nVivo Code	President of High Performing College	Years as President	Gender
President A	8	10	F
President B	7	7	M
President C	7	7	M
President D	21	21	M
President E	2	12	M
President F	3	8	M
President G	6	6	F
President H	3	3	F
President I	14	17	M
President J	10	10	M
President K	8	8	F
President L	11	11	M
President M	2	2	M
President N	8	8	M
President O	3	7	M
President P	4	4	F
President Q	4	3	F
<i>Mean</i>	7.11	8.47	

This chapter presents the analysis and observation of the data from the participant interviews, field notes and member checking note collections.

Research Methodology Applied to Data Analysis

The rigorous data collection and analysis process followed coding, creating themes, and triangulating data to validate the themes. The modified Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data was employed throughout data analysis (Moustakas, 1994). Six steps were utilized throughout the data analysis procedure. Many of the steps occurred throughout the research process, including coding, re-reading, and member checking, and steps were conducted while data were collected to make the process more immersive and authentic (Liamputtong, 2009). Triangulation was used to evaluate the

conclusions drawn from data by verifying the conclusions with other kinds of data.

Triangulation generated knowledge and increased confidence levels in the outcomes of the research (Konecki, 2008).

Once data were collected through field notes, transcribed interviews, and member checking notes, the data were coded and analyzed. The audio interviews were reduced to single-spaced typed transcripts. The field and member checking notes were transcribed into single-spaced pages of text. Recorded interviews were listened to and transcripts were reviewed prior to coding and analyzing the data. The results included 561 single-spaced pages from all data collected.

Themes were developed in two ways for the study. First, the interview protocol for the semi-structured interviews was intentionally developed. The American Association for Community Colleges had developed a framework for effective community college leadership (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). The findings of its work provided the foundational themes for the interview questions: (a) advocacy, (b) collaboration, (c) communication, (d) organizational strategy, (e) professionalism, and (f) resource management. Second, themes emerged independently in the data during the course of the interview, field note, and member checking note data analysis. Repeated ideas were grouped into common research themes.

Beyond the intentionally coded themes from the American Association of Community Colleges leadership competencies, the following 21 themes emerged from the data:

1. Community focus
2. Decision-making strategies

3. Employee engagement
4. Focus
5. High standards
6. Humility
7. Integrity
8. Listening
9. Organizational fit
10. Organizational culture
11. Passion for the community college mission
12. Professional development
13. Reputation
14. Risk taking
15. Shared governance
16. Student-focused
17. Team development
18. Transparency
19. Trust
20. Visibility
21. Visionary

Data was coded from the interview transcripts, field note transcripts, and member checking notes into the structured AACC themes and the recurring themes.

Table 3. *Theme occurrence - AACCC leader competencies*

Number	Theme	# Occurrences	Percentage of Total
1	Advocacy	56	0.064
2	Collaboration	59	0.067
3	Communication	88	0.101
4	Organizational Strategy	84	0.097
5	Professionalism	35	0.040
6	Resource Management	121	0.139

Table 4. *Theme occurrence – common themes*

Number	Theme	# Occurrences	Percentage of Total
2	Community focus	23	0.026
3	Decision-making strategies	23	0.026
4	Employee engagement	27	0.031
5	Focus	25	0.029
6	High standards	32	0.037
7	Humility	15	0.017
8	Integrity	20	0.023
9	Listening	19	0.022
10	Organizational fit	6	0.006
11	Organizational culture	37	0.043
12	Partnerships	23	0.026
12	Passion for community college mission	19	0.022
14	Professional development	17	0.020
15	Reputation	11	0.013
16	Risk taking	15	0.017
17	Shared governance	21	0.024
18	Student-focused	20	0.023
19	Team development	36	0.041
20	Transparency	18	0.020
21	Trust	20	0.023
22	Visibility	16	0.018
23	Visionary	18	0.020

Results were developed utilizing the themes and their occurrence in the data. A total of 869 data points were marked in the data and analyzed to establish the findings

discussed later in the chapter. The findings emerged based on the data occurring most frequently by participants in thematic areas.

Table 5. *Emergent findings: Intentional and common theme alignment*

Number	AACC Theme	Theme Alignment	Theme Alignment	Theme Alignment	Theme Alignment
1	Advocacy	Community focus	Passion for cc mission	Reputation	Visibility
2	Collaboration	Listening	Trust	Shared governance	Organizational culture
3	Communication	Decision making strategies	Transparency	Visionary	Trust
4	Organizational Strategy	Focus	Risk taking	Organizational culture	Student focus
5	Professionalism	High standards	Humility	Integrity	Organizational culture
6	Resource Management	Employee engagement	Professional development	Team development	

Presentation of Data and Results of the Analysis

Rich description of data was provided through the broad range of participant leadership experiences. The purpose of the presentation of data and results analysis section is to provide an understanding of the participants' lived experiences through their own voices (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The coding, analysis, and alignment of themes and data resulted in the emergence of several findings related to each American Association of Community College leader competency and several overall themes, discussed in Chapter 5. A list of emergent findings is discussed throughout the remainder of this chapter. The findings emerged based on intentional and common theme alignments provided in Table 5.

Advocacy Strategies (Question 2)

Successful leader advocacy is defined as valuing and promoting diversity and inclusion, demonstrating a passion for and a commitment to the mission of community colleges, advancing lifelong learning, supporting a learner-centered environment, and representing the community college in the local community and throughout the broader educational community (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). The strategies for effective community college advocacy presented in literature were building meaning and a shared purpose, focusing on learning and inquisition, developing a core message to inspire commitment, building strong partnerships, and concentrating on solid relationships with key stakeholders.

Following a review of the AACC (2013) definition of advocacy, participants were asked, “What advocacy strategies do you consider most important for a community college leader?” This question did not define advocacy as internal, legislative, or focused on the mission of community colleges, so participants discussed advocacy strategies based on their lived experiences. Effective advocacy for the presidents involved in the study stemmed from their passion for the mission of community colleges. President L summarized the essence of this passion:

We’re the last equalizer in this society. I mean, without education, people don’t have an opportunity to achieve what it is that they want to achieve. They don’t have an opportunity to live a fulfilling and engaging life, you know. You just can’t do that. You can’t do this work without being excited about that. Every time I talk to somebody whose life was changed because of what we do, and I’m not taking credit for it. I mean, that’s what happens in the classroom and with the relationships that get formed with faculty. So I’m not trying to say that it’s a presidential thing, but I think that’s where the juice comes from for me - I know as an organization we’re having a positive impact on people’s lives. And there’s nothing greater than that.

There were several additional findings related to advocacy strategies in high performing community colleges. These are presented in more detail below.

Advocacy Theme 1

The first theme that emerged from the data is that *high performance presidents are community-focused, but they are purposeful in developing a strategy for their level of community involvement*. Fourteen of 17 presidents (82%) discussed the strategic approach, message, and purpose in community college advocacy. There was a strong recognition that the president could not be at every event, in every service club, or giving a speech at every function. President N discussed the strategy involved in effective advocacy:

We made a conscious effort over the last 10 years of being involved in the community. I think in the past the president was the main person on things, but now we strategically approach our involvement. Whether it's in service clubs, United Way agencies, or Chamber events, we make sure that we're represented. And that has really has been a number one focus — our staff like it. People like getting out and representing the college, but I really think it's helped us be successful from the standpoint of the community. It's elevated our image and what people see of our college in the community.

Similarly, President L discussed the purpose and messaging in community involvement advocacy:

The mission of community colleges is, is to serve the communities, the regions that we operate in, but I think it's much more than that. I think our mission is to create the kinds of communities that people want to live in. You have to know when to be an advocate and when to stop. You just can't be out promoting all the time, because people get kind of tired of someone that's shamelessly self-promoting all the time. So I think you've got to be, have to be cognizant of how you're being received and when it's appropriate to talk about your institution, but a steady diet of that, people kind of get turned off, too.

Advocacy Theme 2

The second primary theme in this area is that *effective advocacy efforts diligently focus on telling the story of community college impact*. Thirteen of 17 participating presidents (76%) discussed the importance of telling the story of community college impact. The president has the responsibility to be the public figure for the community college and to ensure the story is told. President H stated “the biggest strategy that I use in terms of advocacy is connecting people with the mission and the face of the college, which is our students and our faculty and our programs.” Throughout the interviews, telling the community college story was discussed in the context of visibility of the community college president with key stakeholders:

A president has to be willing to explore these relationships in the community, I think, is really important for advocacy, because that’s how you get the message out there. If nobody knows you and you’re just kind of stuck behind the closed doors of the college, it’s a real problem. (President B)

Beyond telling the story on a local level, community college presidents have a responsibility to tell the story of the community college mission. President A summarized the responsibility of mission advocacy.

Many people outside of the community college do not understand the breadth of the mission that we have. And so in every opportunity you need to take advantage of that, whether it is a social event or a business event that many of us attend probably two or three sometimes in an evening, but to be out there, to be representing the institution, to be always talking about the great things that are happening at our colleges, what our needs are, what our challenges are and the opportunities that we have.

Telling the story was also discussed in the context of consistently correcting misperceptions and misbeliefs about the impact of community colleges; according to President G:

I believe educational elitism is alive and well in the United States. And so one of the things that I'm sure community college presidents, no matter where they are, still do battle with is this notion of it's just a community college, or I'm just going to go to the community college to get my gen eds out of the way. I ask others to help me reframe that language, there's nothing "just" about a community college education, and you're not getting gen eds "out of the way" because they're foundational to your success as a student. But I think the myth about community colleges is still rampant.

Advocacy Theme 3

The third primary theme relating to advocacy was that *relationship building is the foundation of advocacy efforts*. Fifteen of 17 participating presidents (88%) relayed the importance of building relationships to establish a foundation of advocacy efforts. The relationship efforts are based on mutual respect and understanding; for example, President Q noted that "It is getting to know people so that when you do need something that you can go ask, and that's not the first time they've seen your face."

Similarly, President I stated,

Relationships have really been built from a lot of communication and a lot of collaborative sharing and respect for the differences and the departures of responsibility that we have. We have said to them if you need our help, we will be there, and we will never ask you for something that you cannot give us. And that has worked extremely well. As a result, when they are able to help, they have done so and done so with tremendous generosity. When we've had difficulty and they are not in a position to help, we have gone in and said, listen, if you need us to take less, we will take less.

Mutual respect and understanding were also discussed in the context of being present and available. Relationships extend beyond the responsibility for the president to

show up. Visibility and authentic involvement in relationships were mentioned throughout the data. President N summarized:

When you're involved with these outside entities, it's more than just showing up. You've got to be somebody that's engaged and follow through in what you're saying you're going to do and that type of thing that makes you successful. I think people kind of get turned off if they see somebody and their name is on the roster of board of directors, for example, but there's not a lot of direct involvement or engagement on an ongoing basis.

Advocacy Theme 4

The fourth primary finding associated with advocacy was that *advocacy significantly elevates the reputation of the community college*. Fourteen of 17 presidents (82%) discussed reputation and image-building as significant benefits of advocacy efforts. Advocacy elevates the reputation of the college if the most prominent public figure (president) of the college has a positive reputation. According to President A,

Whether that's internally or whether that's externally, you need to be able to have the kind of demeanor and the kind of reputation where people know that you are as transparent as you possibly can be and that your interest and your agenda is to help the institution thrive and to serve our community. And as long as you approach it that way and people understand that you're honest and you have the right kind of approach, they respond to that.

The president cannot escape the level of responsibility. There were several presidents who noted their presence and demeanor as more watched and monitored than they realized. The actions, words, and reputation of the president build or diminish the image of the college. In response, President I summarized a transparent advocacy approach:

We discuss anything that seems to be important to maintain the relationship that's been valuable. And that really comes down to them being able to say they are

proud of this institution and us being able to say that we are succeeding in getting the kind of support that we needed.

Collaboration Strategies (Question 1)

Effective collaboration in leadership is defined as embracing and employing the diversity of individuals and cultures, demonstrating cultural competencies, catalyzing involvement and commitment of all stakeholders, and building and leveraging networks and partnerships to advance the goals of the college (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). The strategies for effective community college collaboration presented in the literature review were awareness of key stakeholder groups, strategy in partnerships and collaboration efforts, recognizing the value of internal collaboration, having a clear purpose for every collaborate arrangement and partnership, and serving as the champion of community college collaborations.

Following a review of the AACC (2013) definition of collaboration, participants were asked, “What collaborative processes do you employ as a leader?” This question did not define collaboration as an internal or external effort so participant responses varied based on lived experiences; participants used the terms collaboration and partnership interchangeably. There were several findings related to collaboration strategies. President C summarized the need for leaders to focus on collaboration in order to move the college toward high performance:

I think not that long ago I can remember where those sorts of partnerships were talked about but institutions really didn’t pursue. We tried to be our own kingdoms. The reality is, I guess that all these different kingdoms out there, these silos, really look great, but we can do a hell of a lot more good work if it we take some of those silos down and work together as partners. Let’s not worry about whether or not the high schools are sending us students who require developmental education. Let’s identify a strategy working together to ensure that they’re coming into the higher education sector with the appropriate skills. I think

in the past we spent more time in education pointing fingers and trying to do things on our own.

There were several findings related to effective collaboration strategies in high performing community colleges, all of which are outlined below.

Collaboration Strategies Theme 1

The first collaboration theme is that *informal interactions and purposeful listening build trust. Trust is essential for effective collaboration and partnership efforts*, a theme that occurred throughout data collection in several areas. Trust occurred 32 times, and listening occurred 35 times in the data. Fifteen of 17 participating presidents (88%) discussed the importance of informal interactions and purposeful listening in collaboration. President A reflected that

It is really important to listen, to be able to understand what people are saying and the issues that they have but also to be able to interpret that in a clear way and to let them know that you understand. Sometimes you really can't do anything to help their problem, but knowing that I am there to help them to do their jobs means an awful lot.

Similarly, President D conveyed the importance of listening by noting that

Listening is extremely important, why do people not want to change, trying to hear that exactly, and then explaining to them why it's important to change. And if we don't change, then the competition is going to put us out of business. If we don't change, then our students are not going to be in demand by business and industry. And I think it's important to be clear on that, to show people why it's important and then to help them in any way they can be helped.

President G also discussed strategies used to develop trust among colleagues:

I have built up a lot of trust from faculty all these years, and so as this next challenging time advances, I have to cut \$2 million over the next two-and-a-half years out of our operating budget. And so as we face this, the trust that we've built hopefully will carry us a little bit, but, you know, we need to engage them all in the conversation. And my message to them has been, "Ask me a question and I

will answer it.” You may not like the answer and I may be missing or misunderstanding your question, but, you know, we have to keep the conversations going.

Collaboration Strategies Theme 2

The second key theme with regard to collaboration strategies is that *internal collaboration builds synergy for high performance*. Fifteen of 17 of participating presidents (88%) discussed the value of internal collaboration and effective governance as essential components of effective collaboration. Shared governance was discussed by most participating presidents, but the description, definition, and satisfaction varied greatly. Regardless of the shared governance model, all of the participants provided examples of internal collaboration; for example, President O discussed that

So really, the faculty talks about shared governance, but that ultimately is where the decisions are made about the future of the college. So to me, collaboration begins with that authentic and genuine engagement, participation, deep thinking in all those kinds of major college bodies that really recommend to the college president directions and futures for the college. So it starts there. And, you know, that takes a lot of discipline and a lot of work, because a lot of people say they want to be in a collaborative environment, but then when it comes time to roll their sleeves up or pick up a shovel, they don’t really want to do it.

President B noted that

Governance is extremely important at this institution. And as a former faculty leader, that’s kind of near and dear to my heart anyway. And so we work very hard here to collaborate at a number of levels. As a college, because governance is so important, everything we do tends to go through the governance system, and we work really effectively.

Collaboration Strategies Theme 3

The third prominent theme in collaboration strategies is that *effective leaders are committed to win-win collaboration efforts. Stakeholder requests are made when the*

timing of collaborative efforts facilitates mutual benefits. Twelve of 17 participating presidents (71%) discussed a win-win approach to external collaboration and partnership. Partnership and collaborative efforts require an awareness of appropriate request guidelines, timing, and commitments.

You cannot be successful as a college president without having an attitude where you explore win-win opportunities. And whether that is within the institution or outside of the institution, whether it's relationships with government leaders or relationships with business and industry and service providers, you have to look for opportunities for each party to be able to benefit. And by doing that, it creates a synergy that is very positive and it really builds upon itself. (President A)

When participating presidents did not have the knowledge, history, or relationships to be fully aware of mutual benefits, they ask; for example, President M mentioned that

We have businesses and industries that we work with in our region, and I went out and I met with not all of them but a good number of them, and I went and I asked them a few questions. What is it that they think of when they think of our college that matters to what they do every day. And then I asked them if they don't think of us every day, how could we become a partner to them that truly is engaged and is value added for them.

Collaboration Strategies Theme 4

The fourth major theme that emerged under collaboration strategies is that *high performing presidents are the champion of collaboration efforts with key stakeholders. Rather than token involvement, the presidents engage in collaboration efforts.* Ten of 17 participating presidents (59%) shared the importance of presidents championing the collaboration efforts for the community college. Effectively championing collaboration efforts involves several stages of collaboration and an extraordinary amount of time.

When you are trying to collaborate with someone and you don't have that relationship built yet, what you first have to do is you have to cooperate. So you first start cooperating with each other. And that's what I did with some of the industries. They had some concerns. Then three or four or eight or nine years ago they had tried to partner with us, and they had not found our institution receptive, and so I had to counteract that when I came on board. So I just tried to cooperate with them and understand what is it that they, you know, would find helpful. Then we moved from cooperation to coordination. Then we tried to coordinate our efforts. So, okay, if you're looking at starting a new venture in your business or you're trying to gather skills in your existing work force or a new work force, how do I coordinate those efforts? And then finally, it's getting to the collaborative part that when we built a lab. We had existing industries come in and then offer help either in equipment or in technical expertise or in training the faculty or becoming the adjunct faculty, and now we're collaborative about it. (President M)

Similarly, President F noted the level of engagement in collaborative work:

I did take the time to go out and meet with countless numbers of people to develop the acquaintance and which later turned into a friendship and a very good working relationship. So it is an incredible amount of time, but it's well worth it.

Collaboration Strategies Theme 5

The fifth major theme embedded in collaboration strategies is that *collaborating creates a high performance culture and builds ownership in initiatives designed to achieve high performance*. Fifteen of 17 participating presidents (88%) discussed the value of collaboration in building initiative and strategy ownership to achieve high performance.

So while you need to actually get ownership in what you're doing, a lot of the changes that we have, that we've had over the years that I've been at this institution, you really need to get people behind you, in front of you, and all the way around you. (President H)

So all of that is a part of a program, a piece of what I think is the formula here, anyway, of being open, sharing, making sure everybody knows what we're doing, why we're doing it, where we're going, what we want to achieve, and being able

to keep everybody included and involved. The politics of inclusion is what we are all about here. (President I)

Communication Strategies (Question 4)

Effective leader communication is defined as disseminating and supporting policies and strategies; creating and maintaining open communications regarding resources, priorities, and expectations; listening actively to understand, comprehend, analyze and engage; and projecting confidence and responding responsibly (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). There are several effective communication strategies supported in literature that add to the AACC definition. Those strategies include broad involvement in communication, communication throughout decision-making processes, motivating and inspiring through communication, authenticity in communication, and recognizing communication protocol. Following a review of the AACC (2013) definition of communication, participants were asked, “What communication strategies influence high performance outcomes in community colleges?” There were several findings related to effective communication strategies in high performing community colleges.

Communication Strategies Theme 1

The first major theme related to communication strategies included that *high performing presidents have people within the organization whom they trust to share the informal communication (grapevine information) and feedback about the message received by constituents (versus the intended message)*. Thirteen of 17 participating presidents (82%) discussed the importance of having a strategy for receiving honest feedback about intentional and unintentional organizational messages. Several presidents

had employed systems to gather information from employees. President C described an intentional “rounding” process used to gather organizational messages and to respond efficiently to concerns:

One of the things we’ve done here is we’ve borrowed from the healthcare system and implemented a system we call “rounding.” And myself and the executive team, we round with each employee at least once an academic year. And the purpose of that rounding session is one of us will meet individually and take about a half hour. We want to find out what specifically is working well, what may not be working well, what is it they need to do their jobs more effectively, what suggestions they have for us moving into the future. Not everyone is willing to talk in a group setting, so this gives everyone a chance in a very much more private setting to speak his or her mind, and it’s been very productive for us. The individual members of the executive committee will make notes of what are the common threads that they’ve heard. Then we’ll sit down as a group and identify what those common threads are. We’ll share that with staff. The staff meeting hears the common issues, if you will, that we’ve identified in rounding and hears how we’re looking at rolling those into our operations where it’s appropriate to do so. I will tell you the other thing you hear are a lot of other small issues that are very correctable very quickly. And the deans are authorized, you know, if they identified something that we can correct with very little effort, to go ahead and make those changes.

The presidents also spoke about being open to feedback while simultaneously being keenly aware of message motivations.

I accept every type of feedback as valid. What I have to look for are what are the trends for that, and I also have to — I’ve been learning this that I have to differentiate between some people will tell you what you want to hear, some people will tell you what they think is the polite thing to say, even if it’s in disagreement, but they’ll say it very politely — and then some will tell you what like it is. (President M)

President N reflected that

When I first started that, it was kind of in contrast to what had been done here previously, and so people didn’t know what to make of it, and some people were reluctant to approach the president. Other people thought, oh, here’s an opportunity I can fix what I’ve been waiting to get fixed for a long time. But I think integrity is extremely important. I think that’s the bottom line of the trust

piece. You know, you've got to be true to your word, and you've got to be up front as much as you can give; some things, personnel items or personal stuff you can't really get into. But beyond that, you know, being open and transparent as you can is certainly important. And then of course, being engaged.

The presidents also spoke of the importance of having trusted cabinet members or employees who are willing to be frank about messaging and the infamous grapevine loop. President O captured this element of the finding.

You need to have people within your audiences that can tell you what it is they heard you say, because so oftentimes what you think you said or what you said has a whole different meaning to the people receiving the message. So that feedback loop and, you know, what did you hear me say and what did it mean to you, I think, is important. So I do try to touch base with people who don't really know me. You know, what stood out in that message or what wasn't clear or what was the unintended message there. And it's a little bit disheartening, but it's the only way to make sure your message gets out there.

Communication Strategies Theme 2

The second major theme under communication strategies is that *communication protocol among administrative leaders must balance with the visibility and availability of the president. The president needs to be an effective listener but cannot become primary listener for all ideas, concerns, or elements of organizational feedback.* Twelve of 17 participating presidents (71%) discussed the importance of finding a balance between openness and transparent communication and following administrative and team protocols. Presidents L and P described the important of involving administrative team members in the communication process.

I don't collaborate very specifically with faculty because most of that collaboration happens with deans, their direct supervisors, and/or the rest of my administrative structure, vice presidents, and so forth. My interaction with faculty tends to be at the 30,000-foot level or through the faculty shared governance council. (President L)

As a leader, you have to learn to delegate and communicate with that person and try not to step on their toes. I always copy them if someone emails me or send it on to them first even to get approval. (President P)

Effective communication protocol also includes knowing when to not respond.

Several presidents talked about message timing. Even with highly visible and engaged presidents, not all questions or concerns have to be addressed immediately.

Effective communication protocol includes knowing when to bring in a team member to respond.

If you start hearing things coming up, and sometimes in our shared governance we'll have these kind of wild things coming up, and we've learned to say, you know, we can't answer that right now because we don't know where the question is coming from. We don't know what the context is. Give us a little more information and we'll have a well-reasoned, well-informed answer for you next month. (President K)

Communication Strategies Theme 3

The third major theme related to communication strategies was that *effective communication occurs when the president has spent a considerable amount of time strategizing about tone, message intention, and unintended consequences of message misinterpretation*. Fourteen of 17 participating presidents (82%) shared the importance of spending a considerable amount of time on message tone and intention. Many presidents also discussed the perceptions that occur with message misinterpretation or a lack of communication from the administrative team. President H suggested that “You have to, you have to really have good writing skills. You have to be able to be articulate. You don't need — I don't know that you really need to be a professional spokesperson in

terms of speeches, etc., but you have to help people understand the heart of your institution.” Similarly, President B reflected

I spend an incredible amount of time — when I need to give a speech to the college community, people stay away from me for two weeks before the speech because I feel like I do in the beginning of each semester, and I feel like it’s such a rare opportunity to get everybody in one room, to think about where people are, where the college is, where our students are, where we need to go and send the right message that they need to hear right then. And I really spend a lot of time and energy thinking about tone and the message that we need right now. So that’s a vehicle that I really — it’s very important to me. Even messages to the campus community — not overwhelming people with stuff, but when it’s important and we need to send out. I spend some time thinking about what needs to be in there, what I’m trying to — what message I’m trying to get through, and the tone is just really important.

Furthermore, just because the message has been shared with constituents, high performing presidents spoke about never assuming the message was received or that it doesn’t need to be repeated. Communication moves far beyond sending a message.

Presidents M and K articulated these finding:

It almost sounds funny to say it, but the most important strategy in communication is to actually communicate. And most institutions do a fair to poor job at it, quite frankly. And I don’t think you can over-communicate. I think you can overuse a style of communication, but I don’t think that you can actually over-communicate, particularly if the culture of the organization is that communication is so important that we’d rather tell you twice than not tell you at all. So if someone sees it again, instead of getting upset or shut down that communication strategy, that they just understand it’s part of the communication process to sometimes see something more than once and just quickly ignore it, delete it and say yep, I know that one. Oh, I’m sure glad they’re communicating. (President M)

I think the more information that you can get out to people, even if they don’t soak it all up, even if they ask the same questions three months in a row, then we’ll answer it three months in a row. What we get so steeped in in administration, we can’t expect the people who are doing other jobs to know it like we know it. I think even with all of the complex things we have to master, we have to have patience in explaining it. And I don’t ever want to discourage

questions, because if I do, then I don't know what's going subterranean.
(President K)

Communication Strategies Theme 4

The fourth major theme related to communication strategies is that *presidents must be able to discern between ordinary grumbling and cultural dissonance quickly.*

Twelve of 17 participating presidents (71%) discussed the importance of having mechanisms in place to discern messages of concern coming informally or formally through the organization. High performing presidents approached this both informally and formally and with individuals and in group settings. Participants spoke about the importance of using follow-up communication strategies to determine level of priority.

You don't want to overreact to everything, but you certainly don't want to not react when something is brewing that may become detrimental to you or a team member or the institution. Something that I'm starting to do more of, I wish I had done more from the beginning, is when somebody brings me a problem, I ask for a couple of solutions, so what do you think would be the best way to handle this, and then sometimes you can see whether or not it's a big issue or not or if it's something they've really been thinking about and they have a great answer that would start you off in the right direction for solving an issue. (President Q)

I'll pick a random person and I'll say, you know, I'd like to get together with you and a bunch of people, whoever you want to invite, in the cafeteria for coffee next Thursday, at two o'clock, and can you do that, and they'll just invite random people. And that – and we just sit around and talk, maybe seven or eight people, and we just sit around and talk. And those have been really helpful, because people are very honest. It's a group of people who know each other, because they at least all have a common friend. (President B)

Presidents also made it clear that getting defensive or trying to explain a decision does not help grumbling, instead it stifles feedback. President C explained:

The ability to listen, the ability to try and filter what people are taking to get to the underlying issue that they may be speaking about, the willingness to develop a

thick skin — and, you know, you're not always going to hear positive things from folks — and resisting the urge to explain yourself while people are telling you what they believe. There will be sufficient time to explain why a decision may be made at some point, but I think often I don't know if anyone would — we may hear something we're not particularly liking and try and explain it while people are talking, and by doing that, we actually cut off very good feedback.

Finally, many presidents also recognize systems don't always work because even the people who tend to approach things with a negative mindset may also be bringing something to light that does need to be prioritized. President H summarized:

We all know who our grumblers are on campus, but sometimes the people that are the common grumblers do have the bigger picture, as well. So I don't think I have a really good answer to tell you how I do that. I think I struggle with it and work with it all the time.

Organizational Strategy Strategies (Question 6)

Effective organizational strategy in leadership is defined as the successful assessment, monitoring, and improvement of the community college; proven data-driven strategy alignment; development of an innovative culture; and alignment of the community college's mission, structures, and resources (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). There were several strategies for effective leaders presented in the literature review that add to the AACC definition. Those elements include building a high performance culture, articulating a vision for high performance, putting systems in place to guide the college to high performance collectively, fully understanding the internal and external factors that impact performance, and building risk, innovation, change management, and an entrepreneurial approach as part of the organizational strategy.

Following a review of the AACC (2013) definition of organizational strategy, participants were asked, “What do you believe are the most effective organizational strategies for promoting high performance outcomes in community colleges?” There were several findings related to effective organizational strategies in high performing community colleges.

Organizational Strategy Strategies Theme 1

A primary theme related to organizational strategy is that *a focus on the mission permeates all decisions, financial resources, human resources, and partnerships in high performance community colleges*. Fifteen of 17 participating presidents (88%) discussed permeation of mission in all aspects of the community college. With so many distractions, the president plays a key role in keeping the community college focused on mission achievement. Presidents A and L summarized this focus:

I’ve been in organizations where there are so many peripheral issues going on that it’s hard to keep everybody focused on what’s important, and that’s a hard thing to do. And the only thing that I would say to that president is, number one, make sure that you and your board are on the same page, and then make sure that it is absolutely clear and that everything that you do and everything that you communicate is focused on that direction. And whenever there are individual instances where you’re being pulled away from that, you need to be aware of it. First of all, you have to recognize whether it’s legitimate or not but to bring it back to the focus and bring people back to that focus. And so that’s really important because — and sometimes you have to make a strong statement to some key constituents that they’re distracting the institution from what is important, and — but keeping your eye on the ball and making sure that you’re focusing on the issues that are most important. My experience has been that there are so many different distractions for a college president that it’s very easy to lose your focus. And so really just keeping that focus is really, really important and working with your leadership team to make sure that they keep that focus, as well, would help to drive the institution in a positive way. (President A)

President L relayed that a keen focus on the mission of the organization is important in developing strategy: “The greatest strategy for high performance is an

unwavering focus on our mission — trying to make decisions and resource allocations and everything else based on does it have a positive impact on student learning or not that that's the way we try to prioritize.”

Organizational Strategy Strategies Theme 2

The second primary theme associated with organizational strategy is that *high performance community colleges are tirelessly focused on student success. The focus on student success permeates all aspects of the college culture.* Seventeen of 17 participating presidents (100%) gave examples of the strategies used to tirelessly focus on the success of all students.

One of the primary themes that we identified is a commitment on the part of the college to do everything possible to help students succeed, and that's something that we now use as an underlying premise. We also look at what decision will most help students succeed, or how a decision helps students succeed. I know that we're making better decisions now than we ever have, because not only is student success the primary focus of what we're looking for and where we ought to allocate resources, time, effort, what have you, but we're then taking a more focused approach to that, a more targeted approach by looking at the data to ensure that where we're looking to improve student success is the right place to do that. The other part of this related to that, I would tell you, is there is a role for everyone in the organization in terms of student success. Our staff members, for example, when they work with their work study students, will weekly sit down with them, and ask them how they're doing academically. If the student identifies an issue, the custodian will work with that student in getting them the resources or the staff help that they need, whether it's a mentor, whether it's an advisor. Everyone across the institution has a role to play. It's not just a faculty commitment for student success; it's everyone across the institution has a place in this effort. (President C)

President M further illustrated the focus permeation. Every member of the high performing community college has a role in the success of students.

We have another employee who is part-time. He sits at our front desk. And as students walk by in the morning, he stands up and he gets a huge smile on his face and he greets them and says hello and wishes them a good day. And I've heard

students walking up to him with other students who don't know him, and they'll say, "Hey, that's (name removed). I look forward to seeing him every day because he makes me feel good." It's having those kind of people who understand that their role may not be — well, I don't know if any of our roles are glamorous, but they don't have necessarily the immediate thought of impact like a faculty member in a class. But these folks do their job to the very best of their ability, and they understand that what they do contributes to the students' success by making them feel welcome, making them feel encouraged, and making them feel better about themselves. And when that permeates a culture, that's why we saw the increases we saw was, because we have — we took that kind of positive attitude that was overshadowed by a lot of negative and closed off a kind of grouchy look, and now we're really — we're seen, I think, by our students as much more friendly and engaged and that what we do is we empower them to be the best that they can be and that student success is not just a phrase or an afterthought of what we do but it permeates everything we do.

Organizational Strategy Strategies Theme 3

The third primary theme related to organizational strategy is that *high performance is achieved by working directly with people who want to move the organization forward. Rather than wait to get everyone on board, high performance presidents harness the enthusiasm of early adapters and continue to move the college forward.* Eleven of 17 participating presidents (65%) discussed the importance of working directly with people who want to move the organization toward mission achievement and high performance. Presidents K and L discussed this strategic organizational element:

As you go through life you find some people who are emotionally fed by the negative, and whether it's anger or whether it's believing the worst or whether it's passing around rumors, that seems to be what really gives them a charge. And then you're blessed with knowing a bunch of other people who are always on the high side of things and always looking on the optimistic side and trying to build. And I still haven't figured out how to completely shut off the impact of the negative, because I have to listen to it sometimes, but I really am — you know, I'm giving a lot more power to people who are positive. I will listen to them more. I'm more likely to enact some of their ideas. You know, there is a way, even if we can't promote or pay people for good ideas, there's a way that, you know, those

people who are positive and contributors, you can take more of what they have to give. (President K)

The efforts that we have with faculty here are — tend to focus on the people that have an interest in whatever it is, and we try to work directly with them, because it doesn't matter what the initiative is; there is going to be a group that thinks it's maybe not a good idea whether that's developing an online offering in science or doing more international recruitment efforts. I mean, you just name the initiative, someone is going to object to it. And so what we try to do here, what I try to do, is identify people who want to opt in, and if they want to opt in, they want to get engaged in the process, those are the folks that we tend to work with. (President L)

Organizational Strategy Strategies Theme 4

The fourth primary theme related to organizational strategy was that *high performing presidents focus on systems thinking and systems improvements. Once systems are established, employees can be empowered to take risks, challenge routine, and continue to improve performance.* Twelve of 17 participating presidents (71%) gave examples of a systems thinking approach to organizational structure, organizational strategy, and organizational culture. President G summarized a systems thinking approach to organizational systems and structures.

When I got here, one of the first things that we began was the integration of academic and student affairs. The intent was to create a seamless experience for the students. The student doesn't care what our organizational chart looks like. They just want service when and how they need it. And so we began then to work across the campus. And I had to work a little bit with my colleagues in other colleges within the district, because this was not a — this was not something that they wanted to do or that they thought was a good idea, and — but it all sort of rolls back to what is fundamental to most, if not all of our decisions, and that is, putting the student right and center of the decision.

The presidents also spoke about systems thinking in terms of an organizational strategy or focus. President J shared a systems thinking approach to innovation as an organizational strategy.

I think one of the most challenging things is getting people to think outside the box, getting them to feel that budget isn't a limitation. I mean, it might be, but it shouldn't be up front. Think through the idea and in the end, let's figure out what it costs and where it fits in our priorities. But it's really trying to create those environments and those situations where people can step out of their daily routine and blue sky a little bit and put the ideas, you know, together.

The organizational culture is built on systematic foci. President K discussed a focus on system quality as part of the high performance community college culture.

Everybody at this college knows that we have to retain more students and grow enrollment. Everybody knows that we need money. And that's a sad thing to be harping on all the time, but I think everybody knows that we're going to be working on quality, whether it's Quality Matters and online courses or more accreditations. I think that every program that can be accredited now by an outside entity is accredited.

Professionalism Strategies (Question 5)

Professionalism is defined as being authentic and visionary, understanding and endorsing the culture of community colleges, managing stress through self-care and balance, and promoting and maintaining high standards for personal and community college integrity, honesty, and respect for people (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). The strategies for effective community college professionalism presented in the literature review include employing strategies to build the community college reputation, exuding wisdom and emotional intelligence, building trust, and developing and maintaining high expectations for high performance. Following a review of the AACC (2013) definition of professionalism, participants were asked, "What

aspects of professionalism impact and promote high performance outcomes in community colleges?” There were several findings related to effective professionalism strategies in high performing community colleges.

Professionalism Strategies Theme 1

The first primary theme related to professionalism strategies was that *the president is the culture of the college. His or her integrity, humility, and standards are replicated throughout the culture*. Fifteen of 17 participating presidents (88%) spoke of the importance of consistently modeling integrity, humility, and high standards. The behaviors and words of the president become the culture of the college. President J described that “The president is the culture of the college. So I think as you go — the college is going to go. So it’s whether or not you have integrity — people notice that and they pick up on that.” Similarly, President J addressed the importance of modeling integrity, humility, and high standards:

Professionalism is pretty simple. You cannot do anything that is immoral, unethical, or illegal. I think that affects the leadership so much. People have got to look up and trust the leader, and you can’t have that trust if you don’t have those three things strongly intact. I could go on and on. I could preach for an hour on that subject, but it’s just, it’s pretty simple.

Even when the presidents have faced difficult situations, stakeholders continue to watch and model the president’s actions and communication. President B discussed a professional response to a difficult situation:

The college acted completely appropriately, that we didn’t try to cover anything up, we didn’t hide anything, we didn’t — we just dealt with it, and we dealt with it discretely until the investigation was over, then we were completely transparent about what happened with the college community, and that’s about all we can do. But in the long run, I think that example, that’s the kind of thing that becomes part of the culture of the place.

Participating presidents also spoke about the replication and modeling of the president's work ethic and approach to work in the community college culture.

According to President H,

I believe a leader needs to be very ethical and they need to demonstrate that in what they do. They need to demonstrate that in your own work ethic and they need to when we expect other people to have a strong work ethic, then we need to show the same thing. Now, that can be difficult, because some of the things that a president does appears to the campus as being just fun, fluffy things, like having lunch with people and stuff.

President M also reflected on the role of professionalism by noting

To me, it's a lot about honesty and integrity, a reputation of meaning what you say, doing what you say, following through and being committed to if you say you're going to do something, you're going to do it. And the more that people perceive that you were professional in your conduct, the more it encourages them to be professional in their conduct and the more that the culture is seen as one where it doesn't mean that everyone agrees but there is an underlying respect for each other even in disagreement.

Professionalism Strategies Theme 2

The second primary theme associated with professionalism strategies was that *high performance is achieved by developing, communicating, and maintaining high standards throughout the community college*. Twelve of 17 participating presidents (71%) spoke of the importance of consistently developing, communicating, and maintaining high standards throughout the community college. President L stated that "I model high ethical standards. I try to be accountable. I try to be transparent. And within the administrative team, I make it pretty clear what the expectations are."

President E discussed the importance of not only modeling and communicating high standards, but also developing and encouraging those high standards among college leaders.

"Well, are you a leader or a manager?" And he says, "Well, I want to be a leader." And I said, "Then there's no other clearer way to demonstrate that to me than doing what you feel you need to do to move your division forward." So the next week that person was gone. Not that — we don't pride ourselves in taking people out of the picture. The issue is that's gone on for years and everybody knew it and it was such a problem and he knew it. He couldn't do anything with the division.

Developing, communicating, and maintaining high standards builds confidence in the organization. Employees are empowered to make decisions because the boundaries for high performance and high standards have been clearly articulated.

If I'm out of town, I don't worry about the organization running when I'm gone. This place runs well. We — people know what's expected of them. We hire good people, and we turn them loose to do their jobs. And that's not rocket science. I guess the term that's in the literature, that we're "empowering" people, but the reality is, they get it. They know what they have to do and they do it, and I don't have to worry about them coming in the doors or the doors being unlocked.
(President C)

Professionalism Strategies Theme 3

The third primary theme that emerged from the data suggested *high performance presidents take deep responsibility for their actions and the actions of all members of the college community. Accountability, not blame, is harnessed in the organizational culture.* Thirteen of 17 participating presidents (76%) spoke of the importance of harnessing accountability, rather than blame, throughout the community college. Participating presidents demonstrated a sense of humility in their professionalism responses. They

create a culture where high expectations and a recognition that everyone makes mistakes occur simultaneously.

I think recognizing individually as the president that I have things that I need to work on as well and to be honest with people and let them know that none of us is perfect. All of us make mistakes. The difference is what kind of mistakes do you make, why did those mistakes occur, and what is the standard that you hold for yourself. Once that is established as a president, then it's holding a high standard among your staff. And I can tell you that within the last week, we have had issues where that standard was not upheld. And so the question then is, how do you deal with that in a professional way, in a supportive way but in a way that clearly articulates that what just occurred is not acceptable, and that behavior needs to change in order for that individual or that organization to be able to meet the expectations of the president. And so, you know, looking at each individual at whatever level they are and looking at them as a professional who is looking to improve and to better themselves and then providing those opportunities for them to be able to take on risks and to do those — the kind of things that's going to help them to grow as a professional and serve your students in a better way. But holding high standards and in a sensitive, yet direct way to hold people accountable, I think, is very important. (President A)

President I discussed how organizational and personal accountability coupled with clear boundaries facilitate high performance:

If you can create an environment in which people understand that that's what is expected and that they are expected to work very, very hard and to be contributors but that failures and mistakes and the like are a natural part of that whole process, you could really work wonders.

Professionalism Strategies Theme 4

The fourth primary theme related to professionalism suggested that *professionalism requires a future-focused and optimistic reaction, even in the midst of drama and controversy*. Twelve of 17 participating presidents (71%) spoke of the importance of maintaining a future-focused and optimistic reaction, especially when faced with difficult decisions, drama, challenges to leadership and strategy, or controversy. President A reflected that

You really just have to have an attitude where you have to be sensitive and you want to be understanding of issues that people have, but sometimes it's pretty clear that a person might have an agenda that may not be as legitimate as someone else's agenda.

Likewise, President D illustrated how presidents remain future- focused and stick to their decisions:

If you give your word on something, then you stick to it unless there's just an extreme reason why you cannot stick to it and then you explain that to people. And I think no matter how tempting it is to not follow through, then you're making a mistake because you're going to get slipped up on it.

Even when challenged, according to President L, high performance presidents forge ahead:

It would be a myth to say that I haven't been under intense pressure, particularly from the faculty with regard to my leadership. And in many ways, I think it is my passion about the job that I feel very strongly about the need to do what's right and not just coast along. I think you can coast along in these jobs and not be very engaged and probably survive, but I've never been that kind of person. I believe too much in the work that we do and how important it is — we're the last equalizer in this society. Without education, people don't have an opportunity to achieve what it is that they want to achieve. They don't have an opportunity to live a fulfilling and engaging life. I mean, you just can't do that. You can't do this work without being excited about that.

Resource Management Strategies (Question 3)

Effective resource management in leadership is defined as the successful development and management of resources, entrepreneurial approach to alternative funding sources, efficient human resource practices and performance management systems, and positive management of conflict (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). Effective leaders recognize resource management as having two distinct divisions: financial resource management and people resource management. There are

several elements of effective resource management supported in literature that add to the AACC definition. The strategies for effective financial resource management presented in the literature review were building organizational capacity and developing a holistic fiscal management model. The strategies presented for effective people resource management were a focus on people as the largest community college resource, hiring people who fit in the organization, mentoring high performing people, and developing engagement with employees. Following a review of the AACC (2013) definition of resource management, participants were asked, “What resource management and development strategies are important to employ on a regular basis?” There were several findings related to effective financial resource management and people resource management strategies in high performing community colleges.

Financial Resource Management Strategies Theme 1

The first primary theme to emerge under the category of financial resource management strategies was that *effective partnerships leverage the limited and declining resources of community colleges*. Twelve of 17 participating presidents (71%) spoke of the importance of developing partnerships to leverage the limited and declining resources in community colleges; for example, President L stated,

An approach I’ve tried to use is to try to bring in new streams of revenue to the college. We just recently were part of a pretty big grant to train rural workers. And that was a collaboration with four other colleges. So, you know, to the extent that I can create new revenue streams, to the extent that I can be more effective as a fundraiser, whether that’s for scholarships or for particular initiatives, I try to be real engaged in that.

Grants and foundation development are expected elements of financial resource management; high performance presidents are innovative in partnerships. They broadly define partnerships to include shared services and outsourcing.

In any event, that whole shared services concept is something that we believe we can parlay, if you will, into additional opportunities for us to join with other colleges and deliver a consortium kind of advancement in their ability to use the technology where they are otherwise not able to do it themselves, primarily because of size limitations, whether it be too few students, too few dollars, too few opportunities to be able to get there and use economies of scale and in which we get to benefit, they get to benefit, and the partner company gets to benefit by all of us making a little bit. For us, the idea is to be able to have the resources that keep us a bit independent of the state funding apparatus, which we know is not going to go up. (President I)

Similarly, President J remarked that,

We make sure that we're as efficient and as effective and implement things like outsourcing when we can. Outsourcing allows our people to focus on doing the things that really make a difference to our students and to our community. I always say it's time to flex our budget muscles when we get into that to try to keep a positive spin on messaging during budget time.

Financial Resource Management Strategies Theme 2

The second major theme under the financial resource management strategies category was that *high performing presidents are transparent in budget planning, spending, and reduction processes*. Thirteen of 17 participating presidents (76%) spoke about transparency in budget planning, spending, and reduction processes; for example, President P illustrated strategies for the transparency strategy: "We have to align our resources with our plan and with our budget. And so when finances come into the picture, I'm very open and transparent but realistic about — accountability." Similarly, President G discussed that

We developed a planning and budgeting advisory council composed of people from across the college. That's not a new idea necessarily but it was new here, because in times of plenty, you know, the money man, you went to him, you said I need or I want and he made it happen and all of that was just great, so there wasn't really much in the way of transparency. And my belief was that people across the college, if they were interested and wanted to know and wanted to serve, then they could come our way. We do budgeting 101 so they understand how a community college operates, what are the financial rules and dos and don'ts. They've also been instrumental in a couple of budget reductions that we've had, which has not been fun.

Resource management includes people resource management. All presidents discussed management of people and talent as a key factor in high performance.

People Resource Management Strategies Theme 1

The first primary theme related to people resource management strategies was that *employee engagement is valued in high performing community colleges. Presidents are effective at recognizing the skills and talents of team members*. Seventeen of 17 participating presidents (100%) spoke passionately about employee engagement as a critical element of high performance. Fully utilizing the skills and talents of team members was mentioned in every interview.

We have an employee engagement committee out of college council, and I started it when I first came just as a separate kind of – it was one of those things I just said here's the kinds of things I think we need to talk about. Anybody who is interested, you know, just show up in such-and-such-a place. And we had, like, 40 people at the first meeting. And so that committee has done all kinds of things, part of it to make people feel valued and appreciated, but more than that, get people involved in activities. (President B)

Engaged employees have an increased commitment to the organizational mission. Participating presidents discussed commitment as a key factor in achieving high performance; for example, President H discussed that “We have a high number of full-time faculty. The number is higher than many institutions. I think it makes a difference in

the kind of commitment you get from people to your programs and to the institution.”

Similarly, President I mentioned,

I think you can achieve a great deal more if you have people who are with you, love the work, are engaged in the mission and the task, and are enthusiastic. If you can create an environment in which people understand that that’s what is expected and that they are expected to work very, very hard and to be contributors but that failures and mistakes and the like are a natural part of that whole process, you could really work wonders.

People Resource Management Strategies Theme 2

The second major theme under the people resource management category was that *high performing community colleges invest in the professional development of the people who help the community college achieve high performance. Leadership is distributed throughout the organization; employees contribute to high performance outcome achievement.* Thirteen of 17 participating presidents (76%) discussed professional development and leadership distribution as key elements of high performance strategies. Presidents C, I, and O demonstrate the outcomes of investing in people”

We’re a service organization. People deliver the services. We may use technology as a tool to help deliver that, but our primary resource is our folks. So I like to believe that we hire very good people, and we will make them greater. So that means that we will invest, in fact, in professional development opportunities, both on campus and off of campus, and that I recognize we will be sending people to conferences. And that all takes money, but the reality is, that’s what we need to do if you want high performing people who are delivering the services to your students. (President C)

But developing people isn’t primarily a matter of money. I think that the money issue is a fundamental baseline of commitment that says that we care about you and we want you and we appreciate you, but in the long term, you know, it’s the personal touch. It’s the expressions of appreciation for work well done, giving them a platform to stand up and talk about what they have done, giving people an

opportunity to allow their creativity to come forward, never turning down an idea even if you think it's crazy but letting people give it a shot. (President I)

So in terms of employee engagement, we've put significant amount of resources into the professional development of employees from their onboarding, you know, all the way through their first year, through their probation and their evaluation, but more importantly, a very robust effort on an annual basis to provide, I think, significantly exemplary good learning professional development kinds of opportunities on campus. So we're committed to developing an employee, helping them to continue to grow to get better, to be more skilled, more competent, more confident in their job. A lot of all of our courses are taught by adjuncts. So for many years, we've put very little resources into preparing our adjunct faculty, but we're moving more towards really mandatory, for adjunct faculty who have never taught before, mandatory well done, not just nuts and bolts professional development but professional development related to student engagement, active learning, to classroom management, to assessment to try to really improve the quality of our adjunct faculty. (President O)

People Resource Management Strategies Theme 3

The third primary theme related to people resources was that *high performing presidents consider hiring team members as one of the biggest leadership priorities. Hiring does not occur unless the candidate fits the organizational mission and strategic directions.* Eleven of 17 participating presidents (76%) discussed diligence in hiring as a critical element of achieving high performance; for example, President H stated that

You're better off not to hire than to hire somebody that you have questions about. And people can look really exciting on paper and even when they come to visit you, but you really need to do really appropriate and really intense background evaluations and reference checks to make sure that it's good. So those things can really set a college back.

President E discussed the importance of hiring the "right people" by stating:

Getting the right people on the bus, and a lot of us talk about that phrase all the time, it's a well-worn topic, is that is so, so important. After 19 months we finally hired our last vacant position, because I relieved the last one. The issue is that

you've got to be able to have guts enough as leader to get the right people on the bus, number one.

As discussed in the second theme of the people resource category, high performance presidents develop employees who are committed to moving the organization forward. Once people have developed, high performance presidents offer internal promotional opportunities to maintain engagement and to continue to move the organization forward.

One of the things that we've tried to do a lot is, when we can, promoting from within. Not always, but when you've got somebody, you're paying attention to people who are rising stars and talking to them about what their goals are and trying to work with them. Sometimes on our campus, sometimes you have to let them go to give them a chance to really grow, and that's happened a few times. But, of course, people are, you know, 80% of what we do, and that 80% of our budget is people, and so we have to get the most that we can out of them.
(President B)

People Resource Management Strategies Theme 4

The fourth major theme related to people resource strategies is that *presidents who achieve high performance make tough decisions about people who are not helping the college move forward toward meeting strategic priorities. Although this impacts social capital, presidents recognize not holding everyone to a high standard impacts the organization on a much broader level.* Ten of 17 participating presidents (59%) discussed the importance of making tough human resource decisions as an unfortunate but necessary strategy to achieve high performance. Strategic changes that move the organization toward high performance cannot be achieved with leaders who resist the changes.

You need to make decisions and do what needs to be done for the institution. And sometimes that means that some people may not be the best fit and provide the best – and be the best to be at the institution. As a president, had to make the tough decisions about, about moving people on, whether it's someone who is tenure-track and not doing their job or an administrator. I think that's an ethical and accountable thing you have to do for those people who are working as hard as they can to do the right thing. (President H)

If we don't change, then our students are not going to be in demand by business and industry. And I think it's important to be clear on that, to show people why it's important and then to help them in any way they can be helped. If they still resist, then maybe it's better for us to part company. And I don't want to sound flippant that way. If somebody just does not, cannot accept the philosophy of why we're doing what we're doing, then they're better off and we're better off if they go on down the road, and if we can help them find something they feel better about as far as a fit is concerned, then we want to do that. (President D)

Summary

The findings discussed throughout this chapter were developed by thoroughly analyzing 561 single-spaced pages of data from multiple data sources. Through triangulation of the data, 27 findings that aligned with the leadership competencies of advocacy, collaboration, communication, organizational strategy, professionalism, and resource management were identified. The presidents in this study applied several strategies to achieve high performance in community college outcomes. The thematic findings presented are important because they may help community college presidents employ strategies to attain high performance. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study and seeks to interpret the findings, presents study limitations, offers implications and recommendations based on the study results, and provides recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore effective leadership strategies for achieving high performance in community college outcomes. Effective strategies for leaders were defined as the organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism within the lived experiences of leaders in high performance community colleges. The participants in the study were presidents leading 17 of the top 120 community colleges identified by the Aspen Institute as the highest-performing community colleges in the nation (Aspen Institute, 2013). Community colleges serve as a critical point of access to higher education for several million students each year, and it is critical to understand the best leadership strategies used by leaders at top-performing community colleges. Leaders who achieve higher performance in community college outcomes will positively affect student completion to graduation and stakeholder satisfaction. Additional community college graduates will increase the number of skilled workers and fill the employment gap to stimulate the economy (Murray, 2010).

Through semi-structured interviews, the lived experiences of leaders in high performing community colleges were investigated (Moustakas, 1990; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The 17 participants were leaders of community colleges who were identified by the Aspen Institute as high performing in labor market, completion, equitable, and learning outcomes. The Aspen Institute's list of top 120 community colleges in the nation identified the sample for selection of interview participants, and AACCC leadership competencies guided the interview process and leadership constructs. The data collected from interviews, field notes, and member checking notes were coded, analyzed, and organized into 27 leadership strategy findings. This final chapter seeks to interpret the present study limitations, offer implications and recommendations based on the study results, and provide recommendations for future research.

Discussion of Results

Leaders who implement effective leadership strategies can help an organization to achieve high performance (Waldman & Yammarino, 1999). When leaders successfully implement effective strategies, they facilitate high performance and continually meet organizational objectives and measures (Peters & Austin, 1985). The outcomes of performance leadership extend beyond meeting metrics and objectives: High performance organizations experience expanded knowledge bases, integrated communications, and increased political influence (Sosik et al., 2005). Community colleges are in a unique position to educate and train the majority of the workforce in the next decade. Community college leaders are under constant pressure to increase enrollment and performance measures such as graduation and completion, yet be flexible enough to meet the needs of regional industries (ACT, 2013). At the same time the

demands for performance increase, there is a shortage of leaders prepared to meet the challenges of the future.

In order to meet the challenges of the future, leaders must employ effective strategies that lead to high performance in meaningful outcomes. The study findings may present a framework of effective leadership strategies leading to high performance in community college outcomes.

Advocacy Discussion

Successful leader advocacy is defined as valuing and promoting diversity and inclusion, demonstrating a passion for and a commitment to the mission of community colleges, advancing lifelong learning, supporting a learner-centered environment, and representing the community college in the local community and throughout the broader educational community (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). The strategies for effective community college advocacy presented in the literature review included building meaning and a shared purpose, focusing on learning and inquisition, developing a core message to inspire commitment, building strong partnerships, and concentrating on solid relationships with key stakeholders.

The advocacy findings presented in Chapter 4 were

- (a) high performance presidents are community-focused and purposeful in developing a strategy for their level of community involvement,
- (b) effective advocacy efforts diligently focus on telling the story of community college impact,
- (c) relationship building builds advocacy efforts, and,
- (d) advocacy significantly elevates the reputation of the community college.

The first advocacy theme is similar to the AACC element of representing the community college in the local community and throughout the broader educational community but more closely aligned to the literature-supported strategy of concentrating on solid relationships with key stakeholders. The presidents who participated in the study saw a broader and strategic approach to community involvement. High performance presidents are community-focused yet purposeful in developing a strategy for their level of involvement. The president themselves cannot attend every community function or participate in every service club, yet high performance leaders develop a strategy for community involvement, focus community involvement efforts on mission alignment, and support key stakeholders who can help the college achieve high performance. Once the strategy is developed, high performance leaders extend the responsibility of community involvement beyond the role of the president as engaged administrators, faculty, and staff are also invited to attend community functions and participate in service clubs.

The second advocacy theme aligns with the literature-supported strategy of developing a core message to inspire commitment and is supported by the AACC strategy of demonstrating a passion for and a commitment to the mission of community colleges. The core message fosters motivation and confidence in the community college, thereby inspiring outstanding performance (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Heifetz & Laurie, 2001). Employees who are passionate about the community college mission and excited about the strategic direction of the college will share the college story with the community. High performance leaders use student and stakeholder success stories to illustrate the community college mission. The president is diligently focused on a core

message in order to change long-standing misperceptions of community colleges and the students they serve.

The third advocacy theme aligns with the literature-supported strategies of building strong partnerships and concentrating on solid relationships with key stakeholders. High performance community leaders build relationships that extend beyond the responsibility just to show up. Authentic engagement in identifying, building, and maintaining relationships is an essential element to effective advocacy strategies for high performance (Boggs, 2008).

The fourth advocacy theme is an outcome of the successful advocacy efforts and image of high performing colleges. The reputation and image of the community college produce a synergy and cyclical performance benefit. As the image and reputation of the community college is elevated, additional partners come forward with ideas for collaboration, the story of the community college mission has broader reach, and community involvement extends to all vested stakeholders.

As they relate to advocacy, the AACC strategies, not explicitly discussed by participants in the study, include valuing and promoting diversity and inclusion, advancing lifelong learning, and supporting a learner-centered environment (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). The advocacy strategy presented in the literature review that was not explicitly discussed by participants in the study is focusing on learning and inquisition.

Based on the study findings, a leadership definition for effective advocacy strategies in high performing community colleges is as follows:

High performing community college leaders diligently focus on sharing impact stories that illustrate how community colleges change the lives of students. High performing presidents are actively involved in building communities where people want to live, skilled at identifying, building, and maintaining authentic relationships, and intrinsically motivated to elevate the reputation of community colleges.

Collaboration Discussion

Effective collaboration in leadership is defined as embracing and employing the diversity of individuals and cultures, demonstrating cultural competencies, catalyzing involvement and commitment of all stakeholders, and building and leveraging networks and partnerships to advance the goals of the college (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). The strategies for effective community college collaboration supported in the literature review were awareness of key stakeholder groups, strategy in partnerships and collaboration efforts, recognizing the value of internal collaboration, having a clear purpose for every collaborative arrangement and partnership, and serving as the champion of community college collaborations.

The collaboration findings presented in Chapter 4 are

- (a) informal interactions and purposeful listening build trust. Trust is essential for effective collaboration and partnership efforts,
- (b) internal collaboration builds synergy for high performance,
- (c) effective leaders are committed to win-win collaboration efforts. Stakeholder requests are made when the timing of collaborative efforts facilitates mutual benefit,

(d) high performing presidents are champions of collaboration efforts with key stakeholders. Rather than token involvement, the presidents engage in collaboration efforts, and

(e) collaborating creates a high performance culture and builds ownership in initiatives designed to achieve high performance.

The first collaboration theme may be a requirement to achieve the AACC-defined involvement and commitment of all stakeholders. Listening and informal interactions build trust (Ewell, 2001). Without trust, leaders would be unable to catalyze involvement and commitment with internal or external stakeholders. High performance presidents focus efforts on listening to stakeholders and building trust with those stakeholders; the outcome of those efforts is involvement and commitment.

The second collaboration theme aligns with the strategy recognizing the value of internal collaboration presented in the literature review. As stated in the literature review, building a culture of collaboration with employees is essential to the achievement of high performance outcomes (McNair et al., 2011). Effective leaders support discussions and unite teams across the community college (Roe & Baker, 1989). Participating presidents embrace this strategy to build cultures of collaboration in the college effectively.

The third collaboration theme bridges the AACC-defined leveraging networks and partnerships to advance the goals of the college with the approaches of having strategy in partnerships efforts and awareness of key stakeholder groups presented in the literature review by Leary (2012). High performing presidents are strategic about all elements of the collaborative strategy and relationship. The strategies maximize

collaborative outcomes because the partners, timing, initiatives, and efforts are tied to the high performance strategies of the community college.

The fourth theme supports the strategy of serving as the champion of community college collaborations presented in the literature review. Once the leader has identified a partner with whom the organization should collaborate, effective leaders become the champion of the collaboration (Amey, 2010; Watson, 2007). Participating presidents suggested collaboration requires hard work. Collaboration cannot work with token involvement, minimal attendance or attention, or a lack of commitment from the president. Once a collaborative strategy is developed, high performing presidents commit fully to the collaborative process and outcomes.

The fifth collaboration theme suggested the outcome of the strategy for having a clear purpose for every collaborative arrangement and partnership presented in the literature review. Collaboration takes more time and is more difficult than moving forward on initiatives autocratically. High performing presidents are collaborative, not because it is easier to collaborate but because it is the only way to build ownership and engagement in the strategic directions of the community college.

As they relate to collaboration, the AACC strategies, not explicitly discussed by participants in the study, are embracing and employing the diversity of individuals and cultures and demonstrating cultural competencies (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). All of the collaboration strategies presented in the literature were discussed by participating presidents.

Based on the study findings, a leadership definition for effective collaboration strategies in high performing community colleges is as follows:

High performing community college leaders are skilled listeners who effectively build relationships and partnerships with internal and external stakeholders. The leader actively operates in a collaborative paradigm, remaining committed to mutual benefits in outcomes. High performing community college leaders build culture based on dialogue and participatory decision-making because the leader recognizes the college cannot achieve high performance without engagement and ownership.

Communication Discussion

Effective leadership communication is defined as disseminating and supporting policies and strategies; creating and maintaining open communications regarding resources, priorities, and expectations; listening actively to understand, comprehend, analyze and engage; and projecting confidence and responding responsibly (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). There are several effective communication strategies supported in literature that add to the AACC definition. Those strategies include broad involvement in communication, communication throughout decision-making processes, motivating and inspiring through communication, authenticity in communication, and recognizing communication protocol.

There were several findings presented in Chapter 4 related to effective communication strategies. The strategies include

- (a) high performing presidents have people within the organization whom they trust to share the informal communication (grapevine information) and feedback about the message received by constituents (versus the intended message),

(b) communication protocol among administrative leaders must balance with the visibility and availability of the president. The president needs to be an effective listener but cannot become primary listener for all ideas, concerns, or elements of organizational feedback,

(c) effective communication occurs when the president has spent a considerable amount of time strategizing about tone, message intention, and unintended consequences of message misinterpretation, and

(d) presidents must be able to discern between ordinary grumbling and cultural dissonance quickly.

The first communication theme is a strategy used by participating presidents to connect two AACC defined strategies: listening actively to understand, comprehend, analyze, and engage, and projecting confidence and responding responsibly (AACC, 2013). Presidents are unable to project confidence and respond responsibly if they do not know what is being said in informal communication circles within the college.

Communicating a message to the college community is only one fragment of effective communication strategies; high performing presidents actively listened to trusted people in the organization. The active listening process provides the information the president needs to respond confidently, minimize concerns, readjust the message, and build stakeholder engagement in the message.

The second communication theme aligns with the strategy of recognizing communication protocol presented in the literature review. Participating presidents spoke about the delicate balance required in this communication strategy. Effective leaders employ a communication protocol to ensure the most appropriate team member delivers

key messages (Neufeld et al., 2008). The president has to be visible and available to stakeholders, yet at the same time, the president needs to use protocol to bring appropriate team members into the discussion. Essentially, building the visibility and availability of administrative team members builds the visibility and reputation of the president. When stakeholders approach a high performance president about an idea or concern, the president actively listens to the stakeholder but then directs the idea or concern to another team member without making promises or providing solutions.

The third communication theme builds on the AACC strategy of creating and maintaining open communications regarding resources, priorities, and expectations, in addition to the strategy of authentic communication presented in the literature review. Authentic leaders create messages with the right tone to build organizational engagement (Dan-Shang & Chia-Chun, 2013). Although the finding builds on the authentic communication strategy foundation (Thomas, Zolin, and Hartman, 2009), it is worth noting the emphasis participating presidents placed on message intention and thinking about the unintended consequences of message misinterpretation. High performance presidents communicate authentically and thoughtfully, anticipating stakeholder reactions through every stage of the communication process.

The fourth communication theme is not in direct alignment with any of the AACC or literature review strategies, though elements were found in the foundations of many strategies. High performance presidents cannot be effective communicators without being able to find the balance between grumbling and cultural dissonance. Presidents use multiple tools to communicate messages, listen to feedback, and seek input in an effort to find the appropriate balance. Community colleges have a formal communication system

and an informal or underground communication system, and high performing presidents can discern when the tone of informal communication is steering toward cultural dissonance (Burnes, & James, 1995). The participating presidents address the concerns before they lead the organization away from high performance strategies.

As they relate to communication, the AACC strategy, not explicitly discussed by participants in the study, is disseminating and supporting policies (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). The strategies presented in the literature included broad involvement in communication (Thomas, Zolin, & Hartman, 2009), communication throughout decision-making processes (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001), and motivating and inspiring through communication (Lin, 2010).. Communication is such a broad subject, and many of the strategies listed above were implicitly stated throughout the interviews but not identified by participants as key communication strategies that lead to high performance.

Based on the study findings, a leadership definition for effective communication strategies in high performing community colleges is as follows:

High performing presidents seek input about how messages are received, involve administrative team members in communication efforts through an understood communication protocol, strategize about tone, message intention, and unintended consequences of message misinterpretation, and discern ordinary dissention from cultural dissonance.

Organizational Strategy Discussion

Effective organizational strategy in leadership is defined as the successful assessment, monitoring, and improvement of the community college; proven data-driven

strategy alignment; development of an innovative culture; and alignment of the community college's mission, structures, and resources (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). There are several strategies for effective leaders supported in literature that add to the AACC definition. Those elements include building a high performance culture, articulating a vision for high performance, putting systems in place to guide the college to high performance collectively, fully understanding the internal and external factors that impact performance, and building risk, innovation, change management, and an entrepreneurial approach as part of the organizational strategy.

There were several effective leadership organizational strategy findings presented in Chapter 4.

- (a) a focus on the mission permeates all decisions, financial resources, human resources, and partnerships in high performance community colleges,
- (b) high performance community colleges are tirelessly focused on student success. The focus on student success permeates all aspects of the college culture,
- (c) high performance is achieved by working directly with people who want to move the organization forward. Rather than wait to get everyone on board, high performance presidents harness the enthusiasm of early adapters and continue to move the college forward, and
- (d) high performing presidents focus on systems thinking and systems improvements. Once systems are established, employees can be empowered to take risks, challenge routine, and continue to improve performance.

The first organizational strategy theme supports the AACC strategy of alignment of the community college's mission, structures, and resources. Participating presidents

spoke passionately about the permeation of mission throughout decision-making, budgeting, hiring, communicating, and operations. The mission is the foundation of the college; it keeps the community college focused in times of change and increases accountabilities. President C summarized the focus on mission:

We need to take that value, those values, those traditions, with us. Sometimes I think institutions make the mistake as we make change that we throw out that which heretofore people have held really dear and close to their belief systems. And sometimes I think that is where some of the resistance to change comes in. It is more the perception that we're changing and we're throwing out the baby with the bath water. We value who we are, we value what we've done. And in order for us to maintain that and keep those traditions alive, we have to change.

The second organizational strategy theme represents the foundation of all leadership strategies for the participating presidents in this study on high performance in community colleges. It was clear in the discussion with high performance presidents that they have created an environment focused on student success. Every employee and stakeholder understood his or her role in helping students succeed, and all aspects guided the community college toward achieving success for every student. Beyond a token mission statement or a strategic plan listing students as the top priority, high performing presidents build systems, processes, decisions, support, and services to help the community college achieve high performance for every individual student.

The third theme related to organizational strategy is parallel to two of the strategies presented in the literature review: building a high performance culture (Eisenstat et al., 2008) and articulating a vision for high performance (Cannella Jr. & Monroe, 1997). Several participating presidents discussed the importance of capitalizing on the synergy of early adapters within the community colleges (Rogers, 1983). If

presidents spend too much time worrying about the people who are unwilling to change or help the organization reach high performance, they will also lose the enthusiasm and trust of the early adapters. High performing presidents clearly articulate a vision and continue to move forward toward that vision with the stakeholders who are ready, strategies that create a high performance culture.

The fourth theme brings several strategies together. Leaders developed systems thinking and improvements in an effort to empower employees to take risks and challenge routine, a theme that aligns with the AACCC successful assessment, monitoring, and improvement of the community college. This theme also aligns with the literature review strategy of fully understanding the internal and external factors that impact performance (Ertel, 1999) while building risk, innovation, change management, and an entrepreneurial approach. Instead of separate strategies, participating presidents spoke about systems thinking (Townsend & Bassoppo-Moyo, 1997) and systems improvements as foundational requirements of innovation and risk-taking.

As they relate to organizational strategy, one AACCC strategy not explicitly discussed by participants in the study is proven data-driven strategy alignment (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). Based on the study findings, a leadership definition for effective organizational strategy in high performing community colleges is as follows:

High performing presidents are tirelessly focused on student success. The focus on students and achieving the community college mission permeates all decisions, financial resources, human resources, and partnerships. High performing presidents harness the enthusiasm of early adapters rather than waiting for

everyone to get on board. They focus on systems thinking and systems improvements to lead the community college to high performance.

Professionalism Discussion

Professionalism is defined as being authentic and visionary, understanding and endorsing the culture of community colleges, managing stress through self-care and balance, and promoting and maintaining high standards for personal and community college integrity, honesty, and respect for people (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). The strategies for effective community college professionalism are employing strategies to build the community college reputation, exuding wisdom and emotional intelligence (Quy, 1999), building trust (Roe & Baker, 1989), and developing and maintaining high expectations and accountabilities for high performance.

In Chapter 4, several findings for effective leadership strategies for professionalism were presented.

- (a) the president is the culture of the college. His or her integrity, humility, and standards are replicated throughout the culture,
- (b) high performance is achieved by developing, communicating, and maintaining high standards throughout the community college,
- (c) high performance presidents take deep responsibility for their actions and the actions of all members of the college community. Accountability, not blame, is harnessed in the organizational culture, and,
- (d) professionalism requires a future-focused and optimistic reaction, even in the midst of drama and controversy.

The first theme supports the AACC strategy of promoting and maintaining high standards for personal and community college integrity, honesty, and respect for people, and the leadership strategy of building the community college reputation presented in the literature review. High performing presidents act with integrity, humility and high standards. The leader's actions, words, and strategies, both while at work and in his or her personal life, build the professionalism culture of the community college. The culture engages or diminishes the reputation of the community college.

The second professionalism theme supports the strategy of maintaining high expectations and accountabilities for high performance presented in the literature review. This second theme moves beyond the president's actions, words, and strategies to developing, communicating, and maintaining high standards. High performing presidents use high standards to keep everyone engaged and focused on the institutional mission (Collins, 2005). High performing presidents do not compromise integrity or lower institutional standards.

The third theme describes the result of exuding wisdom and emotional intelligence presented in the literature review. High performing presidents are emotionally intelligent leaders who are wise in their approach to organizational community and culture. They mentor those around them, utilize the contributions of team members, build relationships, and value the insight of those within the organization (Rubin, Dierdorff, & Brown, 2010). The wisdom, mentoring, and relationships lead to a deep responsibility for actions of the members of the community college community. Employee contributions and mistakes are viewed as part of organizational learning (Senge, 1996). When employees are engaged in the mission of the college and

contributing to high performance, high performance presidents focus coaching, mentoring, and expectations on accountability and not on blame.

The fourth theme is a result of the authentic and visionary AACC leadership strategies. High performing presidents are not immune to drama and controversy. In fact, participating presidents openly discussed the frequency of drama, intense dialogue, and controversial decisions as key cultural elements within community colleges. Consistency in focus and vision and the reaction of the presidents served to enhance or diminish leaders' professionalism. High performing presidents remain focused on the future (Mankins, Bird, & Root, 2013) and committed to their vision, through all elements of the culture.

As they relate to professionalism, the AACC strategies not explicitly discussed by participants in the study include understanding and endorsing the culture of community colleges, and managing stress through self-care and balance (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). The professionalism strategies presented in the literature were all discussed by participating presidents.

Based on the study findings, a leadership definition for effective professionalism in high performing community colleges is as follows:

High performing community college presidents act with integrity and humility. They communicate and maintain high standards and take deep responsibility for their actions and the actions of all members of the college community. Even in difficult times, high performing presidents remain future-focused and optimistic.

Resource Management Discussion

Effective resource management in leadership is defined as the successful development and management of resources, an entrepreneurial approach to alternative funding sources, efficient human resource practices and performance management systems, and positive management of conflict (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). Effective leaders recognize resource management as having two distinct divisions: financial resource management and people resource management. There are several elements of effective resource management supported in literature that add to the AACC definition. The strategies for effective financial resource management supported in literature are building organizational capacity and developing a holistic fiscal management model. The strategies for effective people resource management are a focus on people as the largest community college resource, hiring people who fit in the organization, mentoring high performing people, and developing engagement with employees. Two themes related to effective leader strategies for financial resource management were presented in Chapter 4.

- (a) effective partnerships leverage the limited and declining resources of community colleges; and,
- (b) high performing presidents are transparent in budget planning, spending, and reduction processes.

The first financial resource management theme supports the AACC strategies of successfully developing and managing resources and having an entrepreneurial approach to alternative funding sources. The first theme also supports both strategies presented in the literature review: building organizational capacity (Lim, 1995) and developing a

holistic fiscal management model (Henry, 2007). In general, participants focused very little on financial resource management and many spoke about having excellent financial staff, although the conversation shifted toward partnerships as a holistic solution to financial resource management. Partnerships for student enrollments, transfer opportunities, college readiness, resource sharing, job creation, and grant development were discussed as effective strategies for high performance.

The second theme was not explicitly stated in the AACC strategies or the leadership strategies presented in the literature review. It may have been implied throughout the strategies; however, transparency in financial resource strategies was unequivocally discussed by participating presidents. High performing presidents spoke very little about financial resources processes and procedures. Rather, they spoke about having personnel involved and engaged through all financial resource planning, spending, and reduction processes. Transparency in financial resource management is essential for organizational trust and employee engagement.

As they relate to financial resource management, all of the AACC strategies and the strategies presented in the literature were at least partially discussed by participating presidents. Based on the study findings, a leadership definition for effective financial resource management in high performing community colleges is as follows:

High performing community college presidents build partnerships to leverage the limited and declining resources of community colleges. Through all fiscal elements and phases, high performing presidents are transparent in budget planning, spending, and reduction processes.

People Resource Management Strategies Discussion

In Chapter 4, there were several leadership strategies for effective people resource management presented.

(a) employee engagement is valued in high performing community colleges.

Presidents are effective at recognizing the skills and talents of team members,

(b) high performing community colleges invest in the professional development of the people who help the community college achieve high performance.

Leadership is distributed throughout the organization; employees contribute to high performance outcome achievement,

(c) high performing presidents consider hiring team members one of the biggest leadership priorities. Hiring does not occur unless the candidate fits the organizational mission and strategic directions, and,

(d) presidents who achieve high performance make tough decisions about people who are not helping the college move forward toward meeting strategic priorities.

Although this impacts social capital, presidents recognize not holding everyone to high standard impacts the organization on a much broader level.

The first theme closely aligns with two of the strategies for effective resource management presented in the literature review: focusing on people as the largest community college resource and developing engagement with employees. The strategies presented throughout the leadership competencies lead to employee engagement.

Presidents did not speak about employee engagement as a strategy but rather a result of making communication, professionalism, and collaboration a priority. Employee

engagement leads to high performance because employees are committed to the mission and the strategic direction of the college.

The second theme supports the mentoring high performing people strategy presented in the literature review. Participating presidents spoke about identifying employees who perform to a high standard and developing them to build leadership capacity. High performing presidents are retaining the best and brightest talent who infuse the community college with energy and new ideas (Smith & Crawford, 2007; Solansky, 2010). High levels of employee engagement, distributed leadership through empowerment, and targeted professional development opportunities were presented by participating presidents as the key reason why the colleges were reaching high performance.

The third theme mimics the strategy of hiring people who fit in the organization (Mankins, Bird, & Root (2013). Participating presidents spoke about being purposeful in hiring, supporting, and growing people who embrace the future direction of the college. High performance presidents are very engaged in the hiring process for the organization. They put systems in place to ensure they are hiring and retaining people who help achieve high performance. If there is any question about a candidate's fit or ability to contribute to high performance, the candidate is not hired; at that point, the hiring process starts over.

The fourth theme was prominently discussed by participating presidents. At first glance, the finding may seem to support the AACC strategy of efficient human resource practices and performance management systems as a strategy; however, when the strategy of making tough decisions about people who are not helping the college move

forward was discussed by participating presidents, it was discussed in the context of inhibiting high performance and not in the context of efficiency. The decision to remove someone from the community college may or may not create efficiencies; the purpose is to maintain high standards and move the organization toward high performance.

As they relate to people resource management, the AACC strategies not explicitly discussed by participants in the study included efficient human resource practices and performance management systems and positive management of conflict (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). The participating presidents talked at length about developing, mentoring, hiring, and engaging employees although they never talked about people in terms of efficiency or systems. The AACC definition may parallel some of the findings, but participating presidents used very different language.

Based on the study findings, a leadership definition for effective people resource management in high performing community colleges is as follows:

High performing community college presidents value employee engagement and recognizing the skills and talents of team members. They invest in professional development and distribute leadership throughout the organization. High performing presidents consider hiring team members one of the biggest leadership priorities, and they do not hire people who do not fit the organizational mission and strategic directions. Presidents who achieve high performance make tough decisions about people who are not helping the college move forward toward meeting strategic priorities because they recognize that not holding everyone to high standards impacts the organization on a much broader level.

Implications of the Study

The research question emerged from the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 1 (see Figure 1). Based on the research findings, the framework of leader strategy impact on community college performance has been updated (see figure 4) The study sought to address the research question: How do community college leader strategies impact high performance in community college outcomes? The interview questions explored the strategies related to the leadership constructs of organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism in community colleges. The 27 thematic findings informed the research question. Leadership strategies affect the performance, standards, reputation, purpose, strategic direction, and focus of the community college. The performance, standards, reputation, purpose, strategic direction, focus, and ownership of the community college influence the engagement levels of employees, stakeholders, and partners. Employee, stakeholder, and partner engagement impacts the support, mindset, tone, culture, and commitment to the community college mission and strategic directions. The support, mindset, tone, and organizational culture, as well as the level of commitment to the community college mission and strategic directions, enhances or diminishes community college performance.

The framework and study findings present a range of effective leadership strategies leading to high performance in community college outcomes. Community college presidents seeking to increase organizational performance may benefit from employing the strategies discussed in the study findings. In addition, community college presidents may benefit from considering the overall strategies for high performance

presented by participating presidents. The following recommendations can help community college presidents develop effective leadership strategies:

1. People are the heart of the community college. The lives of students change because of the teaching, caring, and service of the people in the community college. Presidents who focus on hiring, developing, engaging, and collaborating with the best people will reach high performance. Focus on people, and high performance will surface.
2. Focus on three to five key strategic initiatives each academic cycle. High performance presidents stay on track with a small number of initiatives and remain consistent in focus, message, metrics, and outcome reporting. The focus builds a culture of committed people moving in the same direction, therefore increasing performance in other areas as well.
3. The presidential/organizational fit is critical for high performance. High performing presidents are loyal to the mission and strategic direction of their particular institution – not just any community college.
4. Presidents will never make everyone happy. Focusing on the people who are unhappy negatively impacts movement toward high performance. Harnessing the energy of the people who are ready to achieve greatness is an effective strategy for high performance.
5. There are real highs and lows in the presidential role. As long as the president remains focused on the success of students, he or she can achieve high performance.

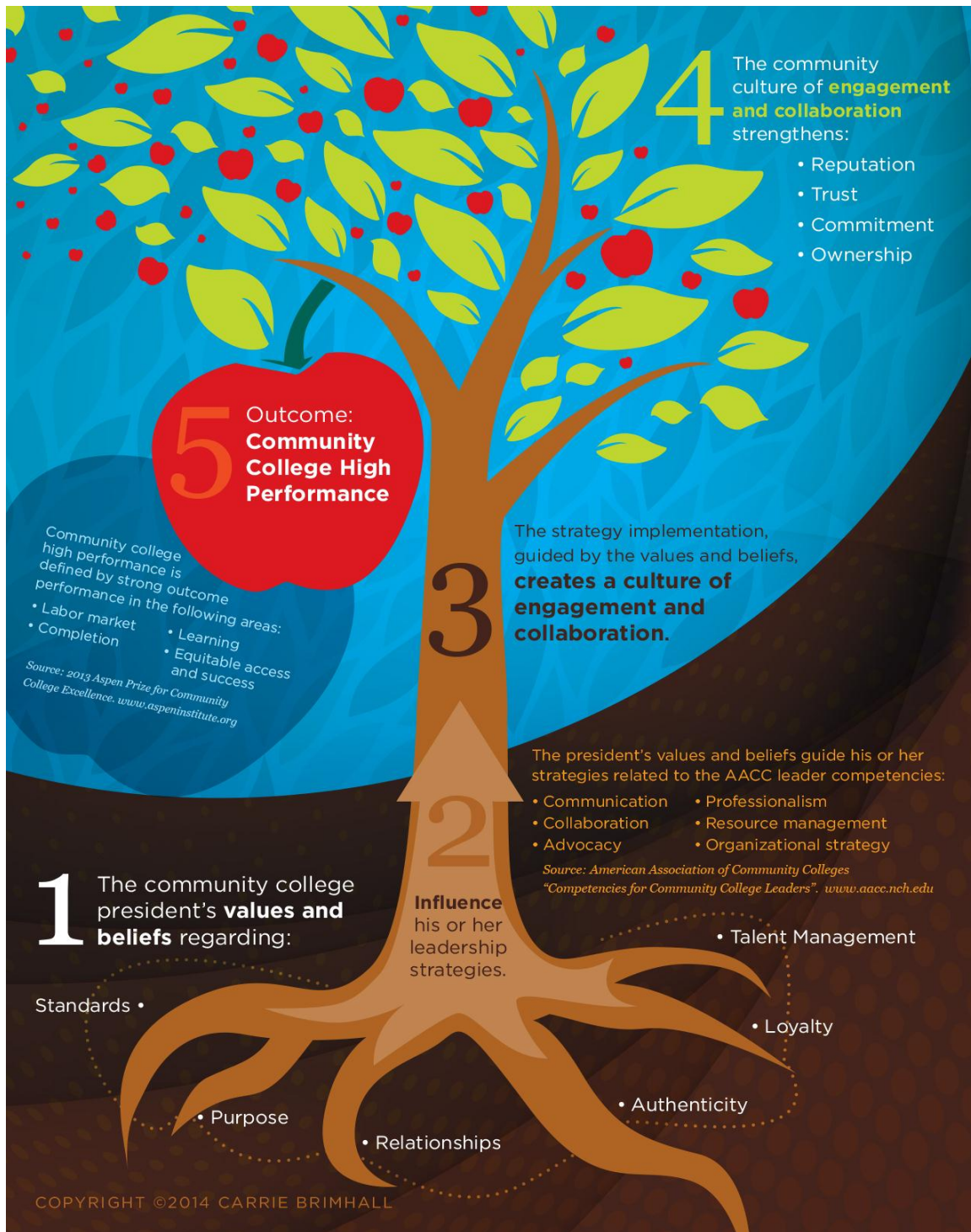


Figure 4. Framework of leader strategy impact on community college performance.
 Note. Community College Outcome Source: Aspen Institute (2013).
 Note. Leader Competency Source: American Association of Community Colleges (2013).

6. The issue, not the person or his or her organizational status, should determine the president's focus, attention, and level of prioritization.
7. Every day, every conversation, and every act of the president sets the organization's tone and develops the organizational culture. Taking time to develop thoughtful communications is essential for high performance.
8. Consistency in actions and vision as well as an unwavering focus on the community college mission impacts high performance. Stakeholders may not always like the decisions, actions, or focus of the president, but they will continue to respect an unwavering and consistent approach.
9. High performing presidents are humbly aware of their impact. The community college reputation and achievement of outcomes depends on the interactions, decisions, partnership opportunities, and relationship outcomes of the president.
10. Community college strategic directions cannot be abandoned. There are distractions that emerge on a daily or hourly basis. New initiatives, accountability measures, and fads have the potential to send the leadership team and community college stakeholders down paths that do not lead to high performance. Presidents must tirelessly shift back to the strategic directions and away from distractions.

Limitations

The stated research question emerged from the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 1 (see Figure 1) and therefore framed the scope of the study to address the community college leader strategies that impact high performance in community college outcomes. The study explored leadership strategies related to the constructs of organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community

college advocacy, and professionalism in community colleges. The study did not explore the leadership styles, demographic characteristics, college elements other than size, or other competencies that may impact high performance, leaving an opportunity for further research. The small number of interviews limits the ability to generalize results across a larger population of all high performance community colleges (Payne, & Williams, 2005), community colleges not achieving high performance, or educational institutions other than community colleges.

Purposeful sampling of the highest-performing community colleges in the nation (Starks & Trinidad, 2007) addressed the research question and assumed the presidents of high performing community colleges would have more effective strategies than those who were not listed on the Aspen Institute's Top 120 Community Colleges (2013). Interviewed presidents may not be representative of the entire group of high performing community college presidents, and results might have been different with another sample of interview participants. The average tenure for president participants in this study was 7.11 years, and a large number of the participants, 11 of the 17, had served only as a community college president in their current institution. Interviews with presidents who had served in several institutions, newer presidents, or presidents with longer tenure might have produced different results.

The final limitation in this study was the geographic disbursement of the population. The high performing presidents who participated in the study were geographically located throughout the United States. The researcher lacked resources and time to conduct in-person interviews with each community college president, so the mannerisms, emotions, and uniqueness of each individual were not directly observed

(Engelsrud, 2005). WebEx© technology assisted in obtaining some observations of those elements, but interviews conducted in person might have produced more nuanced results.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study explored effective leadership strategies for achieving high performance in community college outcomes. Effective strategies for leaders were defined as the organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism lived experiences of leaders in high performance community colleges. There are several recommendations for further research; for example, scholars could explore the impact of gender or ethnicity on leadership strategies in high performance community colleges. Participating presidents had varied career paths prior to becoming community college presidents; in addition, 11 of the 17 presidents had served as a community college president only in their current institution. Research focused on how high performance strategies align with a community college president's career path is recommended.

In addition, additional research could be conducted to compare leadership strategies at high performing community colleges with the strategies of presidents at community colleges struggling to reach high performance. The last recommendation for further research is impact of environmental factors on high performance strategies. Institution size, bargaining status, faculty make-up, geographic location, and community size may impact leader strategies for community college high performance. The topic of high performance strategies in community college leadership has not been explored in depth; therefore, these are just a few areas in which additional research on community colleges could be beneficial.

.Summary

Community colleges are an integral part of the higher education system. Community colleges address the training needs for a skilled workforce and provide liberal arts educational opportunities for individuals who might not be able to access four-year institutions. Community colleges that are achieving high performance in community college outcomes are providing graduates who can meet the needs of the workforce, transferring successful students to universities, building effective partnerships, effectively managing resources, and increasing stakeholder satisfaction (Murray, 2010). The study was developed because a framework defining effective leadership strategies for directly influencing high performance standards in community colleges does not exist (Campbell et al., 2010). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore effective leadership strategies for achieving high performance in community college outcomes. Effective strategies for leaders were defined as the organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism lived experiences of leaders in high performance community colleges. The leadership strategy findings may provide guidance for high performance leadership strategies at community colleges around the nation. The findings of this study may also create a foundational understanding of the impact of leadership strategies on institutional outcomes.

Leaders in community colleges not listed by the Aspen Institute as the highest performing in the nation have the potential to mimic the leadership strategies presented in this chapter by presidents who are achieving high performance (Eddy, 2013). Exploring

the topic of high performance through the lens of the leaders has provided a framework for leader impact in community colleges.

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APPENDIX A. STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL WORK

Academic Honesty Policy

Capella University's Academic Honesty Policy ([3.01.01](#)) holds learners accountable for the integrity of work they submit, which includes but is not limited to discussion postings, assignments, comprehensive exams, and the dissertation or capstone project.

Established in the Policy are the expectations for original work, rationale for the policy, definition of terms that pertain to academic honesty and original work, and disciplinary consequences of academic dishonesty. Also stated in the Policy is the expectation that learners will follow APA rules for citing another person's ideas or works.

The following standards for original work and definition of *plagiarism* are discussed in the Policy:

Learners are expected to be the sole authors of their work and to acknowledge the authorship of others' work through proper citation and reference. Use of another person's ideas, including another learner's, without proper reference or citation constitutes plagiarism and academic dishonesty and is prohibited conduct. (p. 1)

Plagiarism is one example of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism is presenting someone else's ideas or work as your own. Plagiarism also includes copying verbatim or rephrasing ideas without properly acknowledging the source by author, date, and publication medium. (p. 2)

Capella University's Research Misconduct Policy ([3.03.06](#)) holds learners accountable for research integrity. What constitutes research misconduct is discussed in the Policy:

Research misconduct includes but is not limited to falsification, fabrication, plagiarism, misappropriation, or other practices that seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the academic community for proposing, conducting, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. (p. 1)

Learners failing to abide by these policies are subject to consequences, including but not limited to dismissal or revocation of the degree.

Statement of Original Work and Signature

I have read, understood, and abided by Capella University's Academic Honesty Policy ([3.01.01](#)) and Research Misconduct Policy ([3.03.06](#)), including the Policy Statements, Rationale, and Definitions.

I attest that this dissertation or capstone project is my own work. Where I have used the ideas or words of others, I have paraphrased, summarized, or used direct quotes following the guidelines set forth in the *APA Publication Manual*.



Learner name
and date

Carrie Brimhall, January 7, 2014

Mentor name
and school

Dr. Toni Greif, Capella University
School of Business and Technology

APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL GUIDE

Interview Protocol Guide

Capella University, 225 South 6th Street, 9th Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55402

Study Title: Leadership Strategies in High Performing Community Colleges: An Exploratory Phenomenological Study.

Researcher: Carrie Brimhall, PhD learner

Email Address and Telephone Number: XXX

Research Supervisor: Dr. Toni Greif

Email Address: XXX

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore effective leadership strategies for achieving high performance in community college outcomes. At this stage in the research, effective strategies for leaders will be generally defined as the organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism lived experiences of leaders in high performance community colleges. The findings of this study may create a foundational understanding of the impact of leadership strategies on institutional outcomes. Leaders in community colleges not listed by the Aspen Institute as the highest performing in the nation have the potential to mimic the strategies found in colleges achieving high performance (Eddy, 2013). Exploring the topic of high performance through the lens of the leaders at highly successful community colleges may provide a foundational focus related to leader impact.

Introduction

I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. My name is Carrie Brimhall, and I would like to talk to you about participation in the **Leadership Strategies in High performing Community Colleges: An Exploratory Phenomenological Study**. The interview will take less than an hour. I will be taping the interview using a recording software, because I don't want to miss any of your comments. Although I will be taking some notes during the session, I can't possibly write fast enough to get it all down. Because we are recording, please be sure to speak up so that I don't miss your comments. All responses will be kept confidential. This means that your interview responses will be shared only with professional transcriptionist and I can assure that any information included in the report will not identify you personally. Remember, you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to, and you may end the interview at any time.

Are there any questions about what I have just explained?

I have received your signed consent form. Following this brief review of the study are you still willing to participate in this interview? If so, please state your willingness to participate in the interview.

It may be helpful to have the AACCC leader competency definitions provided by the researcher as you answer the interview questions.

Interview questions

- How long have you been the President of XXX College?
- How long have you been a CC President?
- Describe your career path to the community college presidency.
- As an effective leader, you could work in many different industries. Why have you chosen community college leadership?
- What collaborative processes do you employ as a leader?
Can you provide a recent example?
Did the recent experience impact organizational performance? In what way?
- What advocacy strategies do you consider most important for a community college leader?
Please provide an example of the advocacy strategies you have utilized recently and how they impact organizational performance.
- What resource management and development strategies are important to employ on a regular basis?
Please provide an example of the resource management and development strategies you have utilized recently and how the strategies impacted organizational performance.
- What communication strategies influence high performance outcomes in community colleges?
Can you explain which written, verbal, or other communication skills are vital to your success?
Please give an example of why they are important.
- What aspects of professionalism impact and promote high performance outcomes in community colleges?
- What do you believe are the most effective organizational strategies for promoting high performance outcomes in community colleges?
- What specific actions (from those strategies) have contributed most to high performance at your community college?

- Do you have any comments, thoughts, or suggestions that might contribute to this study?

I'll be reviewing the information you and others provide and will follow a process of member checking where you can review the transcript of the interview to ensure I have accurately reflected your lived experiences. Once my dissertation is approved, I will send you an executive summary of my findings for your information and as a thank you for participating in this research.

Thank you for your time.

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