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PERCEPTIONS OF ILLINOIS COMMUNITY COLLEGE CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICERS:
FULFILLING THE MISSION

MARK A. COYKENDALL

104 Pages

This study documents voices of the most experienced active Illinois community college chief academic officers (CAOs). Adaptive leadership theory is used to frame the efforts of CAOs to infuse accountability into the core community college open access mission. The analysis of conversations with these CAOs reveals a focus on accountability that centers around student success initiatives rather than an urgent need to improve completion rates. The CAOs interviewed perceived student success and open access as crucial components of the mission of community colleges. The CAOs describe the work they do to help fulfill the mission and how that work has changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Advice is provided for those who aspire to the CAO position and for those responsible for developing future CAOs.

KEYWORDS: accountability; adaptive leadership theory; community college; community college chief academic officer; community college missions; completion rates; open access; student success

PERCEPTIONS OF ILLINOIS COMMUNITY COLLEGE CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICERS:
FULFILLING THE MISSION

MARK A. COYKENDALL

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Administration and Foundations

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2021

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PERCEPTIONS OF ILLINOIS COMMUNITY COLLEGE CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICERS:
FULFILLING THE MISSION

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This decade-long journey required persistence of me and patience and encouragement from so many. I would like to thank the faculty members with whom I took coursework; each contributed to my knowledge and to the honing of my writing skills. Three of those faculty members contributed more directly to this dissertation. Dr. James Palmer, my original chair, ignited my fire to restart this work on several occasions including a final push near his retirement to set me on a trajectory with a new chair and a committee that could see me through to the end. My current chair, Dr. Dianne Renn, along with committee member Dr. Mohammad Nur-Awaleh taught the very first two courses I took in the program. Though I know Dr. Lydia Kyei-Blankson, Dr. Gavin Weiser, and Dr. Lenford Sutton only as committee members, each offered feedback and support from our first encounters. I am grateful for the work each put into this effort.

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M. A. C.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to document how selected community college chief academic officers (CAOs) view their contributions to realizing the missions of their institutions, considering the shift from a focus on open access to one that includes completion and other forms of outcome accountability. There is a significant lack of research on arguably one of the most important positions at community colleges, the CAO. In the literature that does exist there are few CAO voices. Trachtenberg, Kauvar, and Bogue (2013) predicted that 75% of all CAOs would no longer be serving by 2023. Understanding how CAOs function effectively needs to be a priority. In this qualitative study I interviewed Illinois community college CAOs to document their perceptions on how CAOs work to fulfill the mission of their institutions.

Though referenced in the literature as deans of instruction, vice presidents, or provosts, I use CAO throughout this paper to reference those administrators in charge of academic affairs at community colleges. The CAO is typically considered to be second in command on campus and often performs presidential responsibilities when the president is not available (Vaughan, 1990). CAOs who are perceived as the most successful have a skill set that includes the ability to: understand faculty perspective (Cejda, 2008), build consensus and political support (Ferren & Stanton, 2004; Martin & Samels, 1997), collaborate across constituencies (Ferren & Stanton, 2004), understand and adapt to the culture (Trachtenberg, et al., 2013), balance the colleague/administrator relationship with the faculty (Erwin, 2000), and serve the president while representing the faculty (Martin & Samels, 2015).

Most CAOs have risen through the ranks of academic departments, from department chairs or deans, or directly from the faculty (Eckel, Cook, & King, 2009). That journey often adds to their standing in the eyes of stakeholders, especially faculty members, and adds

credibility to the initiatives CAOs support. Hellmich (2007) stressed the importance of having ethical leaders, individuals who base decisions on what is best for the institution while examining and questioning their actions and decisions in relation to the mission of the institution.

CAOs are charged with representing the institution's academic purpose (Ferren & Stanton, 2004) and promoting academic quality while setting a guiding vision (Eckel et al., 2009; Martin & Samels, 2015). Because of this, even staff who are not directly associated with curriculum and instruction but who are invested in the community college mission and student success (i.e., student affairs staff) look to the CAO for leadership.

Research Problem and Purpose of the Study

Projections on CAO retirements have been known for years yet there remains a shortage of research on CAOs (Amey, VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2002; Cejda, McKenney, & Burley, 2001; Keim & Murray, 2008). With 75% of all CAOs predicted to retire by 2023 (Trachtenberg et al., 2013), it is imperative to gain an understanding of how CAOs function to fulfill the evolving community college mission. New pressures face those that will assume CAO positions. The federal government's 2009 American Graduation Initiative (AGI), which mandated publication of higher education completion rates, has motivated a new sense of focus on completion rates across postsecondary education (Bragg & Durham, 2012). Community college CAOs must be able to offer leadership that effectively promotes the incorporation of student success (i.e., improved completion rates) into the mission of their institutions.

As you will read in Chapter II, given the importance of the CAO role a few researchers have studied the demographics of current CAOs: documenting age, gender, educational background, and prior work experience (Eckel et al., 2009; Vaughan, 1990). Others have studied the characteristics and traits that might indicate strong leadership skills (Cohen, Brawer &

Kisker, 2014; Ferren & Stanton, 2004). There is also an effort by researchers to start emphasizing the need to develop future CAOs (Allen & Cejda, 2007; Trachtenberg, et al., 2013). However, very few researchers have employed qualitative techniques to elicit how CAOs themselves perceive their work.

The purpose of this study was to document how community college CAOs work to fulfill the mission of their institutions considering the shift from access to completion and other forms of outcome accountability. This study provides insights into the leadership qualities necessary to guide community colleges through shifts in academic accountability that expands the focus on access mission to incorporate completion as a core metric of success. Since the 1960s, access to higher education has been a core consideration and key metric for academic accountability for all institutions, but community colleges in particular (Cohen et al., 2014). In the 2000s the emphasis shifted from the access metric to consider completion rates (Dowd, 2007). This shift generated a new emphasis on academic success, leading to innovative approaches like the pathways approach to retention, persistence, and completion (Bailey, Smith Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015).

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do community college chief academic officers perceive their leadership roles as institutions shift to focus not just on open access but also outcomes/completion rates?
2. How did the shift to focus on outcomes affect the work of chief academic officers?

Conceptual Framework

The incorporation of academic success into the access mission of community colleges is not the first challenge these institutions have faced. Change is a hallmark of community colleges as their mission is ever expanding, growing from the original transfer function to include vocational training, adult basic education, and workforce development (Cohen et al., 2014).

Community colleges are charged with a multitude of functions. They act as conduits to develop skills that students may not have gained in their K-12 experiences. Students are developing those skills for multiple reasons. Some may be taking adult education courses to earn a high school equivalency. Other students plan to enter the job market directly after earning a certificate or degree. Others may already be employed and are taking coursework to earn a promotion or higher pay, while others may be retraining to enter a new job field. Another group of students may be taking community college coursework to gain skills or to save money by completing general education coursework at more affordable community colleges before matriculating to four-year higher education institutions.

Because the needs of community stakeholders change as industry evolves, community colleges are constantly reacting and changing. The acute need to change has been evidenced by the reactions to the global health pandemic caused by COVID-19. Institutions were forced to shift the entire curriculum to an online environment or suspend courses all together, a radical transformation. While this study was not designed to explore the effects of the pandemic on CAO leadership, the issues that Covid-19 raised for community colleges turned out to be a serendipitous opportunity to explore how these leaders navigate change and one that they were willing to discuss freely.

CAOs who embrace change and who work to continuously improve and meet the needs of stakeholders must be transformational by necessity. Several authors discussed the need for strong, transformational leadership (Anderson, 2008; Birnbaum, 1988; Diamond & Adam, 2002; Hellmich, 2007; Martin & Samels, 1997). CAOs working to fulfill the mission of the institution should be inspirationally transformational leaders, motivated to move beyond a managerial or transactional style. Transformational leadership is based on the premise that the leaders must

work to learn what motivates followers and find ways to identify and accomplish collective goals (Burns, 1978). Cohen et al. (2014) stated that leaders need followers who feel that their goals are being furthered. These leaders challenge the process where necessary, model the way, and delegate to enable others to act; all while inspiring a shared vision (Erwin, 2000; Hellmich, 2007).

Institutional culture refers to a common set of principles and practices that have developed over time. The interaction between these often-longstanding principles and practices creates an identity that staff, students, and the community perceive as foundational to the institution (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Expanding community college culture to incorporate academic success into the access mission requires a considerable amount of time and a specific type of leadership. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) discussed adaptive leadership, outlining the mechanisms used to successfully adapt cultures to accommodate new components. The authors distinguished the difference between technical problems and adaptive challenges, noting that both are relevant to leaders. Technical problems can typically be resolved using current knowledge, while adaptive challenges require learning and are therefore better addressed with input from many stakeholders. It was also recognized that solutions to some technical problems do require more thought/learning and those circumstances reflect the need to merge technical and adaptive strategies. CAOs who practice adaptive leadership mobilize stakeholders to examine their institutional culture, conserve what is valuable, discard that which is not, and invent new contributions that create a culture that is revitalized (Heifetz et al., 2009). This adaptive leadership theory guided my study. Chapter II will expand on this theory and the application to this study in more detail.

Understanding the power of campus stakeholders and which members hold some level of influence is crucial to establishing allies and creating an environment where grassroots ideas can grow. CAOs who identify and foster potential leaders within the faculty and inspire a shared vision can induce change at a foundational level, ensuring a stronger likelihood of success. The need to build relationships with stakeholders is critical (Cohen et al., 2014) to instilling a sense of the common missions. Efforts to realize the missions of the institution require developing long-term strategies, establishing goals, and potentially creating and implementing policies.

In the past fifteen years significant pressure had already stressed the need for adaptive leadership at community colleges. Accountability efforts caused community colleges to consider the importance of outcome equity and not just access equity (Bailey et al., 2015; Dowd, 2007), which was a fundamental paradigm shift. The open access model is a cultural touchstone for community colleges and finding a way to define success, not only as an entry metric but also an exit metric, is not an easy task. Cohen et al. (2014) noted that “it is difficult for an institution built on the theme of easy access to limit easy exit” (p.75). To lead efforts to shift culture so significantly CAOs must be effective agents of change at their institutions.

Study Participants and Methods

The relationship between the CAO and the evolving institutional missions is the central focus of this study. I interviewed CAOs with at least five years of experience to capture their perspectives on the increased emphasis on completion rates over their tenure. These experienced CAOs also spoke with authority about missions. I used the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) data to identify potential participants.

A phenomenological approach was used to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of CAOs (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Open-ended questions were used to engage in

a conversation with CAOs to document their perceptions of the work they do to help fulfill the missions of their institutions. Detailed notes were taken during and after interviews, and interviews were recorded for transcription. All data was analyzed for emergent themes using standard qualitative techniques (Creswell, 2009; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Maxwell, 1997). Initial findings were shared, and a second round of interviews was conducted to seek clarification on first round interviews and discuss the themes that emerged. Data from the second round was then analyzed before conclusions were drawn. A more detailed plan follows in Chapter III.

Definition of Terms

For ease of readability the following operational definitions are provided.

1. Chief Academic Officer: The chief academic officer (CAO) is the highest-ranked individual at the college responsible for all aspects of academic operations; including academic accreditation, leadership and development of faculty members, curriculum creation and maintenance, and assessment of student learning. A variety of titles are used for individuals who hold this position, including dean of instruction, vice-president for academic affairs, or vice-president for academic services. The title of provost is also used, particularly at four-year institutions. At community colleges the title of provost is normally used only when the CAO is responsible for both academic and student services. The CAO reports to the president/chief executive officer of the institution.

2. Career and Technical Education: Career and technical education (CTE) refers to credit programs at community colleges that focus on educating and training students for direct employment. These programs offer short-term certificates and/or two-year applied associate degrees. Students in CTE programs seldom continue their education at a four-year institution.

These programs have been referenced historically as vocational programs and referenced currently as career programs.

3. Community College: Community colleges are post-secondary, typically non-residential, institutions that offer community members non-credit courses for personal enrichment or workforce development (functions not directly related to CAO responsibilities), and credit-based career/technical and general education courses that can be applied to certificates and degrees. The credit-based opportunities are designed to allow students to find direct employment or transfer to four-year institutions to continue their education following matriculation. These institutions are also referred to as two-year institutions, and historically as junior colleges.

4. Completion Rate: Completion rates used to compare institutions nationally often reference Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) completion rates, which are defined as the percentage of first-time, full-time students who obtain their degree within 150% of expected time. In the case of community college that would equate to earning an associate degree in three years or less. This data has been collected by IPEDS since 1986 (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

5. COVID-19: COVID-19 was the name given by the World Health Organization on February 11, 2020 for the disease caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV2. “From enrollment to instruction, no part of open access postsecondary education has remained untouched by the coronavirus.” (Communication Staff, 2021)

6. Developmental or Remedial Education: Developmental or remedial education courses are designed to improve math and English skills for community college students who are assessed as not yet prepared to succeed in college-level courses.

7. Open Access Institution: Open access institutions require no minimum qualifications to apply. Students are not required to have college entrance exam scores or even high school diplomas. They are assessed to determine what level they are at and what courses they need to begin their educational journey at the institution.

8. Outcome Accountability: Outcome accountability in the context of this study refers to student success, often measured bluntly by completion rates.

9. Transfer Education: Transfer education refers to credit programs at community colleges that educate students who plan to pursue a baccalaureate degree at a four-year institution. Transfer programs offer two-year associate degrees designed to meet general education requirements prior to matriculation.

Statement of Positionality

I have understood the power of education and educators since I was in ninth grade. My desire to become an educator was born then. My path was long but direct, earning a baccalaureate degree to teach secondary school biology, followed by a master's degree in biology which led to working as an adjunct instructor at the community college level. I have been a full-time faculty member at a community college for over 18 years. For the past 15 years I have also served as the biology department chair, a faculty position that accounts for one-third of my load each semester. As chair I create course schedules, hire and manage adjuncts, compile budget requests, create annual action items and department level assessment plans, coordinate course articulations, submit book requisitions, organize and facilitate department meetings, and serve on the dean's advisory board.

My experiences as a faculty union member, faculty senator, and through participation on many committees have allowed me to engage significantly with those serving as CAO. The

relatively small size of community colleges means that there may be more opportunity for engagement between CAOs and faculty than at four-year institutions. For example, I have been on the college curriculum committee for 15 years and for the past 12 years I have served as chair. This curriculum chair role in particular requires interaction and coordination with academic affairs members, including the CAO. As department chair and curriculum chair, I find myself often straddling the faculty - administrator line and therefore I have developed an informed perspective of the administration and the role of the CAO.

During my time as a full-time faculty member the institution where I work has had six presidents and four CAOs. I have experienced interim presidents, interim CAOs and semesters without a CAO. The CAO provides a vital bridge to the other major areas of the college, student affairs, business affairs and the president. From a faculty perspective the lack of stable leadership in the CAO position is problematic and disconcerting. Higher education administration was created by faculty members who no longer wanted to be burdened with administrative tasks (Rudolph, 1962). However, that does not mean that faculty have abdicated a responsibility to assure that those tasks are being completed. Without a stable CAO, faculty not only feel the void in leadership, but they are also left to wonder if the tasks normally performed by the CAO are being completed. This study has deepened my understanding of the CAO role and contributes to a body of knowledge that can have practical meaning in developing future CAOs.

Importance of the Topic

CAOs at community colleges have had shorter tenures than any other administrative leadership team member, including presidents and vice-presidents of finance and student affairs (Cejda, McKenney & Fuller, 2001). In part that short tenure was a direct result of the number of community college presidents retiring. Thirty percent of community college CAOs were

projected to assume a presidential role as those positions became available (Cejda, McKenney & Fuller, 2001). The average time in office for community college CAOs has continued to decline over the years. The most recent figure from the literature reviewed listed 4.7 years as the average tenure of community college CAOs (Eckel et al., 2009). Those numbers are supported by the fact that only four of the 37 CAOs considered for this study had five or more years of experience. It is imperative that institutions develop new CAOs who can face the challenges of the position. Institutions also have to strengthen leadership at mid-level administrative and faculty positions to fill the vacuum when a CAO leaves.

There remains an increased call for accountability at community colleges (Bailey et al., 2015; Bragg & Durham, 2012; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Dowd, 2007; Jenkins, 2007; Ma, Pender, & Welch, 2016). Institutions are reflecting on their missions and their effectiveness at living up to those missions. In the era of increased accountability and reflection, the lack of literature on how CAOs promote the realization of the missions represents an opportunity for meaningful research. Studying the link between CAOs and the evolving missions of their institutions provides insight for future CAOs and all the stakeholders involved in developing and hiring CAOs.

Conclusions

Community College Chief Academic Officers (CAOs) must be able to face the challenges of everchanging missions, including the calls for greater outcome accountability. With so little literature on the topic, this study provides data to better inform the adaptive leadership necessary for CAO success. As turnover continues at the CAO level for many reasons, the need to identify leaders who can fill those positions is imperative. This qualitative study

captured voices of the four most experienced community college CAOs in Illinois to gain insight on the leadership necessary to meet the missions of their institutions.

CHAPTER II: ACCOUNTABILITY, LEADERSHIP, AND MISSIONS

The purpose of this study was to document how selected community college chief academic officers (CAOs) view their contributions to realizing the missions of their institutions, considering the shift from a focus on open access to one that includes completion and other forms of outcome accountability. This chapter offers a review of the literature for this study, detailing the pressures being applied to community colleges to incorporate outcome accountability into institutional missions. In addition, I outline the studies regarding CAOs and note the lack of substantive research on community colleges CAOs. I have included a primer on the ever-changing missions of community colleges. I also highlight the adaptive leadership theory that framed this study.

Accountability

Eighty percent of students entering community colleges state that they want to earn a baccalaureate degree, but less than fifteen percent will reach that goal (Bailey et al., 2015). The sobering reality for community college students is that historically less than forty percent of those entering complete an associate degree or certificate (Shapiro, Dunder, Huie, Wakhungu, Yuan, Nathan & Bhimdiwala, 2017). As Bragg & Durham (2012) noted, completion rates for minority and low-income students remain disproportionately low even as access has improved. Minority students make up a larger portion of the community college student body as compared to four-year institutions (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021). These alarming completion rates highlight the need for adaptive and transformational leadership by the CAO and other leaders within community colleges.

Data Driven Change

The federal government's 2009 American Graduation Initiative (AGI) was the impetus for a new sense of focus on completion rates across postsecondary education (Bragg & Durham, 2012). The publication of completion rates mandated by the AGI shed light on the alarmingly low rates at community colleges (Bailey et al., 2015). However, completion rates are by no means the only measure of success that ought to be considered when examining the role and value of community colleges (Bailey et al., 2015; Bragg & Durham, 2012; Cohen et al., 2014; Dowd, 2007). Many faculty members, counselors, and other staff value individual student progress over institutional accomplishments represented by completion rates (Cohen et al., 2014). Yet completion rates are used to rank institutions. CAOs and other institutional leaders must acknowledge and respect the perspectives of those who challenge the use of completion rates as the only measure of success, while they promote initiatives and policies that improve those rates. Such strategies will be discussed in Chapter V.

Dowd (2007) and others argue that lower completion rates are a direct result of the open access mission of community colleges (Bailey et al., 2015; Bragg & Durham, 2012; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Jenkins, 2007; Ma et al., 2016). Accepting students regardless of their preparedness for postsecondary education inevitably leads to lower completion rates. Completion rates, typically measured as a degree earned within 150% of normal time for first-time, full-time students, reveal a discrepancy between four-year institutions and community colleges. While half of all students entering a four-year institution receive a baccalaureate degree within six years, only twenty percent of those entering a community college earn an associate degree within three years (Bragg & Durham, 2012).

Calls to increase completion rates are partly based on earnings statistics that illustrate the financial benefits of postsecondary education. Students who complete an associate degree will earn on average twenty-five percent more than those who earn a high school diploma; and that gain increases to sixty-seven percent for those completing a baccalaureate degree (Ma et al., 2016). Unemployment rates, poverty rates, and public assistance rates all decrease with higher levels of postsecondary education; while retirement savings, volunteerism, and voting all increase. In addition to economic benefits for individuals, postsecondary education also yields societal benefits: fulfilling a foundational promise of higher education to create a more democratic citizenry (Ma et al., 2016).

The argument linking access to completion is strong. It is difficult to dispute the data when it comes to completion rates for community college students. Given the value placed on degree attainment described earlier it is clear that community colleges do need to look beyond equity of access to include outcome equity (Bragg & Durham, 2012). As Dowd (2007) stated we must focus on both the inputs and the outputs. Access without success is not equity at all (Bragg & Durham, 2012).

A fundamental weakness in the argument that open access leads to lower completion rates is in the data being used. As described earlier, success based on examining completion rates for first-time, full-time students may not be the best measure of success. This data captures only one segment of one component of the missions of community colleges (Torres, Hagedorn, & Heacock, 2018). Excluding any measure of success for part-time students for example, who make up sixty-five percent of community college students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021), seems misleading when defining the success of an institution. Alternative data that captures a wider definition, including certificate completion and degree attainment of part-

time students, is more telling, documenting a fifty-nine percent success rate (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021).

A myopic view of success could result in diminishment of the open access foundation of community colleges. Community colleges cannot sacrifice the open access model in an attempt to increase completion rates by becoming more selective (Mullin, 2017; Torres et al., 2018). Shannon and Smith (2006) noted that government funding cuts make it impossible to expand the mission beyond the focus on open access. Institutions are left to find ways to increase completion rates with the resources they already have. Strong adaptive and transformational leadership is essential in assuring that the ever-expanding mission of the community college to include completion equity does not jeopardize open access.

Existing Literature Reviewed

To gain an understanding of community college CAOs and their leadership, I explored primary texts which offer a foundational body of thought and peer-reviewed journal articles on the topic. There are few primary texts focused on community college CAOs. These texts, and those on higher education leadership more broadly defined, are limited to insights on the career paths, characteristics, and roles of CAOs. There is also a lack of existing research regarding adaptive or transformational leadership theory of community college CAOs. For the ease of readability in this literature review, I designate when I am specifically referring to community college CAOs.

Primary Texts

Career Paths of the CAO

The roots of most community college CAOs are in the faculty (Brown, 1984; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Ferren & Stanton, 2004). The most common route to the CAO position begins at

the faculty level and proceeds through department head to division chair to associate dean to academic dean (Eckel et al., 2009; Vaughan, 1990). CAOs are hired from all levels of this career ladder, including 10% directly from the faculty (Eckel et al., 2009). In 1989 Vaughan documented that 55% of all community college deans aspired to become a CAO. In 1990 Vaughan reported that 29% of all community college CAOs held a position of dean prior to becoming CAO. Nineteen years later Eckel et al. (2009) reported no change in that number for community college CAOs. Fifty-two percent of community college CAOs were hired from within their own institution (Eckel et al., 2009).

Between 1990 and 2009 the average age of community college CAOs increased from 47 to 55.8 (Eckel et al., 2009; Vaughan, 1990). The percentage of women in community college CAO positions increased during that same period by 20%, to 49.5%. The percentage of Black community college CAOs increased from 3.2% to 7.2%. The percentage who were Hispanic rose from 1.8% to 3.4%. The percentage of community college CAOs holding doctoral degrees increased to 82%, a 13% increase. Eckel et al. (2009) also documented that the average time in office for a community college CAO was 4.7 years. Vaughan (1989) documented that half of all community college presidents had occupied CAO positions prior, but by 2009 that had dropped to just 24% (Eckel et al., 2009).

Characteristics of the CAO

Common characteristics of CAOs were also identified in the primary texts reviewed for this study. The list of characteristics associated with a good leader includes good interpersonal and organizational skills (Trachtenberg et al., 2013); strong communication and prioritization skills, demonstrated concern for others, patience (Vaughan, 1990); sense of humor, optimism, thick skin (Brown, 1984); flexibility, decisiveness, fairness (Cohen & Brawer, 2008); and the

courage to take risks (Ferren & Stanton, 2004). As stated earlier the CAO must also: understand faculty perspective (Cejda, 2008), build consensus and political support (Ferren & Stanton, 2004; Martin & Samels, 1997), collaborate across constituencies (Ferren & Stanton, 2004), understand and adapt to the culture (Trachtenberg, et al., 2013), balance the colleague/administrator relationship with the faculty (Erwin, 2000), and serve the president while representing the faculty (Martin & Samels, 2015).

The Role of the CAO

Hellmich (2007) claimed that the primary role of community college CAOs is to support faculty members and learners. This is a simple concept that masks the magnitude of the work it takes to make that happen. As Dewey (1938) declared, "the easy and the simple are not identical. To discover what is really simple and to act upon the discovery is an exceedingly difficult task" (p. 30). Vaughan (1990) described tasks facing community college CAOs including formulating and implementing education policy, recommending faculty member appointments/promotions/dismissals/assignments, and engaging in curriculum development.

Some of the tasks that Vaughan (1990) documented are now delegated to members of an ever-growing group of mid-level administrators (Martin & Samels, 2015), yet the responsibilities of CAOs have expanded. Though traditional roles such as shaping budgets, guiding curriculum, and faculty development persist, new roles like planning/overseeing construction, raising money, and alumni relations have emerged (Martin & Samels, 2015).

The CAO must work and communicate with many represented in the organizational chart of the institution; up to the president and the board, sideways with other vice-presidents, down to deans and ultimately the faculty. The CAO has external stakeholders to communicate with, including governmental and accreditation agencies and the local community (Brown, 1984). This

structure by its very nature offers an opportunity for, and illustrates the necessity of, collaboration.

CAOs collaborate in their relationships as presidential partners, board liaisons, and with other administrators across the institution (Martin & Samels, 2015). For example, student affairs requires extra- or co-curricular programming that plays a vital role in providing support beyond the classroom, including tutoring, advising, student clubs, counseling, and health services. All these resources contribute to student success and therefore collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs is essential. There is competition for funding between student affairs and academic affairs, so CAOs need to advocate for and work with deans or vice presidents of student affairs to benefit both curricular and co-curricular programs (Martin & Samels, 1997). CAO advocacy can include helping faculty to understand the role of student affairs and making sure the president and board members understand the value of student affairs. Focusing on important problems, overcoming political concerns, and studying best practices regarding academic and student affairs cooperation can help bridge the work of both areas (Diamond & Adam, 2002).

Collaborating across the organizational chart can foster a shared vision. That vision can be realized when the CAO encourages and rewards the participation of others and creates an atmosphere of an open campus where all people, students, faculty members, and staff, are viewed as most important (Brown, 1984; Robillard, 2000). For CAOs working at institutions with a strong shared governance structure the emphasis on relationships with the faculty is vital. CAOs, especially those who may be external hires, need to take the time to learn the policies and procedures as well as the history that has shaped the institutional culture (Martin & Samels, 2015). Understanding the power of the faculty and which members hold some level of influence

is crucial to establishing allies and creating an environment where ideas can percolate up from the faculty.

It is valuable for CAOs to consider their position as an elected one, vetted and approved by the faculty and wider search committee, rather than considering themselves to have been appointed by the president or the board (Birnbaum, 1988). This perspective allows the CAO to be part of shared governance, not the administrator of the process. Excluding the faculty from the decision-making process when it comes to academic matters can lead to a disenfranchised faculty which can become hostile (Ferren & Stanton, 2004). Exerting administrative authority over the faculty can be detrimental to the agenda of any CAO.

Birnbaum (1988) described the social exchange theory, where leaders give up something in exchange for faculty compliance or approval. It is necessary that the CAO finds a way to influence others without using coercion (Birnbaum, 1988; Cohen & Brawer, 2008). CAOs should respect the role of senates, delegate, provide support, listen, link the future with the past, and help develop faculty leaders (Martin & Samels, 1997, 2015). CAOs who identify and foster potential leaders within the faculty and inspire a shared vision can induce change in a grassroots manner, ensuring a stronger likelihood of success.

Understanding the mission, developing a shared vision, and establishing strong relationships with different constituencies are hampered when funding is inadequate. CAOs responded that their number one frustration is not having enough money as state funding has been regularly reduced in recent years (Eckel et al., 2009). Thus, budgeting has become a more significant part of the CAO job description (Martin & Samels, 2015). Though CAOs are increasingly asked to actively participate in fundraising efforts, they are also being asked to focus on the utilization of funds and not just their acquisition (Martin & Samels, 2015). In

financially difficult times, CAOs will ask deans to trim department budgets, and CAOs should lead by example, making merit-based budget decisions, not emotional ones (Ferren & Stanton, 2004). Developing and managing budgets can be a stressful part of any CAOs job and most lack the qualifications to deal with such a large budget before entering the position (Martin & Samels, 2015).

Understanding the bigger, long-term picture is crucial, and therefore CAOs should be part of an institution's strategic planning process. The strategic plan examines the needs of the institution (e.g., normal operating budget, construction, deferred maintenance) and establishes goals to meet those needs. Brown (1984) noted that an inclusive strategic planning process itself can be very useful in team building and getting buy-in from stakeholders, both of which are valuable in building a shared vision. Institutions with a strong, well informed strategic planning process tend to be financially stable (Martin & Samels, 2009).

Collaborating with the chief financial officer (CFO), who typically runs the strategic planning and budget process, is essential. Often the CFO has limited understanding of the needs and priorities that the CAO is managing, and vice versa. Working together to educate one another can lead to a smoother, stronger budget development process (Diamond & Adam, 2002). A solid foundation should be established with the CFO by planning weekly meetings. The two should meet jointly with the president as well and should adopt a public, united posture with one another (Martin & Samels, 2015).

Understanding the responsibilities of CAOs and describing the characteristics and backgrounds of those currently in the position is a means to cultivate the next generation of those who will lead. One of the most important functions that all CAOs should be undertaking is the fostering and development of future leaders. Identifying interested faculty members, or other

administrators, who may have some innate leadership skills and encouraging those individuals to build on those skills is crucial. Promoting and supporting continued education in higher education leadership is also important. Robillard (2000) noted the gap in leadership development in professional organizations and the need to establish university programs specifically targeting community college leadership. Though support can be found in professional organizations and reading academic publications can help CAOs remain current, other opportunities for development are needed (Martin & Samels, 2015).

Recent Research

The review of literature thus far has focused on the primary texts related to community college CAOs. An ERIC database search of peer-reviewed journal and report literature yielded 34 results, 18 of which were relevant to this study. Only four of those 18 sources were published between 2009 and 2019. During that same 10-year time span there were five dissertations published on community college CAOs, one of which was later published as a journal article referenced in this review.

As various researchers noted, the conversation regarding CAOs at community colleges in the United States remains limited (Amey, et al., 2002; Cejda, McKenney, & Burley, 2001; Keim & Murray, 2008). Nearly all the researchers highlighted the expected CAO turnover and the lack of literature related to CAOs. This research focused on two lines of inquiry: general profiles of current CAOs and development of the next generation of CAOs.

Profiles of the CAO

For the most part general profiles of current community college CAOs support what the primary texts in this literature review define. The research provided data on characteristics, pathways, degree attainment and satisfaction. Vaughan's (1990) *Pathway to the Presidency* was

the text most often used as a reference point for researchers collecting demographic data on community college CAOs. Demographics on age, gender, and race are provided in this chapter if such data was collected.

Just a few years after Vaughan's text was published, Hawthorne (1994) described the need to increase diversity at the CAO position across the nation. Her analysis of 712 community college CAOs noted little change in demographics. Women comprised 26% of the CAOs. Eighty-eight percent were white. The average age was 51 years. And 67% held doctoral degrees.

Six years later, Murray, Murray, and Summar (2000) analyzed data from 120 community college CAOs and documented an increase in the percentage of women to 40.2%, and an increased average age to 52.9. The researchers also described a slight increase in the percentage of CAOs with doctoral degrees, 68.4%. The demographic data in their study was collected as they investigated CAO satisfaction. Murray et al. speculated that the lack of well-defined job responsibilities resulted in lowered satisfaction as CAOs struggled in their new roles. Based on their analysis and review of previous data, the researchers concluded that community college CAOs had a better understanding of their responsibilities compared to CAOs at four-year institutions. Since so many community college CAOs tend to be internal hires this difference may be attributed to the familiarity that these CAOs have with their institutions. As a result, these CAOs were more satisfied with their position than peers at four-year institutions.

Anderson, Murray, and Olivarez (2002) analyzed data from 184 community college CAOs nationwide. Women comprised 40.8% of the sample. Average age of CAOs was 52.5. And the average time in office was 5.4 years. While these few demographics were stated, the research focused on the managerial roles CAOs perform. The researchers identified characteristics that supported those discussed in the primary texts defined in this literature

review. CAOs first need strong communication skills. They also need to be able to effectively gather and analyze data and to use current technology. The researchers also ranked the roles that CAOs have on campus, documenting that leader, liaison, and disseminator are by far the most important.

Amey et al. (2002) analyzed data from 918 community college leaders (presidents and vice presidents of academic affairs, student affairs, and finance). During their study on the perspectives of community college leaders, demographic data was collected. Women comprised 42% of the CAOs. Eighty-nine percent of CAOs were white. Their average age was 54. Seventy-four percent held doctoral degrees. The researchers identified a trend that differed from previous studies. The results of their study revealed a disruption in the traditional path to the presidency with 51% following the faculty to associate dean to dean to associate vice president to CAO path, compared to 65% in Vaughan's 1990 study. There is an increasing acceptance of CAOs who come through student affairs, vocational education, or outside of academia (Amey et al.).

Keim and Murray (2008) studied 300 community college CAOs. They documented that 44% of the CAOs in their study were women but given that 51% of faculty members were women there was still work to be done to reach gender equity at this level. They also documented the percentage of CAOs holding doctoral degrees, 70%, and what types of programs those degrees came from. The researchers described the trend toward doctoral degrees in education versus other discipline specific degrees. Given the shrinking pool of CAOs and impending mass retirements they also decried the decline in degrees specifically geared toward community college leadership.

Townsend and Wiese (1990) surveyed 296 community college administrators (presidents and vice-presidents of academic affairs, student affairs, and finance) to get their perspectives on

doctoral degrees in higher education. Overall, 58% of respondents thought that the degree would be useful. CAOs were most likely to comment that such programs were too theory-based; more practical coursework and experience was preferred. Courses in budgeting and finance, organization, and governance were documented as the most essential; followed by curriculum, assessment, law, and student affairs. Community college CAOs thought courses in college teaching and on the community college were not essential. The researchers speculated that CAOs had experiences in both areas, so coursework was not perceived as necessary.

Townsend and Bassoppo-Moyo (1997) analyzed data from 61 community college administrators, exploring traits and competencies necessary to be effective. Open-mindedness, flexibility, and patience ranked as the most important attitudes for effective administrators. Survey analysis supported findings from the primary texts in this literature review but also yielded some new trends. For CAOs, technical skills in budgeting, scheduling, curriculum, fundraising, and program evaluation remained important, as did interpersonal and communication skills. Contextual competency, “understanding the environment in which the academic administrator works” (p. 51), ranked highest and had not been documented previously. Their survey analysis also described the lack of value placed on theory in doctoral programs and a shift away from program emphasis on legal and governmental issues and toward diversity and institutional technology.

Walters and Keim (2003) reviewed survey data for 201 community college CAOs and documented that 64% had been in their position for fewer than six years. Forty-four percent held doctoral degrees in higher education. Their research focused specifically on how well prepared CAOs felt regarding campus planning. Thirty-four percent of CAOs felt underprepared for planning and 84% felt that any knowledge they did have regarding planning came from their

previous work experience. Cost and the time commitment were seen as the largest obstacles to planning efforts. Though CAOs felt engaged in institutional planning, most felt left out of facilities planning.

More CAO involvement in facilities planning is likely as institutions engage in strategic planning. Larson, Milton and Schmidlein (1988) described the process of strategic planning as scanning for threats and opportunities, assessing strengths and weaknesses, and identifying a direction for the institution to follow. These researchers surveyed and interviewed community college administrators and concluded that for strategic planning to be effective it required buy-in from all groups on campus, but the “commitment and active participation of key administrators is considered an essential first step” (p. 3).

Next Generation of CAOs

With 75% of CAOs projected to retire by 2023 (Trachtenberg et al., 2013) the need to find qualified individuals to assume those positions is crucial. Research related to the development of the next generation of CAOs builds on the characteristics of good leadership and explores labor markets and development programs. Identifying where qualified applicants can be found and how institutions can develop such leaders is vital.

The traditional path to leadership from faculty to president (Brown, 1984; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Eckel et al., 2009; Ferren & Stanton, 2004; Vaughan, 1990) described an internal labor market for administrators. Cejda, McKenney, and Burley (2001) surveyed 368 community college CAOs to determine what path each had taken to their current position. They used labor market theory to analyze whether CAOs were primarily hired from firm internal labor markets (FILMs) or occupational internal labor markets (OILMs). FILMs provide hires from within the institution and OILMs provide hires from external higher education institutions. Over 92% of

CAOs in their study were professionals in higher education, 59% FILM hires. Eighty percent of the community college CAOs reported having started as faculty. Allen and Cejda (2007) focused on rural community colleges with similar results, documenting that CAOs at rural community colleges are typically hired from within. These researchers suggested the need for institutions to create succession plans that include internal leadership development.

Anderson (2014) analyzed 293 community college CAO surveys concluding that the most frequent path to the community college presidency is through the CAO position. Anderson focused on latent social roles defined as those roles “that group-members consciously consider irrelevant or inappropriate to study but may still influence their actions” (p. 1170). Individuals were grouped within either the local latent social group or the cosmopolitan latent social group. Cosmopolitan latent social group members typically had less loyalty to the institution, a high commitment to professional skills and often used outsiders as a reference group. Local latent social group members exhibit opposite characteristics, with a high degree of loyalty, less focus on professional skills and the use of internal reference groups. Ninety-four percent of CAOs were internal hires and belonged to the local latent social group.

Cejda, McKenney, and Fuller (2001) analyzed data from 335 former community college CAOs to determine what they did after leaving the position. It was noted that CAOs have the highest turnover rate of any community college leadership position. Thirty percent of CAOs advanced their position to become community college presidents. Twenty-eight percent remained in higher education administration either as a CAO at another institution or in some other administrative capacity at their institution. Twenty-seven percent entered retirement. The remaining respondents returned to faculty positions or entered other careers. Their study

supported the strength of the traditional pathway for CAOs and presidents at community colleges and they stressed the need for community colleges to create internal leadership programs.

Smith (1981) studied development needs within community colleges. He recommended that “greater emphasis be given to development goals designed to help staff members prepare for future roles” (p. 217) within the institution. More recent research stressed the need for CAO development, whether in the form of creation/revision of doctoral programs (Allen & Cejda, 2007; Brown, Martinez, & Daniel, 2002; Cejda, McKenney, & Burley, 2001; Townsend & Bassoppo-Moyo, 1997; Townsend & Wiese, 1990; Walters & Keim, 2003), or internal leadership programs (Allen & Cejda, 2007; Amey et al., 2002; Anderson et al., 2002).

Lack of In-Depth Data

Keim and Murray (2008) noted that “scholars have seemed singularly uninterested in studying the CAO” (p.123). Research on higher education leadership is overwhelmingly focused on presidential leadership. As this literature review documented there is limited research regarding community college CAOs. Regarding their research, Cejda, McKenney, and Fuller (2001) stated that “its greatest implication is the need for additional research” (p. 144). Only four of the 18 relevant peer-reviewed sources in this literature review were published between 2009 and 2019.

The review of primary texts and peer-reviewed research revealed a focus on defining characteristics and documenting demographic data of CAOs. This information is useful in producing a baseline and comparison points for demographics such as age, race, gender and degree information, and tracking diversification. For example, in 2019 the American Council on Education (ACE) published data based on their 2013 survey of 1,396 CAOs. Men outnumbered women overall as CAOs in higher education, but women comprised 57% of community college

CAOs. Sixty-nine percent of community college CAOs held doctoral degrees, mostly from the discipline of education (American Council on Education, 2019). However, as Hawthorne (1994) first stated, “demographic data alone are insufficient for understanding chief academic officers and their role and effectiveness in community colleges” (p. 269).

The literature reviewed in this chapter included a small number of studies focusing on community college CAO perceptions on specific topics, but none of these linked CAO effectiveness to the missions of the institution or transformational, adaptive leadership. In addition, the research described in this review is overwhelmingly quantitative in nature. The quantitative research offers only a superficial examination of the CAO position, and there is a significant lack of an in-depth examination of the work of CAOs and the specialized leadership inherent in the position. A qualitative examination of CAO perspectives on their role may add to general understanding of the position and the possible pressures associated with the ever-pressing calls for accountability.

Trachtenberg et al., (2013) suggested that 75% of CAOs will retire from higher education by 2023. That rate of turnover offers an impetus for learning about what makes a good CAO and how the next generation can lead effectively. Incorporating the voices of the CAOs in this study provides insight to how they perceive their roles in contributing to the missions of their institutions. Their voices constitute a unique contribution to the literature on community college CAOs.

The CAO and the Community College Mission

All higher education CAOs do not face the same challenges. There are several variables that influence the nature of those challenges, public versus private, profit versus non-profit, size, and institution type (i.e., community colleges, baccalaureate institutions, research institutions).

Among community colleges there are also distinctions to be drawn. Location is one variable that can provide unique challenges. Rural institutions may serve as more of a hub for community gatherings and entertainment compared to more populated areas where other venues for such gatherings are prevalent. Institutions located in or around university towns may have a greater percentage of transfer students compared to other institutions. Local industry can influence the types of programs offered. “It is important to recognize that community colleges have differing needs due to size, location, and the communities they serve” (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017, p. 127).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, junior colleges were born from the notion that universities should not be burdened with the task of undergraduate general education and as such these two-year institutions were conceptualized as collegiate. Shortly thereafter the concept of vocational or technical schools was incorporated into the institutional mission. By 1930, there were 440 two-year institutions across the country, enrolling roughly 70,000 students (Cohen et al., 2014). In his history of American colleges and universities, Rudolph (1962) briefly mentioned community colleges, noting how they were “answering an insistent demand for the collegiate experience” (p. 487). By 2014 more than a thousand public community colleges were found spread across the United States (Cohen et al., 2014). In 2019 the 1,044 community colleges in the United States had 6.8 million students enrolled in credit-bearing courses (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021).

In 1947 the Truman commission report proclaimed the need for increased participation of the citizenry in postsecondary education in the United States and recognized two-year institutions as key. The commission report stated that increased participation could only be achieved by eliminating racial, religious, and gender discrimination in higher education and

lessening the financial burden of attending college. The committee members understood that these lofty aspirations of equity would likely be met by two-year institutions and recommended that those institutions be public, locally operated, and that they be built strategically to serve the needs of community members, coining the term community college (Gilbert & Heller, 2013).

Much of what the authors of the Truman commission report envisioned has come to fruition. In 1950 just five percent of the population in the United States held a baccalaureate degree, but by 2013 that number had increased to thirty-six percent (Ma et al., 2016). Public community colleges enrolled nearly six million students in 2017, representing thirty-six percent of all freshman undergraduates in postsecondary education (Ginder, Kelly-Reid, & Mann, 2017). For more than a half century community colleges focused on the equity of access lauded in the Truman commission report, creating affordable postsecondary educational experiences for any who sought them. That ideal, removing discrimination, led to an open access model where even lack of academic preparedness would not exclude potential students from enrolling. The open access model is at the heart of most community colleges, embedded in mission and value statements, and in the institutional culture (Bragg, 2001; Cohen et al., 2014; Shaw & London, 2001).

In recent decades, the missions of community colleges has grown to include not only transfer and vocational education functions, for which college credit is awarded, but also non-credit courses in adult basic education and workforce development (Cohen et al., 2014). High school equivalency courses and courses for non-native English language learners are examples of the types of courses offered in adult basic education. Workforce development courses or programs are designed to offer training in fields where accreditation is not necessary or to offer

continuing education training for employees of various companies within a district. Employers increasingly rely on community colleges to train their employees on new technologies.

By eliminating barriers to entry, the open access model of community colleges has allowed for the mission expansion described above. In the past 15 years community colleges have been spurred to consider equity in terms of outcomes, not merely access. There is a growing call for community colleges to evolve their missions to focus not merely on equity of access but on successful completion, creating an equity of completion (Bailey et al., 2015; Bragg & Durham, 2012; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Dowd, 2007; Jenkins, 2007; Ma et al., 2016).

Having such an array of missions with seemingly conflicting ends, meeting the needs of transfer education, career education, and adult basic education, means that the leadership necessary for CAOs at community colleges must be understood. This fact makes the lack of research on community college CAOs even more alarming. This study makes a valuable contribution to understanding how community college CAOs work to accomplish the adaptive and transformational leadership work that allows them to address the college's mission by uniting the open access and completion aspects of these missions.

Leadership

The multiple aspects of the community college missions demand that CAOs incorporate multiple leadership theories into their practice (Nevarez, Wood, & Penrose, 2013). This study addresses transformational leadership and how the aspects of that theory can be broadly applied to the work of community college CAOs. I also detail aspects of a more practical version of transformational leadership theory, adaptive leadership theory, which addresses not only the need to implement major change initiatives but also the need to react and anticipate problems in general. Given the breadth of the missions, community colleges must be highly adaptive. Career

education and adult basic education are fluid, changing to meet community and industry needs. Adding the shift in cultural paradigm to include outcome equity it becomes clear that CAOs and other institutional leaders must be agents of change, or transformational leaders.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership theory originated in political leadership studies over five decades ago and was quickly adopted by those studying organizational leadership (Jung & Sosik, 2002; Tarker, 2019). Burns (1978) wrote about two aspects of political leadership, that which is transactional and that which is transforming (later termed transformational). Transactional leadership, defined by extrinsic rewards and punishments, is based on an exchange between leaders and followers that benefits both toward their individual goals. This aspect of leadership is necessary but may not result in changes that benefit the collective good.

Burns (1978) noted that transforming leaders engage with followers and examined the motives of those followers.

The premise of this leadership is that, whatever the separate interests persons might hold, they are presently or potentially united in the pursuit of “higher” goals, the realization of which is tested by the achievement of significant change that represents the collective or pooled interest of leaders and followers. (p. 425)

Incorporating outcome equity into the missions of community colleges qualifies as a significant change and CAOs must be transformational leaders in that effort.

Expanding on Burns’ political leadership theory to look more broadly at organizational leadership, Bass (1985) developed transformational leadership theory as an alternative to transactional leadership theory. Bass and Avolio (1993) suggested that in organizations where change was needed a leader could be most effective by creating a shared vision that motivated

employees to work with common purpose. Transformational leadership theory has become ubiquitous in social science research focused on change initiatives and those that lead such efforts (Kwan, 2020; Lim & Ployhart, 2004; Tarker, 2019).

Tarker (2019) noted that transformational leadership theory is used by researchers to “synthesize all the frameworks around community college leadership” (p. 673). This theory provides an umbrella under which frames or other theories can be incorporated. For example, distributive theory describes distributing roles and tasks, creating an environment where individuals see themselves as stakeholders, and creating a unified vision (Lipman-Blumen, 1996). These aspects of distributive theory are central to transformational leadership theory (Bass & Avolio, 1993).

Social exchange theory, where leaders give up something in exchange for stakeholder compliance or approval (Birnbaum, 1988), is another example of a theory that fits under the umbrella of transformational leadership theory. It is important that the CAO finds a way to influence others without using coercion (Birnbaum, 1988; Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Exchanging the authority associated with unilateral decision making for stakeholder involvement in a shared vision exemplifies social exchange theory. These are also central tenets of transformational leadership theory (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Transformational leadership theory moved beyond defining characteristics and explored the relationships (transactional and transforming) between leaders and followers with the potential to find some higher moral ground together.

Cohen et al. (2014) suggested that learning the art of meaningful persuasion is more valuable than focusing on leadership theory. Even that sentiment can be incorporated into transformational leadership theory. Tarker (2019) argued that one reason that there is scarce research published on community college leadership is the lack of a unified theory. Detractors

suggested that the broad nature of the transformational leadership theory makes its usefulness limited (Tarker, 2019), hence my use of adaptive leadership theory to frame this study.

Adaptive Leadership Theory

As Heifetz (1994) wrote, historically leadership theories centered on defining the characteristics that made leaders effective and how future leaders might hope to emulate those characteristics. Whether those theories centered on a hero or the situations that allowed those characteristics to emerge in leaders, they did not offer insight on how leaders could diagnose and solve problems they might face. Heifetz (1994) noted the broad, general nature of transformational leadership theory and introduced adaptive leadership theory as a model that viewed leadership as an activity, adapting to challenges.

Adaptive leadership theory provided a practical framework for diagnosing problems and identifying potential actions to solve those problems. This theory, detailed in *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (Heifetz et al., 2009), can be applicable to the individual leader in the form of self-assessment or to the system/institution. Adaptive leadership allows for a continuous improvement plan. Diagnosing problems and creating action plans to address those problems become ingrained in the thinking of the individual leader for self-improvement, and/or in the culture of the institution, creating an environment where both thrive.

The scale of change necessary to incorporate a focus on completion rates into the mission of community colleges requires a cultural shift. Every stakeholder (staff, faculty, and students) must learn and understand the value of increasing those completion rates. Heifetz et al. (2009) described adaptive leadership and outlined the mechanisms used to successfully adapt cultures to accommodate new components. The authors distinguished the difference between technical problems and adaptive challenges, noting that both are relevant to the work of leaders. Technical

problems can typically be resolved using current knowledge, while adaptive challenges require learning and are therefore better resolved with input from many stakeholders learning to frame the situation and develop strategies to address novel situations.

Heifetz et al. (2009) recognized the fact that solutions to some technical problems do require more thought/learning and those circumstances reflect the need to merge technical and adaptive strategies. Most challenges fall into this mixed category. CAOs and all leaders on campus must be willing to engage in the collaborations described in this chapter to work together to resolve adaptive and mixed challenges.

CAOs who practice adaptive leadership mobilize stakeholders to examine their institutional culture, conserve what is valuable, discard what is not, and invent new contributions that create a revitalized culture (Heifetz et al., 2009). Adaptive leadership theory offers an overarching conceptual framework that can support research examining the evolving nature of community college CAOs.

Conclusions

The ever-growing calls to incorporate outcome accountability into the community college culture must be addressed by CAOs at those institutions. Existing literature tends to be more descriptive of the characteristics or demographics of community college CAOs. To accomplish a significant cultural shift, leaders must recognize the need to teach and learn along with the entire campus community. Effective CAOs, those who hope to accomplish such lofty goals, must be able to adapt to the challenges they face. The expected turnover and typically short tenure of community college CAOs also reveals the urgency of developing the next generation of potential CAOs with the skills necessary to adapt to the challenges of the position.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to document how selected community college chief academic officers (CAOs) view their contributions to realizing the missions of their institutions, considering the shift from a focus on open access to one that includes completion and other forms of outcome accountability. The review of scholarship in Chapter II illustrates a lack of the perceptions of community college CAOs in the literature.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do community college chief academic officers perceive their leadership roles as institutions shift to focus not just on open access but also outcomes/completion rates?
2. How did the shift to focus on outcomes affect the work of chief academic officers?

This chapter outlines the methodology of the study, offers specifics on design, participants, procedures, and analysis, as well as a discussion of limitations, delimitations, and trustworthiness.

Research Design

Qualitative research can be a mechanism “for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a...problem” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). I chose to conduct this qualitative study because I recognize the value inherent in lived experiences. Phenomenology is a method of inquiry that examines how people experience a phenomenon, how they perceive it, and make sense of it (Patton, 2002). To better understand how CAOs see their leadership my approach was phenomenological, gaining understanding through documenting participant perceptions and describing their world as they experience it (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). A list of skills and characteristics derived from the existing quantitative research on community college

CAOs does little to elucidate what it is to be a CAO. The voices documented in this study offer a more personal sense of the position.

Population

This study focused on perceptions of experienced Illinois community college CAOs, defined as having served in the role for a minimum of five years. The decision to interview individuals with five or more years of experience in their current position was made to interview those who could speak with authority on the missions of their institution and with the assumption that more experience engenders a sense of confidence, allowing for a more candid dialogue.

Participants were selected from a diverse pool of 37 Illinois community colleges considered for this study. State salary data released by the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) listed eight CAOs that had been in their position for five or more years (Wilson, Brooks, Dufour, & Ferguson, 2020). After a review of the institutional websites, one of the CAOs was eliminated because the years indicated in the ICCB data chart were not accurate (only four of the six years listed were in the role of CAO). Institutional website information revealed that another of the potential participants had retired, lowering the pool to six potential candidates.

Informed Consent

Upon receiving institutional research board (IRB) approval, I sent potential participants a letter of introduction that expressed my community college experience, my interest in the changing community college mission and the work of CAOs, and a request to participate in my dissertation research (Appendix A). The following week an email was sent requesting their participation (Appendix B) and providing them with a copy of the consent document (Appendix C). Instructions stated that their reply in the affirmative would serve as consent.

An autoreply message alerted me that one of the six potential participants had recently retired. Three of the five remaining participants replied within a week indicating that they would be happy to participate. Two weeks later I made phone calls to the remaining potential participants and learned that another had retired recently. The last potential participant returned my phone call two weeks later and then replied to my initial email, consenting to participate. All four of the eligible CAOs with five or more years of experience agreed to be part of the study.

Confidentiality

With the small number of participants, efforts to provide confidentiality may offer little anonymity since a rudimentary search will yield which institutions have the longest standing CAOs. However, the following steps offered some degree of obscurity within the group. To promote an honest dialogue, participants were assured that their personal information would remain confidential. Individual and institutional demographic information is documented in the findings; however, institutions and participants were deidentified. Gender neutral pseudonyms (Oak, Elm, Ash, and Fir) were used when referring to participant insights or specific quotes. These pseudonyms were not associated with any other specific data shared in this dissertation, nor do they reflect the order in which the CAOs were interviewed. Because only one male participated in the study, gender designations were avoided to make it more difficult to reidentify participants, instead the third person pronoun “they” was used.

Interview Design

As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) noted, interviewing “does not follow explicit steps of rule-governed methods” (p. 17). Interviews provide participants an opportunity to share their lived experiences. Rather than rely on a prescribed checklist of questions, initial interviews were

semi-structured conversations, meaning that they focused on the themes related to the research questions.

In addition to an emphasis on lived experience and a focus on semi-structured interviews, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) outline several other key aspects of phenomenological interviewing that were incorporated in this study. Each interview was conducted with a “deliberate naiveté” (p. 30), being open minded to phenomena and themes that emerged during interviews while aware of bracketing off potential preconceived knowledge. In addition to seeking verbal input, non-verbal cues were also observed and noted throughout the interviews to provide additional data points potentially useful in interpreting meaning.

Data Collection

Sixty-minute interviews were scheduled to be conducted via video conference. In March 2020 most institutions, including Illinois community colleges, reacted to the global pandemic caused by COVID-19 by closing campuses and converting all non-essential functions to remote operations (Durham, 2020). The move to limit personal contact to slow the spread of COVID-19 resulted in virtual meetings being used to conduct college business. Traditionally interviews for this type of qualitative study would be held in person but these interviews were scheduled as video conferences using the Zoom platform.

An interview guide based on the work of Guion, Diehl, and McDonald (2001) was created and used. The guide included three components; a fact sheet used to note the date, time, location, and any special circumstances related to the interview, as well as demographic and biographical information regarding the participant; interview questions that guided the conversation with space included for note taking; and a post-interview comment sheet to record key insights immediately following the interview.

The intent of the interviews was to engage in a conversation with each CAO, avoiding direct questions regarding leadership theory and instead gathering data that could later be synthesized to draw connections to those theories. The following prompts, along with appropriate probing questions, guided the first semi-structured interviews:

1. Tell me about the journey that led you to the CAO position here at [name of college].
2. Has the shift toward outcome accountability changed the primary mission of [name of college]? Do you have any specific examples?
3. Do you feel that the focus on completion rates threatens the open access model of community colleges?
4. How has the shift toward outcome accountability affected your work as a leader?
5. What advice would you have for community college faculty members, department chairpersons or deans who might be thinking of preparing for and assuming the CAO role at a community college?
6. What comes next for you?

Interviews were recorded using Zoom, a video conferencing platform. Redundant audio was recorded using a digital voice recorder in case errors occurred in the processing of the Zoom recordings. A lost internet connection abbreviated one first round interview, however topics that were cut short were covered in the second interview. Because of the connectivity issues one of the second-round interviews was conducted without the CAO activating their video.

Audio files were transcribed with the aid of artificial intelligence voice recognition software. Each transcription was reviewed three times for accuracy. Transcripts were printed with large left-side margins where notes were added highlighting key points. After the first round of interviews, those key points were condensed into two-to-three-page, single-spaced summaries

that were shared with participants. Each participant approved the summaries as presented or following suggested non-substantive edits.

A second round of interviews was scheduled to discuss emergent themes and seek any necessary clarifications. The following prompts, each generated from themes or conversations from the first round, along with appropriate probing questions, guided the second semi-structured interviews:

1. Please tell me more about the work you do related to Transfer versus Career and Technical Education.
2. Describe your role in decision making regarding educational affairs initiatives.
3. Would you classify the work you do as managing or leading?
4. In what ways has your work changed during the COVID-19 pandemic?
5. What level of involvement do you have with the Board of Trustees?
6. What are the most and least favorite parts of the work you do?

Procedures outlined for the first round of interviews were followed for the second round. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, checked for accuracy, summarized, and shared with participants. Again, each participant approved the summaries as presented or following non-substantive edits. All interviews, which lasted between 56 and 68 minutes each, yielded 153 single-spaced pages of text.

In addition to interview transcripts and the interview guides, participant profiles were also created. These profiles were based on public records; including institutional websites, press releases, and public websites. Mission statements from participant institutions were also collected. Once interviews had concluded, Board of Trustees (BOT) minutes from the past twelve months were reviewed from each participant institution to identify references to the

CAOs and/or the work they discussed during the interviews. Two institutions did not have BOT minutes from the most recent twelve months posted on their public website. I contacted those institutions and in one instance the website was updated within one week; in the other I was emailed minutes from the most recent twelve months. The BOT data was not significant; little if any engagement occurred between CAOs and BOT members according to the minutes.

Data Analysis

Transcripts were analyzed using a method that Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) call “meaning condensation” (p. 205), defined as analysis based on identifying themes from transcripts. They outlined the five steps of this method of analysis that guided my work. First, I read each interview without stopping to make notes; the goal was to get a sense of the whole. Then, I categorized CAO responses within each interview. Third, I defined the themes that emerged throughout the interviews as I understood them. Next, I considered how the themes that emerged related to the purpose of this study. Finally, the essential themes of the entire interview were tied together into a descriptive statement found in Chapter V.

The phenomenological interview approach and the protocol to summarize each interview to share with participants made this method of analysis logical. Meaning condensation included listening to the recordings to verify the transcripts and then re-reading the transcripts. The meaning units that emerged were organized into themes which became the structure for the interview summaries that were shared with participants for member checking. Additional meaning units after the second round of interviews deepened and extended the themes. Meaning units from the interview guides and participant profiles were added to the emergent themes when relevant. The consolidation of themes across all participants is documented in the findings. The final steps of this method of analysis inform my interpretation of the findings.

Assumptions

There were a few assumptions that guided this study. It was assumed that all institutions had begun efforts to address concerns about completion rates. In addition, it was assumed that the CAO was familiar with the missions of the institution and how those missions has shifted in response to increased accountability. For an interview-based qualitative study it was assumed that the participants would be open and honest with their responses.

Though there may have been a small burden regarding the time obligation for interviews and a review of the summaries for accuracy, that burden was offset by the value of the opportunity to contribute to the data. As Anderson (2014) stated, CAOs “are committed to helping community colleges succeed by taking a key leadership role” (p. 1176). That commitment to success can be magnified by participating in this qualitative study, allowing CAOs to be part of the production of knowledge toward overall community college success. Participation is a way to contribute to a legacy of excellence and to model life-long learning, which is a tenet of community colleges. As an added benefit to participants, the interview process may have offered an opportunity for reflection about their roles as adaptive leaders and contributions that they may not typically have time or reason to assess.

Limitations and Delimitations

Because the researcher in a qualitative study is the instrument, Creswell (2009) cautioned that researcher bias can occur. An example here is that my position as an Illinois community college faculty member could have resulted in bias. That bias was mitigated to some degree by the fact that my institution did not qualify for the parameters of this study. In addition, trustworthiness measures discussed later in this chapter have reduced levels of bias. It is worth noting that some have suggested that researcher bias is not a negative. Maxwell (1997) claimed

that “separating your research from other aspects of your life cuts you off from a major source of insights, hypotheses, and validity checks” (p. 28).

Other limitations are inherent in the interview process. There is always the possibility that questions asked will be misunderstood (Creswell, 2009). In addition, though I think a rapport was developed with each participant, one-on-one hour-long interviews may not have provided enough time to establish a relationship with participants open enough to get the most genuine responses to the questions posed. Conducting interviews via video conferencing could have added to this limitation, though I never felt that participants were holding back during interviews.

Delimitations are variables that researchers put in place to provide boundaries and create a focused, manageable study. There were three primary delimitations in this study. First, I made a conscious decision to interview individuals with five or more years of experience in their current position. That decision was made to interview those who could speak with authority on the missions of their institution and with the assumption that more experience engenders a sense of confidence, allowing for a more candid dialogue. Next, I deliberately chose to focus on Illinois community colleges. In part that decision was made to make the study more manageable; however, given the number of Illinois community colleges and the reputation of the system, the proposed sample was appropriate. Third, I excluded City Colleges of Chicago and Illinois Eastern Community Colleges from my potential sample. This was done because both are run as conglomerates with multiple colleges functioning under a chancellor. Including these institutions would have added a layer of leadership complexity absent in the 37 Illinois community colleges that were included in the sample for this study. As it turns out including the two chancellor-based systems would not have changed the pool given that neither CAO met the minimum five years of experience.

Trustworthiness

Creswell (2009) noted that “the value of qualitative research lies in the particular description and themes developed in context of a specific site” (p. 193). This study offers some exploratory insights that may prove valuable to those aspiring to a CAO position, or people responsible for developing future CAOs. The rigor of a phenomenological study such as this is rooted in authenticity and trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is demonstrated by a researcher’s ability to be balanced and fair while being open to multiple perspectives and interests (Patton, 2002).

Several steps that Creswell (2009) suggested to increase the trustworthiness of qualitative approaches were employed in this study. As I approached each interview and analysis, I continued to be reflective of my own biases and acknowledge them. I also used participant profiles to compare transcript claims with documented evidence. For transparency, to increase accuracy, and add another layer of trustworthiness to the study, member checking was used; summaries and findings were shared with participants for their input. Input from all the CAOs was affirmative, although one offered minor changes to better clarify intent. Lastly, data that might not support the research questions or major themes that emerged have been shared to further demonstrate the trustworthiness of my coding and analysis of interview findings.

Conclusions

Qualitative research offers a method to explore rich, in-depth aspects of topics that cannot be accomplished with quantitative methods. The phenomenological methodology and research design outlined in this chapter offers a formula for meaningful research. Interview data can be used to seek a deeper understanding of how community college CAOs perceive their work as leaders, offering them a voice rather than describing them as a collection of characteristics or

demographics. Deriving meaning from these voices provides an opportunity to document the type of leadership needed to grow as a CAO to meet whatever needs arise.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to document how selected community college chief academic officers (CAOs) view their contributions to realizing the missions of their institutions, considering the shift from a focus on open access to one that includes completion and other forms of outcome accountability. One goal was to gather insights from CAOs regarding the leadership qualities necessary to guide community colleges through significant paradigm shifts; one such example is the expansion of the open access culture to include accountability. In our conversations the CAOs described a focus on accountability that centers around student success initiatives rather than an urgent need to improve completion rates. These CAOs shared that there is no threat to the open access model of community colleges. They also described the work they do to help fulfill the missions and how that work has changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Advice was provided for those who aspire to the CAO position and for those responsible for developing future CAOs. Each of these themes will be explored in more depth in this chapter.

Review of Research Protocol

This qualitative, phenomenological study was rooted in adaptive leadership theory, which is the ability of leaders to adapt institutional cultures to accommodate new components (Heifetz et al., 2009).

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do community college chief academic officers perceive their leadership roles as institutions shift to focus not just on open access but also outcomes/completion rates?
2. How did the shift to focus on outcomes affect the work of chief academic officers?

Data Collection

All Illinois community college CAOs with five or more years of experience participated in this study. Consent, which offered participants confidentiality, was obtained from each CAO. Participant profiles were created for each CAO by gathering information from college websites and other public sources. Guiding questions were developed and included in interview guides which were used during each interview to make notes and keep the conversation focused.

Two rounds of interviews were conducted via video conference. The length of each interview ranged from 56 to 68 minutes. Interviews were transcribed, yielding 153 pages of single-spaced text. Following both rounds of interviews transcript summaries were generated and shared with each CAO to allow for transparency and member checking. In addition, a review of Board of Trustees minutes from the previous 12 months were conducted to determine levels of engagement between the boards and the CAOs.

Data Analysis

Utilizing the Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) condensation methods described in Chapter III the process of creating the transcript summaries resulted in the generation of themes used to organize the findings in this chapter. The findings were generated from interview transcripts, participant profiles, and Board of Trustees minutes; and interview guides also provide limited data. To ensure confidentiality, the CAOs are referenced with gender neutral pseudonyms (Oak, Elm, Ash, and Fir). These pseudonyms are not associated with any other specific data shared, nor do they reflect the order in which the CAOs were interviewed.

Findings

The data collected was organized into brief demographics, CAO interview composites, and Board of Trustees interactions. The demographic information offers an aggregate picture of

the participants to provide as much confidentiality as possible. CAO interview composites represent the individual voices of each CAO. Composites were organized into themes such as accountability and the work of the CAOs, which include discussion of initiatives to help increase student success, working with career and transfer programs, managerial and leadership aspects of work, and how their work has changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Chapter V the themes will be used to address the research questions through an adaptive leadership lens.

Demographics

Institutional

The National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 2021) classified the campuses where each CAO was employed into separate settings: rural – fringe, city – small, suburban – midsize, and suburban – large. Geographically the institutions were located throughout the central and northern regions of Illinois. The student populations ranged from 2,841 to 13,032. The number of faculty members ranged from 137 (63 full-time) to 760 (191 full-time).

CAOs

Three of the four CAOs were female. One of the four represented a minoritized group. Tenure as CAO at their current institution ranged from five to seven years; one had served as a CAO at a previous institution. Each CAO responded with surprise to learn that only four community college CAOs in the state of Illinois had five or more years of experience. All four CAOs hold doctoral degrees; two in higher education fields and two in the content disciplines in which they previously taught. Oak noted that the doctoral degree “might still be listed as preferred on a lot of job applications, but I think it’s pretty...standard” to have the degree. All four CAOs had experience teaching in higher education.

Two of the CAOs were external hires to their current position. Both had international experience in higher education; one managing an overseas campus and one teaching. One of these individuals became a CAO after having worked in policymaking for a state board of higher education. The other worked in business before returning to teach at the university level and progressed to become a satellite campus director, then a community college dean, prior to being hired as a CAO at their current institution.

Both internally hired candidates have spent their careers in higher education. One began as a director at a small community college before becoming an associate dean. That individual was hired at their current institution as a dean just a few months prior to being promoted to the CAO position. After having worked as a faculty member and department chair at a four-year institution, the other internal hire worked their way through the administrative ranks at their current community college to become the CAO.

Three CAOs noted that they had interviewed for a community college presidency in the past, multiple times. Each commented that they did not have plans to actively pursue a presidential position any longer; however, two did state that if the perfect presidential opportunity arose, they would consider accepting. One stated that they hoped to move into a university teaching position. One was curious to explore a career outside academia. One commented that they would likely retire as CAO, a sentiment shared by the one CAO who had never pursued a presidency and had no plans to do so.

Oak Interview Composite

Accountability and Completion Rates

The premise behind the research questions posed in this study was that CAOs were undertaking steps to increase completion rates under pressure from external stakeholders. Oak

rejected the notion that improving completion rates was a driving factor in the work underway. Instead, accountability was framed in terms of increasing student success. Oak described first noting the external pressures of increased accountability when recalling time spent as a long-time Higher Learning Commission (HLC) peer reviewer many years ago.

HLC sort of announced that there was going to be a shift. That if schools hadn't gotten on the assessment bandwagon by now, they were just going to get cited because now they were interested in persistence, retention, and completion. And I think that was when it got my attention. (Oak)

Oak also spoke about the need to look beyond a single measurable outcome, completion rate. Rather than just looking at the standard Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) completion rates for a cohort of first-time, full-time students, there is a need to explore other ways to assess success for all students. Looking at how well students do at completing a degree or certificate and comparing that with benchmark data from like institutions “gives us a little bit more holistic look at how we're doing.” What is still missing are those students “who really need just one course, who need a couple courses.” To capture these students, stackable credentials are starting to be offered, “smaller bite-size credentials [for] people who take a couple of courses...but...that just ends up being about the completion rates” (Oak).

Threat to Open Access

Part of the first research question posed in this study was that the open access model of community colleges was being threatened by calls to focus on outcomes. Oak stated that the open access model at the foundation of the community college mission was not threatened by the increased outcome accountability. This CAO noted that for a long time there was a perception that it was an either/or scenario when it came to open access and success, but that is not true.

You just “have to meet [students] where they are and work with them to get them where they need to be” (Oak).

Work

During the first round of interviews, conversations about the work that CAOs do was described in broad terms. Oak noted that the first job of the CAO is to make sure the institution stays accredited and is meeting all state requirements. Sometimes faculty members may not think the state requirements are legitimate and that can cause friction. It is hard work, “it takes a lot of diplomacy... excellent listening skills, and...an ability to speak the truth even when it’s really unpopular...painful at times.” In general, “I would also say...I facilitate the academic work of the institution,” which includes curriculum, assessment, and faculty training among other things (Oak).

Most of the time spent in the second round of interviews focused on the work CAOs do to fulfill the missions of their institutions. Oak emphasized the importance of finding ways to help students succeed.

...when someone decides to come here, we need to be committed to them being successful...We don't want people to come here and just waste away, just get nothing for the opportunity...We need to find ways for students to make the most of the opportunity once they decide to come here. (Oak)

Success Initiatives. When asked to offer an example of an initiative underway at their institution that addressed efforts to increase success rates, both student-level examples and institution-level examples were discussed. Student-level initiatives have a direct impact on students; for example, Oak referenced the creation of specific pathways to funnel students through a program efficiently. Institution-level initiatives are those that require a change in

practice or governing philosophy. Oak referenced the creation of stackable credentials as an institution-level initiative. Stackable credentials are designed to give students a sense of progress and accomplishment for completing a subset of courses as they work toward a degree.

The role the CAOs had in creating initiatives was also discussed. Oak noted that some initiatives can be generated from the top-down and others from the bottom-up. As an example of a top-down initiative, Oak acknowledged that the institution “is moving towards using a guided pathways model...and that came through our president.” The president initiated that idea and then as the CAO I am working with faculty members to make that happen; “this is slow work.” Though no specific examples were offered, Oak did share that there are other things that generate from faculty and work their way up.

...it's really a job of change management of, you know, whether it's something that's bubbled up or whether it's something that's initiated from the top. It's really...how do you convince people to come along? How do you get people on board? What do you do with people who don't want to get on board? Really, that's really what you spend your time doing. (Oak)

Transfer and Career and Technical Education (CTE). As part of the initial conversation regarding mission, Oak noted the reality of the multiple missions of community colleges.

...on the one hand you have this side that's committed to the arts and sciences and the liberal arts education. And then on the other hand, you've got this, for lack of a better term, job training function... So, one's a philosophy that education is for its own sake. And the other one is that education has got this very specific purpose, which is to make

you a functional adult in the real world. And so, to me, [the mission is] kind of schizophrenic. (Oak)

When asked in the second round interview how much time was spent dealing with Transfer and CTE programs, Oak stated equal time was given to both. Meeting community needs often entails working on the CTE side to develop new programs or modify those that exist, or to find funding for new equipment needs. There is also time dedicated to managing federal Perkins Grant money that supports CTE programs and students. These are things you do not have to be concerned about on the transfer side, but time spent dealing with faculty members who teach in transfer programs equalizes the time spent dealing with CTE programs. Oak noted that members of the transfer faculty "...are more needy, are more vocal, raise issues of concern...so I end up troubleshooting and problem solving more on the transfer side."

Managing Versus Leading. When asked to quantify how much of their work they would classify as managing versus leading Oak referenced all the writing that is required in the position, "...my experience has been the higher up the ladder you go, the more writing you do." Email to faculty, memos, reports, including accreditation reports, all fall into managerial work. Most of the week is made up of meetings with faculty members and some of that is managerial, setting an agenda, leading discussion, and calling for votes, "...but I feel like no matter what meeting I'm in, I'm there to inspire or lead or set the tone." As a leader, it is key to "listen to what people are saying and you have to take it seriously," whether trying to build consensus about something particular or holding a listening session (Oak).

Pandemic Shifts. During initial conversations, the topic of how CAOs were managing the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic became apparent. Oak noted struggles dealing with: declining enrollments, shifting to remote operations, technology needs (faculty, staff, and

students), finding safe ways to allow for skills-based or clinical programs to meet, and training faculty members to teach remotely. Oak claimed that they have made the best out of a bad situation and will search for positives that can be built upon post-pandemic, primarily the expansion of online course modalities.

When asked about how the work had changed during the pandemic Oak commented that the work had not changed much, it had merely shifted to being done remotely. However, Oak did discuss the need to alter approaches while working remotely due to the pandemic and spoke to the stress being felt by everyone and the need to respect that.

...normally I would have had a list of five things I would have wanted to accomplish this year and I would have worked my way through each one of them. People are working hard, they're too stressed out, they...don't have the mental energy for some of this stuff. And so...if I get one of those five things done this year, that'll be good. So...I'm not putting the pressure on to move through an agenda. I'm sort of taking it more slowly.

(Oak)

Faculty members are teaching their five online classes and trying to catch up and stay on top of things. That is what we want them doing right now (Oak).

Reflecting on the Work

When asked to consider the best and worst aspects of their job, each CAO stated that they loved their job but offered one task that was their least favorite. Oak noted that “sometimes people are more...interested in being right than they are in finding a solution and that’s really difficult.” Having to “[manage] the personalities and...staying respectful enough that people feel they’ve been heard and valued, that’s really hard work.” Regarding the best part of the job, Oak discussed the value of having a seat at the table where decisions are made that shape the future of

the college, and noted that even though working with faculty members can be exhausting that aspect of the work is also rewarding.

Recommendations for the Next Generation

For those who aspire to a CAO position, CAOs did offer some advice on gaining the skills necessary to succeed at the job. Oak recommended working as a HLC peer reviewer as a means of gaining an institution-level perspective. Gaining experience or an understanding of enrollment management and scheduling, along with thinking strategically were also mentioned as important skills for future CAOs. Oak also stressed how valuable leadership training would have been before taking the position, noting the need to inspire and set a vision, not simply manage.

Elm Interview Composite

Accountability and Completion Rates

Elm rejected the notion that improving completion rates was a driving factor in their work and instead framed the work in terms of increasing student success. However, in response to the question about completion rates, Elm shared that stackable credentials have been used as a mechanism to boost completion rates.

...there was a huge push for completion. And so, everyone like, ran to their desk and created all of these stackable certificates and that kind of thing. So, you're showing kind of an inflated completion rate. But I think honestly now it's more about just retention in general and also the overall outcomes for your student[s] while maintaining that rigor, because that is huge for us as community colleges, because if we lose our credibility, I mean, think about our transferability, the relationships that we have with business and industry and just a variety of things. And so, we...have to be held accountable. (Elm)

Elm emphasized that individual successes should be considered, not just completion rates; noting that it is important to measure whether students end up employed or upscaling in their current job, whether students make more money, and if they leave the institution having accumulated a lot of debt. Institutions must be accountable for these things too.

Elm returned to the topic of accountability later to mention how it does not have to relate specifically to student outcomes. For example, faculty and administration both must be accountable regarding union contracts. In addition, there are institutional accreditation practices for which the college is held accountable. Additionally, there is also accountability to the Board of Trustees and the community. The business office must be held accountable for financial practices. And there is a need for everyone to be personally accountable for their behaviors. “There are a lot of different components to accountability for us” (Elm).

Threat to Open Access

Elm stated that the open access model at the foundation of the community college mission was not threatened by increased outcome accountability. Elm did reference exploring “floor” scores for students at the very lowest developmental education levels, but the idea of limiting enrollment based on placement scores was rejected. Elm commented specifically that we must keep our open access model, we can “scaffold up” student skills and build ways to increase student success without abandoning the open access model.

Work

Elm offered a broad view of their work, stating that the job is about establishing a long-term vision for the institution, working to inspire and connect with people. Elm also offered some specific examples of other responsibilities. You must work to make sure faculty have the professional development they need. You also need to work to put the right people in the right

places to drive up retention. For example, when our completion rates in nursing were not where they should be, “I hired a retention specialist to work with those students specifically...and not just [for] anatomy and physiology...but also to work from a more emotional intelligence-based space” (Elm). It is also important while working with other administrators who are not from the academic side to always advocate for the faculty, explaining what the faculty needs are and why those needs must be met.

Success Initiatives. Elm referenced the creation of a campus food pantry to meet the basic needs of students so they can focus on their education as an example of a student-level initiative. As an example of an institution-level initiative, Elm referenced the work of Illinois CAOs to implement multiple measures to reduce barriers regarding math placement. This initiative allows students to demonstrate their math proficiency with their high school coursework or institutional placement tests, not only by a particular college entrance exam score.

The role the CAOs had in creating initiatives was also discussed. Elm used the cybersecurity program at their institution as an example of a top-down initiative. The administration recognized the need for the program and the potential salaries graduates could earn and recommended that faculty develop the program. Though no specific example was offered, Elm noted that typically initiatives driven by the faculty in more of a bottom-up manner tend to be easier to establish if there is a documented need. Whoever presents the idea, the goal is to “do some research together or share some information together and move forward” if it is all feasible.

Transfer and Career and Technical Education (CTE). Elm noted that they spend more time dealing with CTE programs, explaining that the emphasis can shift. Years ago, the focus was on developing articulations to make it easier for students to transfer credit to four-year institutions, but that has been worked out.

In the last few years the focus has been more on what the community needs, and “right now there’s a definite shift to workforce development” and CTE (Elm). People are coming to the college because they want to get a degree or just a certificate and go to work. There is a need to listen to the community and give them what they want. For two years the focus has been on trying to help the large population of the community that does not hold a high school diploma. We have also worked to enroll formerly incarcerated individuals right from prison into an industrial skills program where they learn the skills they need to succeed and get them directly into jobs that can pay as much as forty dollars an hour. Elm used this initiative as an example that restorative justice within the community is a current focus at their institution.

Managing Versus Leading. When asked about leadership Elm responded by referencing experiences with staff and other administrators that report to the department, without specifically mentioning faculty. Elm noted that “more than 90% [of the job] is people-driven.” The job is more about leading than managing, “there’s just a natural, inspirational component that has to go along with [the position] when you’re helping people to get through particular challenges or you’re perhaps trying to guide them in another direction.” Elm described delegating the more managerial aspects of the job to others. There are a lot of reports, a lot of managerial things but “I’m just very fortunate that I have very good people on my team that...do like...compliance and regulations and all of that and they’re very good at it” (Elm).

Pandemic Shifts. Elm noted the same struggles described by Oak: declining enrollments, shifting to remote operations, and remote learning, technology needs (faculty, staff, and students), finding safe ways to allow for skills-based or clinical programs to meet, and training faculty members to teach remotely. Elm also claimed that they have made the best out of a bad situation.

When asked about how the work had changed during the pandemic the response was that the work had not changed much, it had merely shifted to being done remotely. Elm discussed the need to alter approaches while working remotely due to the pandemic, reflecting on translating the pop-in visits that were part of a normal routine when on campus to the current virtual environment. “We’re all using our personal phones and I don’t want to...intrude. And so, I usually will send a text message to say is this a good time...” There must be an effort to respect boundaries as we find ways to interact (Elm).

Reflecting on the Work

Elm referenced compliance work as the worst part of the job, “...it’s just something that you have to do” but there is nothing exciting about that work, “it’s just...a lot of reporting.” Regarding the best part of the job, Elm focused on the interactions with the people they work with, noting the thrill of inspiring and motivating others to achieve.

There’s nothing more rewarding for me than...working with a student...a staff member...a faculty member and...[recognizing] that they have so much more capacity and potential and helping them to realize and recognize that through opportunities that you can provide them with and then also giving them the feedback and support that they need. (Elm)

Recommendations for the Next Generation

Elm noted that serving on cross-campus committees within the institution would offer an opportunity to develop an institution-level perspective. Because they are difficult to teach, Elm highlighted the need for mentoring to help develop “emotional intelligence” skills, like “being able to talk to people, relate to people, listen to people.” The value of being genuine and authentic was also stressed.

...[the] key is being true to self and continuing to reflect who you are as a person in your work and...especially important for women and minorities to not feel like you have to come in and you have to behave like a white male, but that you stay true to self. And then that's when you make that position your own. (Elm)

In addition, Elm mentioned the need for current CAOs to make sure they have a succession plan, a mechanism to cultivate interest among staff or faculty members in becoming a CAO.

Ash Interview Composite

Accountability and Completion Rates

Ash discussed accountability in terms of institutional sustainability; referencing an increasing need to manage enrollments to maintain revenue, thus allowing the college to remain viable. Ash noted that when enrollments were high and there was less concern about revenues, we “were focusing on innovation, everything was about...being more innovative, more innovative programs.” When the last recession hit the focus shifted. While student services, equity, and barriers to success were mentioned, enrollment management was the central focus. Ash continued, noting that deans and faculty members are the people doing the student success work, “they’re the ones that are in the trenches with everyone getting the work done...I’m just

responsible for making sure that it gets done and offering feedback and getting everybody through the process.”

Threat to Open Access

Ash thought that the open access model at the foundation of the community college mission was not threatened by the increase in demands for accountability. Ash did note that at one-point other institutions were exploring whether they should keep their developmental education programs or if they should have some minimum admission standards, but that did not go anywhere. Ash stated that there was no threat to open access; noting they stick to the

...mission of affordability and the accessibility for our students. So even though there’s this pull to get the numbers to increase the enrollment over a certain number of years...we really stick to what can we do to make sure that we are accessible to our students, that it’s affordable.

Work

During the first round of interviews, conversations about the work that CAOs do was described in broad terms. Ash noted that primarily their job is about having conversations with people about whatever the important topic is and how to make it happen. Ash described the importance of educating those outside of educational affairs about the work of educational affairs. As an example of such an effort, Ash described inviting the chief financial officer (CFO) to attend budget request meetings with deans and faculty members so that the CFO could get a sense of the needs and why requests were being made. Ash also stressed the importance of getting the entire college behind the need to find ways to help students succeed.

Success Initiatives. Ash referenced improving onboarding programs to reduce barriers and create connections between the student and the institution as a student-level initiative. Ash referenced an institution-level initiative to partner with local industries to develop appropriate programs at satellite campuses to bring needed training to certain regions of the district where it is most needed.

The role the CAOs had in creating initiatives was also discussed. Ash focused on a bottom-up example regarding program development. As far as creating new programs, “all of that is really faculty driven;” faculty members share their ideas with the deans.

...so when we have our Deans Council meetings, we...put that out there and talk about what's going on, what's happening, how that would impact other areas. And really what I just kind of do is, I'm just sort of there to give them the support that they need or if I see...that maybe they're going down the wrong path or maybe it's not doable, then I can offer some input at that time. (Ash)

Ash described a process for vetting new programs and noted that there is a dean that oversees that process once there is approval to move forward. A more top-down role is required when it comes to deactivating programs. In those cases, the data is analyzed to see what programs are no longer viable and then potentially we start that difficult conversation. Most of the stakeholders know when a program is no longer viable but they just cannot make the move, so it is up to me to say it has to be done, it is part of the job (Ash).

Transfer and Career and Technical Education (CTE). Ash noted that energy expended on the transfer side revolved mostly around articulation and transfer agreements with four-year institutions. Ash recognized that the institution where they work is “very...heavy on the career side” and those faculty members are more vocal, so a lot more time right now seems to

be spent on career and technical education. Meetings with community and industry leaders is always about how CTE programs can be leveraged or what opportunities there might be to develop new CTE programs. On the CTE side there are also always accreditation reports and concerns to think about and that is just not something that is an issue for transfer programs.

Managing Versus Leading. When asked to quantify how much of their work they would classify as managing versus leading, Ash described several managerial tasks that come with the job and noted that “our president always says that the VPs have the hardest job on campus because we manage everything.” “So, for example for me, responsibilities for the adjunct in-service, college learning days, community learning days, accreditations, HLC, things like that. To me, they just kind of came with the role” (Ash).

Ash noted that it took a lot of effort to try and become more motivational, if not inspirational. Before the pandemic I would pop in on people and just say “I’m doing a wellness check.” This was just a chance to stop in, make a connection, and just let someone know I appreciated them and their work. It took time to realize it was not all about getting projects done or accomplishing tasks.

[People] want to know that I know that they are working, that they are doing a good job...But I had to learn that because when I first entered the role, I was still more in a managerial mindset. (Ash)

Pandemic Shifts. Ash also noted the struggles dealing with: declining enrollments, shifting to remote operations, and remote learning, technology needs (faculty, staff, and students), finding safe ways to allow for skills-based or clinical programs to meet, and training faculty members to teach remotely. Ash also claimed that they have made the best out of a bad situation.

Ash noted that a lot of work had merely shifted to being done remotely but listed some specific examples of the work being done that had not been part of normal responsibilities pre-pandemic.

... for example, looking at office hours for faculty and staff. How many people do we really need on campus? Is it necessary to have these buildings open for these amount of hours? ... I make sure that campus operations is marking classes so that when they come back...they have everything in place like the hand sanitizer, floor markers on, the desk[s] all marked. So, I see myself doing...more of that type of work. (Ash)

Ash shared that additionally time is being spent evaluating what kinds of things being used to make remote classes effective might want to be extended to whenever there is a return to campus post-pandemic. For example, some of the software and simulations that nursing has been using and the "...professional development for instructors with the online teaching," have been valuable so trying to figure out how to find the resources for those things is also more work right now (Ash).

Reflecting on the Work

When asked to consider the worst aspect of their job, Ash touched on a topic related directly to students: "I dread student appeals...they are so time consuming and normally they involve parents and lawyers." Regarding the best part of the job, Ash focused on the interactions with the people they work with. Ash talked about the joy of being a stabilizing force. "I don't like to see the deans stressed out and the people who work with me stressed out and upset." I tell them to "let me do the worrying for you." The best part of my job is watching people succeed and have happy lives.

Recommendations for the Next Generation

Ash recommended working as a HLC peer reviewer as a means of gaining an institution-level perspective. Ash described the need to know the additional “basics,” including enrollment management, strategic scheduling, the importance of understanding the Illinois Community College Board Policy Manual, and the HLC accreditation processes. Ash also discussed the importance of relationship building by noting “you have to be mindful that [people] have families, they have issues...and sometimes they bring those things to the office...” You must learn to listen and talk openly. Ash stated that “at the end of the day it’s really going to be about how you work with people, how you lead people.” The importance of fostering growth of individuals who work in the institution was also emphasized.

I’m all about talent development...if I see someone and I just say hey, I know you love it here, but there is an opening...I would hate to lose you, but I think you would be really great for this position. Because ultimately...I think that I've done my job or I at least contributed to someone's professional development if let's say, for example, they're a dean, and they go on to be a VP and then they go on to be a president, I want to be able to kind of help that growth. (Ash)

Fir Interview Composite

Accountability and Completion Rates

Fir rejected the notion that improving completion rates was a driving factor in the work and instead framed accountability in terms of increasing student success. Fir talked about accountability as a slow shift away from a concern about enrollments to focus on student persistence and how to help students succeed.

I do think that the fact that whether it was, these school report card kind of approaches where we had to publish things that we never published before, or whether it's the accrediting body that's now coming in and wanting to see how are we assessing program outcomes and degree outcomes, whatever those things are, they've pushed us to begin to look at our numbers very differently. And I think that has changed then the way we approach everything we do, because we're no longer just thinking about getting [students] in the door. (Fir)

Fir continued talking about how to help students keep moving toward their goal. Part of that is directing students to a realistic path. Sometimes “we treat them all as if they should be going on to transfer,” when they might be better suited for a career field. What can be done to get that developmental math student through the course so they can start taking more credit courses? What kinds of barriers can be removed so students do not lose their momentum? These are some questions that Fir shared that institutions must be accountable for. The shift has “changed our approach to holding ourselves accountable, when it used to be just enrollments because enrollments were tuition and tuition was the budget” (Fir).

Threat to Open Access

Fir thought that the open access model at the foundation of the community college mission was not threatened by the increase in demands for accountability. Fir referenced exploring “floor” scores for students at the very lowest developmental education levels, but the idea of limiting enrollment based on placement scores was rejected.

However, the exploration of “floor” scores led the institution where Fir works to begin encouraging an alternative path for developmental education math students. Fir explained, “what we've done with people who place really low is we try and put them in adult ed where they don't

have to pay tuition.” Students in those adult education courses tend to do well with building their math skills. “We’ve never said...that we would stop allowing them into the college, we just want them to go into a different track” (Fir).

Work

The broadest explanation of the work done by CAOs came from Fir who framed comments around student success. Fir discussed development of programs that maximize successes early and all along the process (i.e., stacked credentials) and touted a newly created office of program development to explore and support such programs. In addition, when asked about work, Fir gave several examples of work happening by faculty; such as universal curriculum design, which promotes a more accessible curriculum at the course-level. This concept of defining CAO work as all the work happening to improve student success was novel.

Success Initiatives. As an example of a student-level initiative, Fir described a corequisite model being used to allow developmental English students to enroll in credit courses along with their developmental courses. Any time a student can earn credit while enrolled in developmental courses allows for progress toward a degree or certificate. As an example of an institution-level initiative, Fir mentioned the adoption of the lost momentum framework, which supports students from recruitment to matriculation or employment.

The role the CAOs had in creating initiatives was also discussed. Fir stated that “sometimes things percolate up, sometimes they percolate down.” If something is presented at a conference or from a colleague that seems like it could work here, then that is explored. Plenty of initiatives are generated from faculty members working with their deans and in those instances the role of the CAO is more supportive. Wherever the idea comes from there must be a genuine discussion.

I don't like the term that you hear often, the idea of buy-in. Because to me, buy-in means, I've got something I'm trying to sell you. I would prefer it to be shared ownership... whosever idea it was is less relevant than, are we all in on this together, that we all feel like we own this idea and that we've got something at stake here, that we want to make it work. (Fir)

Transfer and Career and Technical Education (CTE). Fir felt that they gave equal time to both CTE and transfer programs. Fir discussed time spent developing CTE programs but stated that "...other times I'm really heavily dealing with personnel issues...on the transfer side," acknowledging that transfer faculty members made up seventy percent of the overall faculty. It was noted that those on the career side are more workforce minded and tend to have fewer issues with union matters or personnel complaints because they have worked outside academia. Career faculty members are "...used to just getting in there and getting it done, where on the academic side, you get a lot of people who want to play the union game and...they see things as adversarial...that's a challenge" (Fir).

Managing Versus Leading. Fir referenced the built-in managerial aspect to the position, but "...every situation...[is] unique...so I have to ask myself is this a time for me to [lead] or...to manage?" When it comes to deans or staff members that the CAO supervises, even with "the same basic scenario" some may need more managing than others; "I can let [some] run with it" and "...sometimes [they are] asking me to manage [them]."

I do always hold to the idea that you manage one level down, but you have to lead the whole organization. So, when I'm dealing with faculty, I'm not managing faculty. I'm trying to lead faculty and [trying] to develop a shared vision of what we're wanting to achieve. (Fir)

Coming to a vision together through collaboration is important because if everyone feels like they have ownership of a vision or initiative it increases the chance of success (Fir).

Pandemic Shifts. Fir noted the same struggles expressed by the other CAOs: declining enrollments, shifting to remote operations, and remote learning, technology needs (faculty, staff, and students), finding safe ways to allow for skills-based or clinical programs to meet, and training faculty members to teach remotely. Fir claimed that they have made the best out of a bad situation and will search for positives that can be built upon post-pandemic, primarily the expansion of online course modalities.

When asked about how their work had changed during the pandemic Fir noted that the frequency of meetings had increased, especially at the beginning of the crisis when more weekly updates were needed. Fir noted that attendance at meetings had increased which they hypothesized was because of the convenience of remote meetings and the level of anonymity one can have just by turning the camera off. Fir also postulated that the exodus of community college administrators and others may be attributed to the pandemic, “it’s a hard time to be in education.”

Reflecting on the Work

When asked to consider the worst aspect of their job, Fir noted, “...the worst part is dealing with the unionized faculty. It’s not that I’m anti-union, it’s just that...it creates an adversarial relationship, which I find very disturbing.” Regarding the best part of the job Fir noted that even as a faculty member years ago policymaking was always interesting and that is still true. Working “with my colleagues across the state as well as on our own campus” to try and work through problems is so rewarding (Fir).

Recommendations for the Next Generation

Fir thought that serving on cross-campus committees within the institution would offer that institution-level perspective that all of the CAOs thought was so important. Fir suggested that anyone interested in becoming a CAO should review the job description and identify the areas where they recognize the need for a deeper understanding. For example, if one is not familiar with budgets then it would be important to sit down with their chief financial officer and ask them to “walk...through it or get a copy of the comprehensive audit and read through it” (Fir).

Board of Trustees Interaction

The review of Board of Trustees minutes yielded very little data, none of which suggested boards are concerned about CAOs addressing outcome accountability. All four CAOs stated that they attended open and closed session board meetings to answer questions related to educational affairs. CAO accounts were corroborated by a review of the Board of Trustees minutes. Two were mentioned just once in the review of minutes during the 12 months reviewed, each for making a presentation during a regular board meeting. Minutes from two institutions listed attendance that documented the presence of the remaining CAOs at all but one meeting each during the same 12-month period.

The details of board minutes varied among the institutions. The minutes for three institutions offered few details, mentioning just the topic that was presented: academic profile, institutional learning outcomes, and pandemic teaching modalities. Minutes from the other institution included details offered by the CAO regarding various faculty recognitions, program graduation rates and accreditation approvals, student accomplishments at state competitions, course modalities, and administrative personnel changes. Again, there was no mention of

concerns or updates on completion rates in any of the Board of Trustees interactions with CAOs recorded in the minutes reviewed.

Conclusions

These findings document the voices of the four CAOs interviewed as they reflected on outcome accountability and the work they do to promote the missions at their institution. All four CAOs shared that their focus was on student success rather than a completion metric. Each also believed that the open access mission of the community college was not threatened by pressures to drive up completion rates. What they shared about their perceptions, their work, and their recommendations in the interview conversations will allow connections to be drawn to the adaptive leadership theory that framed this study.

CHAPTER V: INTERPRETATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to document how selected community college chief academic officers (CAOs) view their contributions to realizing the missions of their institutions, considering the shift from a focus on open access to one that includes completion and other forms of outcome accountability. This chapter offers an interpretation of the findings detailed in the context of the research questions: (1) How do community college chief academic officers perceive their leadership roles as institutions shift to focus not just on open access but also outcomes/completion rates? and (2) How did the shift to focus on outcomes affect the work of chief academic officers?

This interpretation draws connections between the findings described in the previous chapter, the literature reviewed, and my personal experiences working at a community college. Themes regarding the focus on student success initiatives rather than completion rates, the compatibility of student success and the open access mission, the work of CAOs in an everchanging climate of change, and advice for those who aspire to the position of CAO, are explored in more depth in this chapter. These connections are linked by the thread of adaptive leadership theory. Implications for practice and research are also offered.

Interpretation of Findings

Adaptive leadership theory provided a framework for this study. Heifetz et al. (2009) described technical problems and adaptive challenges that leaders face, either when self-assessing themselves or problem solving at the institution level. Technical problems are resolved using current knowledge; while adaptive challenges require learning new information, typically with input from multiple stakeholders (Heifetz et al., 2009). The hallmark of adaptive leadership is learning together to diagnose problems and find solutions. Technical problem solving and

responding to adaptive challenges are evident in the exploration of perceptions that the CAOs in this study had regarding their work.

Participants referenced emailing staff and faculty, holding meetings, compliance work, Board of Trustees briefings, and dealing with faculty grievances or student appeals, as examples of managerial responsibilities. Though these tasks are accomplished using previous knowledge, they are not classified as technical problems as defined by Heifetz et al. (2009) because they are not necessarily performed to improve the CAO or the institution. Before exploring examples of initiatives that do fit the adaptive leadership model, I first need to address the research questions.

Completion Rates Versus Student Success

The first research question that guided this study asked how the CAOs perceived their roles as institutions shifted to focus on completion rates. The literature reviewed stressed the importance of accountability and holding institutions responsible for low completion rates at community colleges (Bailey et al., 2015; Bragg & Durham, 2012; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Dowd, 2007; Jenkins, 2007; Ma et al., 2016). The primary assumption was that institutions had begun concerted efforts to address concerns about completion rates.

The four CAOs interviewed did not report feeling any pressure to increase completion rates directly, instead they framed the work as focused on student success. Increasing student successes should result in improved completion rates so it may seem like semantics, but completion rates and student success are distinct. Completion rates are an institutional measure of how many first-time, full-time students complete their intended degree in three years. That is a big picture number. To understand how all the different stakeholders at an institution can affect that completion rate it is necessary to focus on the smaller pictures, and the student success initiatives offered by CAOs in this study are examples of those smaller pictures.

In all interviews, any discussion about completion rates happened only when I attempted to steer the conversation to that concept. The collective reaction to completion rates was that they are not a good measure to use for assessing institutional success. The use of additional measures of success mentioned by the CAOs in this study (i.e., benchmarking data with other like institutions, six-year completion rates for part-time students, or employment data) align with those documented in the literature (Cohen et al., 2014) and with my own belief. Using Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS) data based on first-time, full-time cohorts offers a skewed view, particularly given the large number of part-time students at community colleges.

When asked to consider the shift toward increased accountability the CAOs did not discuss completion rates, they described a shift to increasing student success. One CAO recalled that changes started to occur once the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) began to hold institutions accountable for assessment of student learning. Another detailed the recent growth in the focus of community colleges that has progressed from an emphasis on enrollments, first to retention, then persistence, and now success. Retention is a mechanism to keep enrollments up, whereas persistence is about how students can be supported so that they can succeed. The CAOs in this study are scattered across that enrollment to success spectrum. One CAO may have focused more on enrollments than the others but certainly enrollments were on the minds of all. It was also clear that each of the CAOs was working to emphasize student success.

The second research question focused on how the work of CAOs had changed with the shift to focus more on outcomes. The CAOs could not address this question because none had worked in the position prior to 2009 when community colleges started to be scrutinized after the advent of the American Graduation Initiative (AGI) and the subsequent publication of completion rates.

The question of how CAOs perceive their leadership roles considering increased accountability regarding outcomes/completion rates was centered around the assumption that institutions were making a concerted effort to increase completion rates. That assumption was based on the literature and in part my experience as a community college faculty member working at an institution that has explicitly made increasing completion rates a priority. Granted, to increase completion rates you must increase student success in the same ways the four CAOs described in this study; but at the present time, at the institution where I work every initiative is linked to the targeted completion rates. The focus on success versus completion rates seems more palatable, however I can understand that institutions targeting specific completion rates may be attempting to be as transparent as possible about that goal.

Adaptive Leadership Opportunities

Participants did outline some tasks that are done explicitly to improve the institution, typically revolving around student success efforts, and therefore might reflect the application of adaptive strategies discussed earlier. The CAOs in this study recognized the need to support professional development for faculty. As a faculty member, increasing student success in a course may require self-reflection on how one could teach content in ways that are more student-centered, or perhaps reevaluating assessments to determine if they are adequately assessing the intended outcomes. These activities are the epitome of adaptive learning and CAOs must not only find the funding for such efforts but also must promote those efforts. Faculty members who may be consumed with their teaching load may not have the self-motivation to undertake such a self-reflection and it falls on the CAO to encourage or inspire such an endeavor.

The CAOs in this study offered several examples of institution-level initiatives aimed at increasing student success, all of which require the work of many campus stakeholders. Heifetz

et al. (2009) defined such initiatives as adaptive strategies, or more accurately as an amalgamation of technical and adaptive strategies. Heifetz et al. noted most challenges are in fact this “mix” of technical and adaptive. Any effort to create what one CAO called “shared ownership” in hopes of achieving a common goal incorporates both technical and adaptive strategies. Stakeholders work together contributing prior knowledge and building a new collective knowledge to increase student success. Whether programs were conceived of at an administrative, staff, or faculty level, all the CAOs shared that their role was to be supportive by inspiring innovation and finding resources to fund them.

Not all CAOs in this study were able to give examples of developing shared ownership with everyone working together toward a common goal. One CAO discussed a two-year long ongoing process to try to reduce the total number of hours in programs, a mandate from the state. Faculty members were resistant to have courses removed from programs and held up the process. My experience with state mandates is that leaders sometimes neglect to apply an adaptive strategy just because it is something that must be done. If your degree has 70 hours and the state says it must have 60 to 64 a novice administrator might simply send an email that asks the department chair to please reduce the hours in your program by six to 10 hours to meet the state mandate. The adaptive strategy would be to present the mandate as a problem that the administration and faculty members need to solve together, taking time to educate all on the mandate and the consequences of not complying, then working to formulate a plan to accomplish the goal of meeting the mandate.

Though few details were discussed regarding the student success initiatives CAOs mentioned that were underway at the institutions where they work, each has the potential to utilize an adaptive strategy. The examples offered demand a high level of learning to diagnose

and solve problems collectively. Each of the four initiatives that follow are also underway at the institution where I work and they are rooted in prior research (Bailey et al., 2015).

One example highlighted the need to improve or create onboarding programs. Two CAOs discussed the importance of building programs to recruit students and to integrate students into the college community. Students who may be lost as they try and navigate the college experience may encounter barriers to their success that can be resolved by simply talking with someone who knows the system. These onboarding programs seek to reduce barriers by educating students about the varied campus resources available and connecting students to advisors who can help them navigate their college experience. In addition, such onboarding programs foster connections between the student and campus life (i.e., student clubs), which may increase student persistence (Martin & Samels, 2015). This example highlights the value of collaboration with stakeholders outside of academic affairs detailed in Chapter II. Designing onboarding programs is done primarily by student affairs but building relationships with faculty members must be incorporated into such efforts given that students engage far more with their instructors than they do with other staff. It is imperative that members from student and academic affairs understand the value of the program and work toward a shared goal.

Initiatives to develop curriculum pathways which funnel students through programs more efficiently may not involve collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs, but it requires a deep change for academic programs. Creating a prescribed pathway with limited elective choices seems antithetical to many community college faculty members who appreciated the freedom they may have had as college students to choose what types of elective coursework they took. CAOs, other administrators, and faculty members must find a way to research the

current data, critique that data, and learn together about how such pathways may be effective. All these adaptive strategies promote the concept of shared ownership described earlier.

Reducing developmental education barriers was another initiative mentioned by the CAOs. The literature indicated that lower completion rates are directly related to the open access community college model (Bailey et al., 2015; Bragg & Durham, 2012; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Dowd, 2007; Jenkins, 2007; Ma et al., 2016). Students languish in these courses as they try to build the skills necessary to succeed in college-level courses. This is the issue that informed my research question regarding the potential threat to the open access culture of community colleges. That threat was discounted by all the CAOs in this study; they believed that the open access mission of the community college was compatible with student success accountability.

The need for adaptive strategies when dealing with developmental education may not stretch across the number of stakeholders involved in onboarding or curriculum pathways but it is also not narrowly focused only on math and English departments where developmental education courses are housed. Most of the work will be done by faculty in those departments but there is also a need to educate faculty members beyond those areas. In my experience, reinforced by the comments of one of the CAOs, one mechanism to remove this barrier is to allow students to be co-enrolled in a developmental education course and a credit-bearing course (Bailey et al., 2015). Educating faculty who teach courses with math and English prerequisites about the skills that developmental education students possess, even if they are not yet proficient, may lead to more credit course options for these students.

One other specific initiative mentioned by the CAOs was the creation of stackable credentials. Contradictory opinions were shared, with some CAOs referencing stackable credentials as merely a tool to increase completion rates. The concept of stackable credentials is

that a group of entry-level courses within a program are combined to form a certificate, the next level of courses is combined into a second certificate and that process can be repeated creating several certificates. Potentially a student could graduate with a degree, having earned three or four certificates in the process. In that scenario a student is counted four or five times as a success by the time they graduate, and it is clear how that can be perceived as inflating completion rates.

Another CAO noted that stackable credentials are valuable because they give students a sense of accomplishment that can be motivating as they pursue a degree, helping with persistence; a sentiment with which I agree. In my experience there is an additional benefit for certain students. For students who are in the workforce, earning a certificate or degree may satisfy continuing education criteria that results in a salary increase. By creating stackable credentials these students can move up the pay scale multiple times. Any increase in completion rates due to the creation of stackable credentials is an unintended consequence in my judgment. I am open to the idea that it is the other way around, but I choose to believe that it was in the best interest of students that stackable credentials were created. In either case it seems that students and institutions can benefit from stackable credentials.

The stackable credential comments offered by the CAOs were anecdotal and they did not provide data on how many of these stackable credentials had been created or completed, or whether the creation of such credentials had resulted in increased completion rates. Comparing such data with the intentions the various CAOs described would be valuable in assessing the effectiveness of such initiatives and I outline such a study later in this chapter. Regardless of the value placed on stackable credentials, the process of implementing them or not requires institutional and departmental self-reflection. This is true with each of the initiatives described in

this chapter. Without the adaptive leadership mindset of the CAO and other campus leaders there might not be a push to examine the status quo.

Adaptive Leadership in Action

In 2020 the COVID-19 virus created a global health pandemic and in the United States concerns resulted in the closure of, among many other sectors, the education system. In March 2020 Illinois community colleges suspended all in-person activities (Durham, 2020). Instruction and most other institutional work was forced to move online. Though this study was planned prior to the pandemic, the suspension of in-person activities provided a perfect model of adaptive leadership. Adaptive leadership theory provides a practical framework for diagnosing problems and identifying potential actions to solve those problems (Heifetz et al., 2009). Every stakeholder was forced to learn together to develop a plan that would allow the institution to remain functional. There was a steep learning curve.

The CAOs in this study described declining enrollments but also the remarkable shift that most faculty made to teaching online. Each CAO described professional development opportunities to get instructors trained, and efforts to make sure faculty and students had the technology tools to shift to online teaching and learning. The triage of the spring 2020 mid-semester shift to remote learning was followed by planned summer, fall, and spring 2021 semesters that remained mostly remote for the institutions where the CAOs interviewed for this study work. The same was true for the institution where I work. CAOs in this study described shifting to remote meetings, scheduling more informational meetings, working to make sure faculty and students had needed technology and support, and creating safe places for those programs that had no alternative but to meet in-person to fulfill skills requirements. All this work was the result of necessity and has certainly resulted in a cultural change. Given the number of

departments and individuals that needed to come together to make this possible and the new lessons learned, this was a paradigmatic study in the application of adaptive leadership theory.

Whether institutions retain aspects of this cultural change post-pandemic is yet to be determined, but each CAO talked about learning lessons from the crisis. Providing the COVID-19 pandemic subsides, will institutions rely on or allow continued remote work for some employees? Will meetings continue to be offered remotely in hopes of maintaining the higher levels of participation that have accompanied the pandemic? Will the number of online and partially online courses remain as prominent options for students and faculty members? These all seem like reasonable questions to me, especially given the past year.

Demographics

Though obtaining demographic information was not the objective of this research, limited data was collected. Given the exploratory nature of this study the data would not be expected to necessarily align with the data collected in the larger quantitative studies cited in the literature review or even with exploratory studies executed in different policy contexts (i.e., states other than Illinois). However, some of the institutional data does offer insight on the missions of institutions.

Despite the small sample size of this study there was a diverse array of institution types represented: rural – fringe, city – small, suburban – midsize, and suburban – large. As noted in Chapter III, “It is important to recognize that community colleges have differing needs due to size, location, and the communities they serve” (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017, p. 127). Those differing needs define the varied missions that community colleges have. Those missions are not all academic (e.g., community meeting place, performing arts, library), but most are, and the CAO is responsible for academic aspects.

The findings of this study align with the premise that size, location, and community all influence institutions. One CAO spoke specifically about restorative justice as a community need and how the institution was responding to that need. Two others referenced meeting the needs of industry partners and the creation of new career and technical education (CTE) programs. The CAO working for an institution with a university nearby noted that most students are matriculating to four-year institutions and acknowledged that CTE programs comprised just 30% of the total programming at the institution. Despite these various missions every CAO is charged with leading academic efforts and responding to challenges that emerge, hence the value of an adaptive leadership mindset.

Urgency of this Research

The overall average time in office for CAOs in the state illustrates the large turnover that Trachtenberg et al. (2013) predicted and reinforces the impetus for this study. Prior to the three retirements in 2020 the average time in office for CAOs in Illinois was 4.3 years. Following those retirements that average dropped to 2.0 years. The turnover rate for CAOs is higher than any other community college leadership position (Cejda, McKenney, & Fuller, 2001). The need to learn about the work that CAOs do as adaptive leaders is critical to inform the next generation of CAOs.

Implications for Practice

The focus on student success by the CAOS in this study has implications for current and future CAOs. For those who embrace an adaptive leadership style the process of working with stakeholders to learn just which initiatives may promote the greatest successes and how those initiatives might be implemented will be rewarding. As noted earlier, this process of exploring and learning together, and creating shared ownership, will increase the likelihood that these

initiatives will be successful. Given my supposition that increasing student successes will ultimately increase completion rates, CAOs must have assessment plans in place to allow for data collection. That data is crucial in judging which success initiatives are effective and whether they can be correlated with increased completion rates.

Understanding how current CAOs perceive their roles in contributing to the missions of their institutions is valuable for developing and hiring competent CAOs in the future. All four CAOs offered sound advice to individuals who might aspire to become CAOs. They recommended gaining an understanding of budgets, enrollment management, strategic scheduling, the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) Policy Manual, and the HLC accreditation processes. These recommendations aligned with the literature reviewed for this study (Brown, 1984; Eckel et al., 2009; Ferren & Stanton, 2004; Martin & Samels, 1997, 2009).

All four CAOs expressed the need to develop an institutional perspective. I agree with the two CAOs who shared that such a perspective can be developed by serving on college-wide committees. I serve on the strategic scheduling committee, which has offered me a more comprehensive understanding of enrollment management. My time serving on continuous improvement projects and presenting during HLC accreditation visits has expanded my knowledge of the accreditation process. My time spent as chairperson of the college curriculum committee has resulted in a working knowledge of ICCB regulations pertaining to curriculum and has offered a unique opportunity to understand many more programs than my own.

Part of the value of serving on the committees I have referenced is that these committees are often cross-working groups. These committees are made up of members from the faculty, administration, and staff from across the campus. From my experience, chairing or serving on these committees also allows practice at the relationship building that the CAOs noted is so

crucial for those aspiring to the CAO position. It is these relationships, established across all units of the college, that promote the development of shared ownership necessary to implement success strategies that result in institutional change.

I would suggest that gaining an institutional perspective and building relationships are valuable for all leaders at an institution, not just for future CAOs. CAOs who foster relationship building across the institution will be able to leverage those connections when unexpected challenges arise, whether those challenges are with how an institution can deal with a pandemic or how onboarding barriers can be reduced. As a faculty member I feel confident debating the merits of a new initiative with the administration because I have a broader understanding of how things work at the institution. When I believe in the value of a new initiative being proposed, I am even more comfortable championing that initiative.

The four CAOs also offered recommendations for developing future CAOs within the institutions where they work, which aligned with suggestions in the literature reviewed. Smith's (1981) recommendation that a "greater emphasis be given to development goals designed to help staff members prepare for future roles" (p. 217) was echoed in this study by the CAOs. My institution has implemented a college-wide leadership program to foster leadership skills for all employees.

I know from personal experience that unofficial mentoring from a prior CAO has been valuable to me becoming a faculty leader at my institution. When CAOs discussed the joy of recognizing potential in others and encouraging the growth of those individuals I recognized that I had been a recipient of such encouragement. Current and future CAOs should recognize their ability, and responsibility, to foster the next generation.

One CAO also shared how valuable leadership training would have been to prepare for the position and that need was documented in the literature review, specifically in calls to create or revise doctoral programs in educational leadership (Allen & Cejda, 2007; Brown, Martinez, & Daniel, 2002; Cejda, McKenney, & Burley, 2001; Townsend & Bassoppo-Moyo, 1997; Walters & Keim, 2003). Townsend & Wiese (1990) documented that community college CAOs thought doctoral programs were too theory-based, and that there was a need for more practical skills. Perhaps universities should think more like community colleges when developing doctoral programs, offering a mix of the theory with career and technical skills.

Implications for Research

The review of the literature for this dissertation documented an expected large turnover of community college CAOs (Trachtenberg et al., 2013) and revealed a lack of qualitative research on community college CAOs. This study adds CAO voices to the body of knowledge regarding the work of community college CAOs. The themes that emerged; the focus on student success initiatives rather than completion rates, the compatibility of student success and the open access mission, the work of CAOs in an everchanging climate of change, and advice for those who aspire to be a CAO, offer multiple avenues for future research.

My first recommendation for future research is the most direct extension of this study, a similar qualitative study of all but first year Illinois CAOs. One of the delimitations of this study was the choice to interview only those CAOs with five or more years of experience. That choice was determined based on two premises. First, that experienced CAOs could speak with authority on the missions of the institution. This premise may not have been accurate given that the discussions of missions seemed rudimentary to all four CAOs. Each had the same understanding and acceptance of the compatibility of the open access mission and accountability in terms of

student success. It is likely that even a new CAO would have a similar understanding of community college missions. Perhaps using a set of guiding questions that could have generated more direct responses relevant to the multiple missions of the community college and how CAOs perceived their own leadership styles could be useful.

The second premise for having selected CAOs with five or more years of experience was that these CAOs would be more confident in their roles and therefore more candid, as well as more situated in a community and policy context in which they developed their adaptive leadership. Based on my interview notes and post-interview notes, along with the general ease of the conversation evidenced in the recordings, I am confident that all four CAOs in this study were comfortable and candid. This may have been most evidenced by the fact that three of the four CAOs spoke openly about difficulties dealing with faculty members, knowing that I am a faculty member. While my premise held true, gaining the perceptions of shorter term CAOs on the themes of this study could be informative, and the comparison of those perceptions with the findings in this study could be of value. Future studies might benefit from the use of a focus group structure. That approach could provide an opportunity for a more in-depth, complex conversation.

My second recommendation for future research is to expand this qualitative study beyond Illinois. Without the constraint of time associated with dissertation work it would be interesting to expand the study regionally or nationally. Interviewing experienced CAOs from large community college systems such as California, Texas, Florida, and New York would significantly increase the sample size and possibly provide interesting data for comparing perspectives from coast to coast.

That expansion to other states might be more plausible because COVID-19 has forced us to be more comfortable with video conferencing. If institutional research boards and the qualitative research community accept video conferencing as a legitimate substitution for in-person interviewing post-pandemic (itself a worthy research topic), then opportunities for place-bound researchers would greatly expand. Though video conferencing was noted as a limitation to this study, it proved to be an asset. For example, when CAOs had issues arise that prevented them from meeting at our originally scheduled times my drive time was not wasted, and the ease of rescheduling was aided by the flexibility that meeting remotely afforded.

My third recommendation is not an extension of this study but instead is generated from the pandemic conversations shared with the CAOs. A study to investigate what higher education institutions can learn from any postmortem examination of the reaction to the COVID-19 crisis would yield useful data. Researching how higher education leadership personnel reacted, what they learned, and how they plan to integrate those lessons learned into strategic plans is crucial to avoiding the pitfalls institutions encountered in 2020.

My fourth recommendation for future research pertains to leadership development. The CAOs talked about developing a succession plan, developing talent, and noted the value they would have gained having had leadership training before becoming a CAO. Investigating whether institutions have succession plans in place for leadership positions and where that is documented would be useful. Building on the work of Eddy and Garza Mitchell (2017), another potential research project could look at formal and informal leadership development at institutions. Researching external leadership development, including the effectiveness of doctoral programs in educational leadership, could also be explored.

Though the recommendations offered here focus on qualitative approaches, quantitative research studies would also contribute to the literature. Given the significant community college CAO turnover in the state, quantitative research would document the changing demographics. A national survey of community college CAOs designed to collect perceptions related to student success versus completion rates would be informative considering the distinctions participants in this study made. Based on the examples of success initiatives offered by the CAOs in this study a statistical analysis of completion and success rates could allow for more meaningful discussion about leadership accountability. Ideally a mixed-method approach would allow for this quantitative research to be coupled with an observational study or a case study where a more in-depth picture of adaptive leadership could be developed.

These recommendations focus on my research regarding CAO leadership related to access and student outcome accountability. There are a host of other CAO responsibilities that could be explored in future studies as well. The CAOs who participated in this study referenced many of the challenging parts of their jobs that could be explored in greater depth, particularly qualitatively. Such topics could include budget and other financial considerations, institutional and program accreditation, and governance issues. These are topics of concerns that have been documented for CAOs nationally (American Council on Education, 2019).

Conclusion

The CAOs in this study offered a unified perspective that increased outcome accountability is a pressure facing community colleges but framed that accountability in terms of student success, not directly to completion rates. CAOs who adopt an adaptive leadership mindset to collectively diagnose challenges and find solutions will be better instruments of change. This interpretation of the findings and those related to the work of CAOs in general and

their recommendations for future generations resulted in implications for practice and for research. Recommendations for future research include additional qualitative studies as well as quantitative studies. These recommendations range from extending this research to a larger population, to the use of focus groups, to collecting data on effectiveness of success initiatives. Each implication ties back to the themes related to student success, the evolving work of CAOs, and advice for future CAOs.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear _____,

I am a tenured faculty member and Biology Department Chair at College of Lake County (CLC). I am also a doctoral student in the department of Educational Administration and Foundations at Illinois State University, studying with Dr. Dianne Renn. My research interests focus on how Chief Academic Officers (CAOs) perceive their role in helping the institution fulfil its mission. As one of just six Illinois community college Vice-Presidents of Academics/CAOs with five or more years in your current role, I am writing to ask you to meet with me via Zoom for a couple of interviews to talk about your experiences.

Since becoming a full-time faculty member, I have been engaged in governance at CLC and prior to his retirement I worked with Vice President Rich Haney in several capacities. Those interactions resulted in my interest in the pivotal role that CAOs play in the success of institutions. As you may know, there is shockingly little research on community college CAOs and your willingness to participate in this study will add a great deal to the body of knowledge on the topic. Your voice will be valuable in contributing to a broader understanding of the position; with implications for development, recruitment and hiring of future CAOs.

This study was planned before the current Covid-19 crisis and I understand the pressures on your calendar even in normal times, but I am hoping that you will agree to meet with me. I will reach out to you via email in the coming week to secure your commitment and consent to contribute to this research. In the meantime, feel free to contact me at macoyke@ilstu.edu or (XXX)XXX-XXX if you have any questions.

Thank you for your consideration,

Mark Coykendall, Doctoral student
Department of Educational Administration and Foundations
Illinois State University

APPENDIX B: FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

Good Morning _____,

Last week you should have received a letter that I sent asking you to consider participating in my study of experienced Illinois community college CAOs. This email is the follow-up promised in that letter. Because I realize you may be under Covid protocols and not regularly in your office I have attached a copy of that letter here.

Like me, you have worked in the community college system for a long time, so I know you are a proponent of life-long-learning. I am hoping that you will take this opportunity to contribute your voice to my research on how CAOs help to fulfil their institution's mission in an era of increased outcome accountability. Your participation would simply include two one-hour interviews via Zoom in the coming months.

The second attachment is a consent form and your reply to this email affirming your willingness to participate will be your proxy signature to that consent. There are just six Illinois CAOs with five or more years of experience so your volunteering to be interviewed would add a great deal to this study.

Please let me know if you have any questions. If you can commit, please respond to this email. I can work with your administrative assistant to schedule a convenient time for our first interview. Thank you,

Mark Coykendall, Doctoral student
Department of Educational Administration and Foundations
Illinois State University

email: macoyke@ilstu.edu

p:

APPENDIX C: CONSENT DOCUMENT

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Mark Coykendall under the supervision of Dianne Renn of the Department of Educational Administration and Foundations at Illinois State University. The purpose of this study is to examine how participants tend to perceive their work as Chief Academic Officers (CAOs) in helping their institution fulfill its mission.

Why are you being asked?

You have been asked to participate because you are a current, experienced CAO at an Illinois Community College. You are ineligible to participate if you are under the age of 18. You are ineligible to participate if you are currently within the European Economic Area. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose to skip parts of the study, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time.

What would you do?

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be interviewed twice in a one-on-one setting via video conference. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. Each interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

Are any risks expected?

We do not anticipate any risks beyond those that would occur in everyday life.

Will your information be protected?

We will use all reasonable efforts to keep any provided personal information confidential. All data will be stored on a secure password protected hard drive. Information that may identify you or potentially lead to reidentification will not be released to individuals that are not on the research team. After your data has been deidentified it may be used in other research projects. The findings from this study may be presented in conferences, meetings, and publications. When these findings are presented, your responses may be combined with the responses of other participants.

Who will benefit from this study?

While you may not directly benefit from this study, your responses will contribute to research on community college CAOs. Your responses may inform future CAOs and those interested in hiring and developing future CAOs.

Whom do you contact if you have any questions?

If you have any questions about the research, contact Mark Coykendall at macoyke@ilstu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, contact the Illinois State University Research Ethics & Compliance Office at (309) 438-5527 or IRB@ilstu.edu.

Documentation of Consent

An affirmative email response will indicate your willingness to participate in this study and that you are 18 or older.

You can print this form for your records.