

DISSERTATION

AN EXPLORATION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF
SENIOR-LEVEL COMMUNITY COLLEGE FOLLOWERS IN THE CO-CREATION OF THE
LEADERSHIP PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

AN EXPLORATION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SENIOR-LEVEL COMMUNITY COLLEGE FOLLOWERS IN THE CO-CREATION OF THE LEADERSHIP PROCESS

Community colleges are in the midst of an unprecedented leadership crisis precipitated by large numbers of its presidents retiring, new political, financial and regulatory demands for presidents to oversee and the lack of robust succession planning to fill leadership vacancies. At the same time followership has become of interest in higher education and leadership studies as failures in followership at colleges and universities have brought negative attention, and emerging theories of followership have evolved. As new leaders take the helm at community colleges, more research is needed on how leaders and followers work together to lead these institutions of higher education that educate almost half of the undergraduates in the United States.

This study's purpose was to explore how senior-level followers co-create leadership with their community college presidents. The sole research question asked was what were the lived experiences and followership behaviors of community college senior-level followers in the co-creation of the leadership process with their supervisor presidents. Senior-level followers at community colleges in the state of Maryland with at least three years' experience participated in this qualitative study. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was utilized as the methodology for this research.

The findings resulted in four superordinate themes comprising deference to the president, informed and interactive decision-making, vision and mission and respectful relationships. The superordinate themes were developed from eight emergent themes including role of the president, final decisions, planning and information gathering, conversation and collaboration, supporting the president's vision, common belief in mission, trust and honesty and integrity.

The study provided recommendations on ingraining followership in community college presidential selection processes, adjusting the competencies of community college presidents to include followership, changing leadership development programs to incorporate the development of leaders and followers in the leadership co-creation process and strengthening employee performance evaluations to measure leader and follower effectiveness in leadership co-creation. Suggestions for future research were identified including using different sample populations, reversing the research to account for the lived experiences and followership behaviors of presidents, strengthening homogeneity among participants to better understand the lived experiences and behaviors of community college vice presidents and utilizing quantitative approaches to further explore the leadership process in community colleges.

Keywords: community colleges, community college leadership, community college presidents, followership, followership theory, leadership, leadership process, leadership theory

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my loving parents, David and Barbara Newton. Though higher education was not a focal point of their lives, they encouraged me on my path from a bachelor's degree to a juris doctorate and finally to the doctorate degree that culminates in these pages. Their quiet support of dreams that were so far removed from their daily struggles, and their love and devotion in times of great difficulty, led to my educational accomplishments and a career in higher education that I will always cherish.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

Terminology in higher education, community colleges and the leadership literature was used in this research. In order to understand the study, the following definitions of terms are provided:

- **Community College:** A regionally accredited, open access institution of higher education that offers associate degrees as its highest credential. Some community colleges also award baccalaureate degrees as permitted by state law.
- **Community College President:** The chief executive officer of a community college.
- **Followership:** “Followership is the characteristics, behaviors and processes of individuals acting in relation to leaders” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014, p. 96).
- **Leadership Process:** A theory of followership that is “interested in understanding how leaders and follower interact together in context to co-create leadership and its outcomes” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014, p. 99).
- **Senior-Level Follower:** A senior-level follower for purposes of this study is a community college leader that reports to a community college president and has responsibility for a broad area of the college or campus initiatives (academic affairs, administration, institutional affairs, student services, etc.).

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Dr. Graham Spanier served as the 16th president of The Pennsylvania State University for 16 years from 1995 until 2011. On the day he began his 17th year as president, authorities arrested a former assistant football coach, Jerry Sandusky, on multiple charges of sexual abuse of children (Sokolove, 2014). The ensuing scandal, replete with allegations of failure to report child abuse, grand jury perjury, and obstruction of justice, led to the firing of Penn State's long-time football coach, its athletic director, a university senior vice president and Dr. Spanier. Since Dr. Spanier's termination in November of 2011 Mr. Sandusky was convicted of 45 counts of child sexual abuse, the university paid \$60 million in fines to the National Collegiate Athletic Association, its football team received severe sanctions, several civil lawsuits totaling \$113 million were settled by the university, the university paid legal and court costs of nearly \$30 million and Dr. Spanier, along with other former Penn State employees, were forced to defend themselves against felony indictments of perjury, obstruction of justice and child endangerment (Bieler, 2018; Freeh Sporkin & Sullivan, LLP, 2012; Rafacz, 2018; Tracy, 2016). In 2017 Spanier, senior vice president for finance and business Gary Schultz and athletic director Tim Curley were convicted of child endangerment for failing to report Sandusky's crimes and were sentenced to several months in jail (Hobson, 2017). Costs to the university are now more than \$250 million as of February 2019, and the fallout from the scandal and damage to the university's reputation continue (Snyder, 2019).

In the aftermath of the Penn State child sex abuse scandal, there has been a focus on the actions and inactions of leaders such as Dr. Spanier, vice president Schultz, athletic director Curley and Joe Paterno, the now deceased legendary football coach. One obvious lesson learned

from this horrible episode is that leadership, including the leadership of those entrusted by college and university boards of trustees to lead institutions of higher education, is of great consequence. Yet, as the scandal at Penn State illustrates it is not only leadership that matters but followership as well. Thoroughgood and Padilla (2013) stated that followers “appeared to contribute significantly” (p. 147) to the devastating and destructive outcomes realized at Penn State. Inaction, ignorance and an unwillingness to confront those who brought great national prestige and athletic success to Penn State were at the core of how Mr. Sandusky was able to perpetuate evil for so long within the university environment.

Failures in leadership, and followership, are not the exclusive purview of large universities and well-known athletic programs. Community colleges in recent years have experienced a wide ranging set of scandals involving bid-rigging, bribery, cheating, corrupt business practices, forgery of transcripts, fraud, grade-fixing, overspending, and sexual harassment (Alaimo, 2014; Associated Press, 2006; Faulk, 2016; Kelly, 2009; Krupnick, 2007; Nguyen & Dougherty, 2014; Specht, 2017). One of the most far-reaching scandals involved the Alabama Community College System, where an investigation into corrupt business and hiring practices led to several administrators and employees being convicted of state and federal crimes (Faulk, 2016; Kelly, 2009). Those in positions of formal leadership as well as their followers were implicated in these two-year college scandals emphasizing again, as was the case at Penn State, that the actions and inactions of both leaders and followers, and the interactions between them, have great impact on the successes and failures of colleges.

Statement of the Problem

Though the examples above focus on scandal and failure at institutions of higher education, gaining a greater understanding of how leadership is created can be useful for the

improvement of these institutions and instructive for those who wish to lead them. Leadership at community colleges in particular is in the spotlight now more than ever.

The profile of community colleges and an awareness of their importance to United States economic development was significantly raised during the administration of President Barack Obama as he attempted to make free community college a centerpiece of his higher education agenda (Palmadessa, 2017; Peak, 2015). Free community college programs have flourished across the United States and many state and city leaders have expressed a need for K-14 education to develop a strong workforce, making the spotlight on community colleges even brighter (Brownstein, 2017). Given this new emphasis on community colleges, and the role of followers in institutional decision-making, the exploration of how leadership is co-created between community college leaders and followers can provide insight into how to improve institutional leadership and avoid followership failures.

Insight into how leadership is created is needed now more than ever in our institutions of higher education as colleges and universities weather major transitions in their presidencies and senior leadership positions (Betts, Urias, & Betts, 2009; Klein & Salk, 2013; McNair, 2015). Community colleges in particular are in the midst of a leadership crisis as this sector of higher education works through unprecedented changes and greater public scrutiny (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015; Garza, Mitchell, & Eddy, 2008; Phillipe, 2016; Reille & Kezar, 2010; Taylor & Killacky, 2010; Tekle, 2012; Wymer, 2014). Leaders who began their careers in the community college at the dawn of the community college movement in the 1970s are nearing retirement creating significant vacancies throughout the two-year environment (Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Ebbers, Conover, & Samuels, 2010; Jones & Jackson, 2014). Institutions awarding associate degrees reported in 2016 that more than 50% of their presidents intended to retire in the next five

years (American Council on Education, 2017). Teckle (2012) contends that the leadership crisis will continue with 75% of community college presidents set to retire by 2022, and Phillippe (2016) reported that 80% of presidents polled in a recent presidential compensation survey plan to retire in the next ten years.

Compounding the leadership crisis is the lack of interest among a growing proportion of academic leadership in pursuing community college presidencies (Appiah-Padi, 2014; Eddy, 2013). As community colleges have gained more notoriety and political importance, the demands of these positions have become unrelenting as leaders attempt to keep pace with the urgency of changes in this sector of higher education (American Association of Community Colleges, 2016). Deepening the leadership crisis even more is the decreased pipeline of individuals engaged in formal preparation to become community college leaders, as evidenced by the sharp decrease in degrees awarded by community college leadership programs (Eddy, 2013; Lederman, 2008; McNair, 2015).

With so many presidential vacancies expected in the community college, new leaders will step into these important leadership roles. It is timely to examine how leadership is constructed between leaders and followers and to learn more about the lived experiences of current senior-level community college leaders that report to presidents. These senior-level leaders who are also followers to a community college president are most likely to become part of a new generation of community college leadership. In a recent study of new community college presidents, 92% had community college work experience in their history (Jones & Jackson, 2014). Individuals in senior academic leadership positions reporting directly to community college presidents are most likely to fill the plurality of presidential vacancies (Appiah-Padi, 2014; Jones & Jackson, 2014; Keim & Murray, 2008; Weisman & Vaughan, 2007), and

presidents with a student services leadership background continue to grow (American Council on Education, 2017). Other roles in the community college from areas such as finance, institutional advancement, and strategic planning have also been tapped to fill presidential vacancies (Jones & Jackson, 2014).

At a time when community colleges across the nation are transitioning their leaders, the nature of leadership itself is also changing. Leadership is evolving “from being leader centered, individualistic, hierarchical, focused on universal characteristics, and emphasizing power over others” (p. 2) to a process that encompasses empowerment, collaboration, and mutual influence (Kezar, 2009). The “others” in the leadership dynamic, i.e., followers, are beginning to be explored by leadership researchers and studies of both their own followership and their perspectives on leadership have begun to emerge over the last 20 years (Carsten, Uhl-Bien, West, Patera, & McGregor, 2010). Leadership theories have shifted “toward a focus on interpersonal dynamics occurring within the leadership process” (Hannah, Sumanth, Lester, & Cavarretta, 2014, p. 598).

New followership theories that provide constructs for the exploration of leader/follower dynamics are beginning to materialize as the nature of leadership is rediscovered (Benson, Hardy, & Eys, 2016; Carsten, Uhl-Bien, & Huang, 2018; Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). Relational, role-based and leadership process approaches are emerging as frameworks for discerning how leaders and followers co-construct leadership (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Examining leadership as a process, the framework to be used in this study, has the potential to significantly alter how leadership is understood. Leadership process moves away from the concept of one party acting on another to produce leadership toward an understanding of leadership as co-

created. Combined acts of leading and following must exist for leadership to be understood in this framework (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Hollander, 2009).

Considering the raised profile of community colleges, its leadership transitions, new leaders preparing to take on leadership and followership roles, our changing understanding of leadership and the emergence of new followership theories there are a plethora of issues surrounding community college leader/follower dynamics that are ripe for exploration.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how community college senior-level leaders, who are also followers in relationship to their community college presidents, co-create the leadership process through their followership. The study is important for both scholarly and practical reasons. Community colleges are responsible for almost half of undergraduate enrollment in the United States, and studying the sector's leadership is essential as community colleges grow in prestige and importance. As understandings of followership and leadership theory continue to evolve, this study will contribute to the body of research of this subset of leadership studies. In addition, the research will provide practical insights into the leadership process within higher education administration.

Research Question

The research question that guided this study was as follows: What are the lived experiences and followership behaviors of community college senior-level followers in the co-creation of the leadership process with their supervisor presidents?

Delimitations

Participation in this study was delimited to senior-level followers reporting directly to a two-year community college president. Senior-level followers in community colleges generally

hold titles such as chief of staff, chief operations officer, provost, vice chancellor or vice president, and some hold combined titles such as vice president of academic and student services. The study excluded senior-level followers that do not directly report to a community college president, as well as people that may eventually become community college presidents from outside academia such as political and business leaders.

This study only explored the leadership process in public two-year institutions within one state, Maryland, in order to capture experiences that are similar in nature. Maryland is a diverse state with large population areas such as the suburbs of Washington, D.C., the city and suburbs of Baltimore and rural areas in its western mountains and eastern shore. The experiences of leaders in rural, less diverse areas was somewhat different from those in urban community colleges. Another delimitation was that the study explored the leadership process only within public two-year institutions.

Significance of the Study

This study aimed to add to the growing literature on followership in hope of better understanding the leadership dynamic between leaders and followers. As noted earlier, with a large number of community college presidents retiring it is important to discover more about the next generation of community college leaders and how their followership impacts their approach to leadership. In addition, learning more about how current senior-level followers experience leadership with their presidents provided insight about the type of community college presidents that should be chosen, or avoided, when considering presidential hires as well as the significance of followers in the presidential selection process. Finally, this study helped answer the call of some researchers for more followership studies that use a qualitative approach, versus the predominant quantitative approach in the leadership research field, to gain perspective about the

nature of following (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Little is known about the nature of following, including the behaviors of leaders and followers in the leadership process, and this interpretative phenomenological analysis study attempted to provide insight into leader/follower behaviors in one sector of higher education.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter Overview

It is often noted in the study of leadership that it “is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth” (Burns, 1978, p. 4). By contrast the study of followership, as part of leadership studies, has until recently been given little attention. Leaders have traditionally been perceived to be causal agents, and the study of both leadership and followership has revolved around the action, or inaction, of the leader (Shamir, 2007). Recently, new theories of leadership and followership have begun to suggest that leadership is co-created through a process of leader/follower interactions (Carsten & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Hurwitz & Koonce, 2017; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014; Weber & Moore, 2014). This study adds additional insight to this co-creation process in the context of the community college, an environment in which leadership is rapidly changing.

To explore how senior-level community college followers co-created leadership through their followership, it was important to review the study of followership in the context of leadership research as well as emerging theories of followership. This literature review provided historical context on how the study of leadership has moved from almost complete ignorance of followers to an understanding of leadership that does not exist without their involvement in its creation. Discussion of emerging followership theory was reviewed to provide a foundation for the study’s research questions about the co-creation of leadership and the behaviors engaged in by followers during its creation.

The first section below reviews followership studies within leadership research including the historical relationship between followership and leadership, leader-centric approaches to

understanding followership, and follower-centric approaches. In the second section, emerging theories of followership are detailed including relational studies, role-based approaches from an entity perspective, and leadership process perspectives from a constructionist perspective. This chapter concludes with practical applications of followership theory detailed in the literature, and how theory can inform practice in leader selection, evaluation and professional development.

Followership in Leadership Research

While much of leadership literature focuses on the traits, behaviors and heroism of individual leaders, a much narrower portion of both scholarly and popular works regarding leadership involves followers (Bligh, 2011; Ford & Harding, 2018; Lord, Brown, & Freiberg, 1999; Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985; Shamir, 2007; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Followers tend to be treated in the leadership literature as though they exist separate and apart from leaders, and they have been traditionally discussed in the context of the group as opposed to the individuality of the leader (Collinson, 2006, p. 179). A recent emphasis on followers in the literature is such a divergence from the mainstream leader-centric tradition, that it has been labeled critical and at the same time controversial (Bligh, 2011; Kelley, 2008). To better understand how leadership studies have moved from followership being on the periphery of leadership to a recognition that the study of leadership can be enhanced by its exploration, followership is first situated below in its early historical context.

Historical Context

Before the late 1900s leadership and management theorists devoted their research almost exclusively to the leader, who was predominately viewed as male, and studied his traits and characteristics, skills and abilities, style, situational approach, power base and ability to form and manage teams (Bligh, 2011). This devotion had its genesis in the application of Thomas

Carlyle's great man theory originally proffered in the mid-1800s more as a statement of faith than a scholarly theory (Spector, 2016). The great man theory suggested that leaders were born and not made and thus only certain men had the characteristics and traits to become leaders (Allio, 2013; Bass & Bass, 2008). Carlyle believed that leaders were "gifts from God" (p. 250) and those not divinely chosen to be leaders had the responsibility to obey them (Spector, 2016). Leadership during this period was defined by who the leader was, what the leader did to others and how he influenced situations.

Followers appeared in the research as part of behavioral sciences fields in the first half of the 20th century, mentioned by scholars such as Freud and Fromm in psychology, Mead in anthropology, and Sanford and Homans in sociology (Baker, 2007). Bligh (2011) references 1920s and 1930s writings about the leader/follower partnership, but he states the economic and social conditions of the period prevented this model from receiving further exploration (p. 426).

Despite these intermittent discussions management and leadership theorists did not start to pay great attention to followers until the second half of the 20th century. It is in Fiedler's (1964, 1967) contingency theory and the path-goal theory posited by Evans (1970) and House (1971) that followers, characterized at that time solely as subordinates, began to play a role in leadership and management theory. Contingency theory attempted to match leaders to appropriate situations, with leader-member relations (positive and negative) and leaders' positional power to punish and reward followers, serving as key situational variables in the research (Northouse, 2010). Conversely, path-goal theory focused on the relationship between a leader's style and subordinate's characteristics, and suggested that a leader should alter his style to achieve maximum employee performance and motivation (House, 1996). In both leadership theories, followers were factored in as significant variables that leaders must match or adjust to

in order to be successful; yet, the emphasis was still on the leader to take action, or inaction, in order to achieve a desired outcome.

Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory established in 1975 was the first significant break from the notion that leadership must be viewed solely from a leader's perspective (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen & Scandura, 1987). LMX concentrated on the dyadic relationship between a leader and each of his followers and the interactions between them (Graen & Schiemann, 2013; Uhl-Bien, Graen, & Scandura, 2000). Relationships with negotiated responsibilities outside of the formal defined leader/subordinate role (in-groups) were based not on leader action, but by a follower involving himself in the leadership dynamic. Out-groups were composed of those followers content to play the role defined in the formal employment relationship with a leader. LMX theory addressed differences in the relationships between leaders and followers in the dyads.

In addition, LMX theorists Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) attempted to break down the study of leadership into domains that comprised the construct of leadership. Referring to the taxonomy of leadership, three domains generated in the leadership construct were leaders, followers and relationship. Graen and Uhl Bien described the opportunity for research not only of individual domains, but research on how each domain should be considered as it interacts with another providing "a more complete picture of the leadership process" (p. 223). This focus in LMX studies on interactions versus individuals paved the way for followership perspectives of both leadership and followership, as well as relational and other emerging studies of followers in the 21st century.

Writings in the popular press, in particular, Kelley's (1988) article *In Praise of Followers* and Chaleff's (1995) attention to courageous followers, also began to shift the paradigm of

master leader/subordinate follower to one in which the follower had an active role. Kelley detailed basic styles of followership, and the type of follower he believed to be most effective was an active follower that thought for herself and could be energetic and assertive. Chaleff too developed the idea of an active, or in his terminology, courageous follower creating five dimensions of courageous followership – assuming responsibility for themselves and organizational needs, serving the leader, challenging a leader when behavior or policies are at odds with organizational mission, participating in transformation and the change process, and leaving a leader for self-growth or due to destructive leadership the follower is unable to alter (pp. 6-8).

To further bridge the gap between the passive follower being acted upon by a leader, and a follower that is critical to leadership's construction, the romance of leadership theory emphasizing followers' representation of what leadership is was created. In the 1980s and early 1990s James Meindl and colleagues first theorized that while much attention was placed on the leader, it was followers' construction of leadership that was critical to understanding the leader/follower dynamic.

Romance of Leadership

Social constructions of followership first prominently emerged in James Meindl's concept of romance of leadership (Shamir, 2007). In developing the romance of leadership as a follower-based theory, Meindl theorized that leadership was a social construction of followers' infatuation with leaders and bias toward the leader resulted in the leader being attributed both good and bad outcomes within organizations (Meindl, 1995; Meindl & Ehrlich, 1988; Meindl et al., 1985). For Meindl "the romance of leadership [was] about the thoughts of followers: how leaders are constructed and represented in their thought systems" (Meindl, 1995, p. 330). In

romance of leadership, followers have interpreted their relationship with the leader, and it is only at that point that leadership begins to take shape.

According to Bligh, Kohles, and Pillai (2011) bias in attributions and misattributions of leadership in organizations is a key theme in romance of leadership studies (pp. 1061-1064). Leadership outcomes are attributed by followers to leaders both when there is organizational success and when there is organizational failure. The desire to credit leaders is so strong that research using the romance of leadership theory has indicated that positive organizational outcomes are more highly valued by followers when they can be attributed to the leader (Bligh, 2011, p. 428; Bligh, Kohles, Pearce, Justin, & Stovall, 2007, p. 531). In addition, when organizations experience either positive or negative performance at the extremes a leader is more likely to be attributed with the success or failure of the organization (Meindl & Ehrlich, 1987, p. 105). Though these constructions of leadership are made by followers, romance of leadership appears to create either a horns or halo effect that attributes success or failure to the leader, not to followers (Bligh et al., 2007).

Meindl (1995) framed his research as inherently follower-centric because it relied upon the constructions and manipulations of followers to bring sense to how leadership is defined, as opposed to the causal reactions forwarded in leader-centric research (pp. 331-333). Yet, other scholars have maintained that the romanticization of leadership actually amplifies the importance of leaders and highlights their centrality to the concept of leadership (Bligh, Kohles, & Pillai, 2011; Gray and Dentsen, 2007; Uhl-Bien & Pillai, 2007). Uhl-Bien and Pillai (2007) criticized Meindl's follower-centric view of romance of leadership, opining that even though it is socially constructed by followers, it is still centered on how leadership is constructed rather than followership. They also criticized Meindl's romanticization of leadership for reinforcing the

notion that leadership is a result of the performance of a leader. “It is possible that a corollary to the ‘romance of leadership’ may well be the ‘subordination of followership’” (Uhl-Bien & Pillai, 2007, p. 192). In addition, Gray and Densten (2007) in their research using a leader-centric perspective concluded that through self-deception and impression management, leaders will actively woo followers into constructing the image of leadership that leaders want created (p. 577). Their suggestion that leaders can be responsible for purposively constructing impressions of leadership made by followers casts additional doubt on the follower-centric nature of romance of leadership espoused by Meindl. The leader-centered aspect of leadership construction in romance of leadership, its heroic undertone and its resultant subordination of followers also gives insight into the powerful desire in North American cultures to elevate individual leaders versus the collective in improving organizations.

Whether romance of leadership resulted in more attention to the leader, or as Meindl suggested brought attention to followers and their social constructions of leadership, the theory helped spark additional interest in scholarly research regarding followers. Followership studies have benefited in particular from two approaches: leader-centric approaches to followership and follower-centric approaches to followership.

Leader-Centric Approaches

While trait, situational, contingency, path-goal and romance of leadership theories all involved followers in their composition, at their core they are all leader-centric theories of followership with a focus on a leader’s action or inaction upon followership (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). LMX theory is sometimes described in the context of follower-centric or relational views, but it too can be considered leader-centric due to the powerful and driving position that the leader has in the LMX relationship-building process (Uhl-Bien et al., 2000; Uhl-Bien et al.

2014). Two additional modern theories that have taken hold of leadership studies and become very popular, transformational and charismatic leadership, are also rooted in a leader-centric view.

Referred to by Conger (1999) as being “practically identical twins” (p. 146) in leadership research, transformational and charismatic theories of leadership emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as theories that emphasized connections between leaders and followers. Both theories moved away from leadership as emphasizing transactions between leaders and followers (e.g., giving promotions in exchange for surpassing organizational goals) to an emphasis on how leaders can motivate followers to help them reach their greatest potential. Though both transformational and charismatic leadership are similar in their motivational aspect, Yukl (1999) concluded that you could not have both types of leadership at the same time (p. 301). Yukl distinguished that while transformational leaders rely on partnership and empowerment to achieve organizational objectives, charismatic leaders focus on the unique outcomes that can be achieved if followers will just put their faith in the leader. Sy, Horton, and Riggio (2018) contend that the strong emotions of followers are the primary variable in charismatic leadership. In both theories, the leader is acting upon followers to achieve organizational outcomes – similar to theories of leadership that historically have undervalued followers.

Transformational leadership involves a leader fostering exceptional influence on a group of followers to exceed expected organizational performance (Diaz-Saenz, 2011; Li, Furst-Holloway, Gales, Masterson, & Blume, 2017). Positive qualities such as vision, charisma, values, motivation, and empowerment are all associated with transformational leadership. Transformational leadership theory has been refined by scholars such as Bernard Bass and Bruce Avolio to include behavioral components like idealized influence, inspiration, intellectual

stimulation and individualized consideration (Conger, 1999). According to Diaz-Saenz (2011) critics of transformational leadership have found weakness in it due to the volume of credit leaders receive to the exclusion of followers.

Likewise, charismatic leadership has a transformational element in which leaders deemphasize extrinsic rewards and focus on convincing followers that the successful completion of organizational tasks is vital to their well-being (Sy et al., 2018). “What charismatic leaders do is to tie these self-concepts of followers to the goals and collective experiences associated with their missions so that they become valued aspects of the followers’ self-concept” (Conger, 1999, p. 155). Leaders that communicate high expectations, articulate clear goals, stir emotion in followers and bring moral and heroic overtones to their excitement of an organization’s vision are classified as charismatic leaders. Charismatic leadership is seen by some researchers as “the most exemplary form” (p. 149) that transformational leaders can attain (Conger, 1999).

Shamir (2007) noted that for all their popularity both theories still categorized followers in their traditional roles as recipients of leadership influence. In addition, Yukl (1999) suggested that the heroic bias inherent in these theories exacerbates the concept of leaders acting upon followers. Yet, in the use of partnership (transformational) and in a shared faith to achieve outcomes due to leadership (charismatic), these theories bridged the gap between the focus on a leader’s traits, characteristics and abilities and emerging theories of leadership. Transformational and charismatic leadership theories ultimately led to leadership being examined as a process versus it being the exclusive responsibility of the leader. In follower-centric approaches, even more attention has been paid to followers and how they construct not only leadership, but their own followership.

Follower-Centric Approaches

A common theme found throughout follower-centric work is to compare the massive amounts of scholarly effort expended on leaders versus follower-centric approaches (Baker, 2007; Bligh et al., 2007; Brown & Thornborrow, 1996; Lundin & Lancaster, 1990). In follower-centric approaches attention has been paid not only to how followers construct leaders and their leadership, but also how followers construct their own followership. Constructionist approaches that make meaning of followers' own reality have dominated follower-centric research.

Understanding how followers socially construct followership is to understand how followers make meaning of their reality while interacting with their environment. One such example of utilizing social construction to make meaning of followership can be found in Carsten, Uhl-Bien, West, Patera, and McGregor (2010). They conducted a study "to deconstruct the meaning of followership by investigating how individuals socially construct follower roles in organizations" (p. 556). A grounded theory research design was used to explore how subordinates socially construct definitions of followership as they interact with their leaders. Data from 31 individuals that held a variety of positions across organizations including non-supervisory (n = 15), supervisory (n = 8), and middle-management (n = 8) positions was collected in order to increase the amount of information for qualitative analysis. The findings of this exploratory study revealed that followers define followership in a passive (39%, n = 12), active (32%, n = 10), or proactive (29%, n = 9) manner.

Passive followers made meaning of their followership by submitting to their leaders' demands; active followers understood their roles to include input but only when given the chance by their leaders; and proactive followers took opportunities to provide opinions and solutions to problems before their leaders asked. The three dimensions of followership also impacted

followers' values in their relationship with leaders, with passive followers valuing obedience and deference, active followers appreciating positivity and loyalty, and proactive followers upholding the values of partnership and challenging their leaders. In addition, Carsten et al. (2010) found that followers, particularly active and proactive followers, "spoke about the important role that leadership styles and organizational climate play" (p. 556) in how their followership is socially constructed.

Ehrhart and Klein (2001) utilized a social constructionist approach to explore the role of followers' values and personality dimensions in making meaning of followership. Data was collected from 267 college students who participated in the two phases of the study. In phase one each participant completed a survey containing predictor measures such as achievement orientation, risk-taking, and self-esteem. A month following phase one the second phase of data collection began which asked participants to read descriptions of leaders and then complete a survey measuring their preferences. Open-ended questions were included at the end of the survey to gain additional insight to the quantitative findings. Participants' explanations for their choice of leaders revealed that their values draw them to certain leader preferences. For example, participants who value "security and stability at work [were] drawn to the clarity and order offered by the task-oriented leader" (Ehrhart & Klein, 2001, p. 172). Results of the study suggested followers interpret leadership behavior differently based on their values and what type of follower they want to be. The researchers stated that the limitations of the study included (1) the use of undergraduates versus older, employed participants; (2) written descriptions of leaders versus video observations; and (3) distinct leader preferences (e.g., charismatic, task-oriented, etc.) versus the complexity of leadership characteristics found in individuals.

In addition to social constructions of followership, implicit leadership theories (ILTs) and implicit followership theories (IFTs) have been used to research follower-centric perspectives (Junker & van Dick, 2014; Sy, 2010; Thompson, Glasø, & Mattheisen, 2018; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) indicated that ILTs, sometimes referred to as philosophies or folk-theories of leadership, influence how followers subjectively interpret observations and data about leaders, resulting in schemas that contribute to organizational sense-making. For example, a majority of variability (62%) in leader performance appraisals has been attributed in one study to ILTs (Scullen, Mount, & Goff, 2000). Likewise, IFTs refer to the subjective, and sometimes subconscious observations of followers about follower perspectives and behaviors (Thompson et al., 2018). Followers subjectively or subconsciously process information about other followers based on their cognitive processes and fill in the gaps about them (Thompson et al., 2018). The bias inherent in ILTs and IFTs was found by Junker and van Dick (2014) to impact treatment toward an individual when they were categorized as either a leader or follower. As followers make meaning of leadership and followership, ILT and IFT research posits that the production of their meaning-making can ultimately be swayed due to existing schema within the person constructing it.

In a post-structuralist take on followership, Collinson (2006) proposed that we must develop how complex followership identities interact with leader identities. His post-structuralist approach focused on “differentiation as much as identification” (p. 185) in deducing how followers perceive their own identity. A leader’s actions have an impact on how a follower perceives her identity, and it is sometimes through this differentiation with a leader’s identity that a deeper understanding of the follower is developed. This condition and consequence of one another, Collinson suggested, led to a state where “traditional dichotomous identities of leader

and follower are increasingly ambiguous and blurred” (p. 187). Identity theory has also been used by group theorists to view leadership as a product of the processes and self-categorization of group members, both leaders and followers (Hogg & Terry, 2000).

Social constructionism, implicit leadership and followership theories and identity theories have led to an emerging understanding of leadership that goes beyond the individual. Scholars producing these emerging theories noted that they are ‘reversing the lens’ through which leadership is viewed, arguing that there is great complexity in how leadership is ultimately created. This complexity has manifested itself in emerging theories of followership that emphasize relationship over function, and process instead of position.

Emerging Theories of Followership

Unlike the positional-based dichotomy inherent in leader-centric and follower-centric discussions of followership, emerging theories of followership emanate from concepts such as relationality and process. Three approaches to followership theory – relational, role-based and leadership process - have emerged out of the attempt to understand how leaders and followers together co-construct followership (and likewise, leadership).

Relational Approaches

Issues of relationality are paramount in new discussions of both theory and practice in leadership. Ospina and Uhl-Bien (2012b) characterized the need to understand relationality as follows:

There is a hunger to find novel ways to respond to the organizing challenges stakeholders face in our post-industrial, communication technology-driven, social media-oriented, global society. A complex social environment – characterized by conditions such as scarcity, uncertainty, interdependence, diversity, participation, and paradox – makes even more evident the relational nature of social processes like organizing and leadership. (pp. xxi – xxii)

Uhl-Bien (2006) explored two different perspectives of relational leadership: an entity perspective and a relational perspective. Entity perspectives of relational leadership focused on individuals and their attributes, perceptions, behaviors and actions – similar to the concentration on traits and behavior that defined early leadership studies (p. 655). The individual in an entity perspective is viewed in relation to other individuals with which they interact. On the other hand, a relational perspective used social constructions to make meaning of the process of relating, and the leadership that is processed and understood through these constructions (p. 655). Relational perspectives emphasized how leadership is constructed by dynamic processes, and understandings of leadership are considered to be in a state of evolution. Uhl-Bien offered relational leadership theory (RLT) as a framework for the study of relational processes that enable the production of leadership (p. 667). RLT can be used to ask how people “work together to define their relationships in a way that generates leadership influence and structuring” (p. 668).

In a later set of articles, Ospina and Uhl-Bien (2012a, 2012b) explored the gulf between entity and relational views of relationality rooted in basic understandings of philosophy and research methodologies. Entity views of relationality treat the individuals in the leadership dynamic as objects or units that exist on their own, mirroring the postpositivist stance found in entity studies (Ospina & Uhl-Bien, 2012a, pp. 6-7). A relationship, such as a leader/follower relationship, has occurred in this postpositivist epistemology when one unit acts on another to create it. Researchers that choose an entity perspective of relationality to examine leadership may be more “concerned with identifying attributes of individuals as they engage in interpersonal relationships, characterizing the quality and antecedents of relationships, [and] the association between relationships and outcomes” (Uhl-Bien, Maslyn, & Ospina, 2011).

Conversely, relational perspectives (re-titled as constructionist perspectives) are views of relationality that are grounded in a postmodern epistemology of constructionism (Ospina & Uhl-Bien, 2012a, p. 7). Constructionists see their worldview as being created through meaning-making with others, and thus the process of leadership is a social construction that is derived from interaction between leaders and followers. Researchers that choose a constructionist perspective of relationality will be interested in how those who are involved in the leadership co-creation process define the leadership they have created, and the context in which they have created it (Ospina & Uhl-Bien, 2012b, p. xxix).

Role-Based Approaches

The infancy of followership research leaves researchers with few formal theories of followership that can be utilized to conduct new research. In their groundbreaking article on followership theory, Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) define followership theory as “the study of the nature and impact of followers and following in the leadership process” (p. 96). In the creation of this construct two approaches to future research on followership have emerged – a role-based approach and a leadership process approach.

The role-based approach described by Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) reverses the lens through which follower characteristics construct their role and how follower behaviors are viewed. Instead of studying impacts that leaders have on followers, followers’ construction of their own characteristics and behaviors and how they influence leaders and outcomes is analyzed through the role-based approach. In this new approach, leaders are now on the receiving end of followership behaviors, and their resulting actions are examined from the followership perspective. While in this approach we explore one group acting upon another, followers upon

leaders, followers are constructing their followership and taking a step toward co-construction of leadership.

Shamir (2007) provided examples of how followers could construct their own followership and simultaneously influence leaders and the leadership process. Examples of possible follower self-construction included:

- Followers' needs, identities, and cognitive schema affect leader selection and emergence as well as leader endorsement and acceptance.
- Interfollower structures and processes such as social networks and social contagion influence the emergence of leadership and affect its consequences.
- Followers' expectations, values, and attitudes determine the latitude of leader behavior.
- Followers' expectations of the leader act as self-fulfilling prophecies and affect the leader's motivation and performance.
- Followers' acceptance of the leader and their support of the leader affect the leader's self-confidence, self-efficacy, and behavior.
- Followers' characteristics (e.g., self-concept clarity) determine the nature of the leadership relationship formed with the leader.
- Followers' attitudes and characteristics (e.g., level of development) affect leader behavior (e.g., transformational leadership) (Shamir, 2007, p. xxix).

These possible ways in which followers could construct their own followership were seen as an active role that followers played in the leadership process. For example, characteristics developed by followers could determine how much latitude a leader has in the decision-making process. In another example, attitudes toward the leader could impact how a leader values their own self-worth and effectiveness, ultimately leading to changes in how a leader behaves. These self-constructions and their impact on leaders are emblematic of what Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) described as a role-based approach to followership.

Bastardoz and Van Vugt (2019) contend that the role-based approach to followership and leadership does not work because of the voluntary nature of followership. Deference is conceptualized for them as a voluntary process that is freely given by followers, and not part of the assignment of leader and follower roles in the organizational hierarchy. Bastardoz and Van Vugt have focused on why followers voluntarily defer, not the assignment of the role that shapes role-based approaches. They also maintain that followership is an evolutionary process given human tendencies to exist in groups and the benefits of being a follower versus a leader.

Role-based approaches to followership provides opportunities, such as those explained by Shamir (2007), to explore how followers effect and even create leadership through their own behaviors.

Leadership Process Approaches

While the role-based approach seems created out of the same dynamic of one party impacting another that for decades characterized the study of leaders' effect on followers, the leadership process as described in Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) focuses on the co-creation of leadership by both leaders and followers. "The basic assumption of the leadership process approach is that leadership can only occur through combined acts of leading and following" (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014, p. 99). Followership behaviors are examined in this approach as to how they collectively produce leadership outcomes, and research can focus on patterns of leading and following that provide insight into both effective and ineffective leadership.

In a qualitative study of 31 community nurses in the United Kingdom, Kean, Haycock-Stuart, Baggaley and Carson (2011) asked participants how they perceived and experienced leadership. Findings suggested that leading and following were perceived by participants to be a process in which the interplay between leading and following was paramount, not the qualities or

characteristics of the individuals labeled as leaders (p. 512). Participants initially socially constructed leaders by focusing on their characteristics, mirroring the trait perspective that has defined the study of leadership. However, complexity emerged as participants were asked additional questions such as “What actually happens when people lead?” and “How do you enact leadership?” (pp. 511-513).

Kean et al. (2011) also observed that followership is not static, but it is defined by situational context. Study participants moved between follower typology as they socially constructed their followership, sometimes indicating they were actively engaged in their followership, sometimes acting as bystanders, and sometimes resisting by attempting to sidetrack team leaders. The study concluded that “following and leading are interdependent activities to be found in both groups: leaders and followers” (Kean, Haycock-Stuart, Baggaley & Carson, 2011, p. 515).

Hollander (2009) also discussed how leadership is co-created, stating that leadership does not exist without followership. Hollander opined that more needs to be known about followers and their relationship with leaders, including their needs and expectations and how they may come to be leaders (p. 8). Hollander viewed leadership as a process, and lamented the focus in leadership literature on leaders’ effects on followers. “Much of the literature on the study of leadership focuses on the leader, and his or her effects on followers, with far less attention given to follower effects on a leader’s decisions and actions” (p. 8).

Shared leadership theorists have also explored how leadership is co-created among both leaders and followers. Offermann and Scuderi (2007) acknowledged that the complexity of understanding and measuring the concept of shared leadership can be seen in the interchangeable terminology used to describe non-hierarchical leadership. Shared leadership, distributed

leadership, co-leadership, emergent leadership and self-managed teams are just a few of the terms to describe leadership involving more than just the solo, self-titled position of leader. To discern the differences in similar shared leadership terminology, the authors proposed a continuum of shared leadership ranging from single leadership to collective leadership. Within the continuum single leadership is the traditional solo leader, co-leadership comprises two leaders and at least one follower, distributed leadership involves multiple leaders but less than all group members being leaders, and collective leadership denotes that everyone in the group is considered a leader (Offermann & Scuderi, 2007, pp. 76-77).

Foundation for Current Research

While relational, role-based and leadership process approaches are all worthy of additional exploration, the leadership process approach as described in Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) provides the best foundation for this research study. “The epistemology of the leadership process approach aligns with constructivism” and constructivism is central to both the paradigm and methodology of this study (Benson et al., 2016, p. 950). The social constructivist paradigm underpinning this study as described in chapter three relies on co-construction to seek understanding of the world (Creswell, 2013). In addition, an element of interpretative phenomenological analysis, the methodology used in this study, is co-construction between participants and the researcher to make meaning of participant followership experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003). In both instances, it is a co-construction process that is central to the exploration of the leader/follower dynamic.

Likewise, in the leadership process approach co-construction explores how leader and follower efforts combine to create leadership. Leadership process maintains that it is through combined acts of leading and following that leadership is created (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014, p. 99).

To understand the process of leadership, followership behaviors in the co-construction process have to be explored in order to understand how they helped to collectively produce leadership.

While co-construction is not part of the dynamic in role-based approaches, it is central to the relational perspective when using a relational approach to study followership. A leadership process approach instead of a relational approach is used in this study because followership behaviors are being explored, not just the context of the leader/follower relationship.

Whether the emerging theory on followership is focused on relationality, roles or how leadership is created as a process between leaders and followers, the literature also provides practical reasons for exploring these concepts.

Practical Applications of Followership Theory

Several researchers have commented on the importance of shifting the balance in leadership studies so that follower perspectives are considered in both future empirical and exploratory research. Kellerman (2013) has gone even farther contending that the study of followership is even more critical as “the balance of power between leaders and followers is shifting in ways that are permanent, with leaders generally losing power and influence, and followers generally gaining” (p. 135). It is not only a greater understanding of leadership that is sought, but practical applications in the study of followership to improve leadership and its function within organizations.

Shamir (2007) provided two examples of how a shift in understanding leadership through a co-creation process can lead to a practical change in leadership development for organizations. A leadership process approach that views the leader as only one element in the leadership dynamic means that when organizations develop leaders they also must develop followers that contribute to the leadership equation (p. xxix). Likewise, Shamir cited leadership evaluation as

another area in which there are practical implications for viewing leadership as a co-produced process. Leadership evaluations that focus only on the leader's characteristics and behaviors do not take into account the active role of followers or their contributions to leadership outcomes.

Hosking (2007) applied emerging discourse on followership to how organizational leaders are trained. Leadership training is largely targeted at the development of the individual – their skills, personal growth and ability to perform analysis – versus nurturing the relational processes between participants in the leadership process. Hosking recommended involving all participants in leadership training, not just the appointed leader and constructing the principle of “open, multilogical, collaborative ways of relating” (p. 244) between leadership process contributors.

In a study of 302 senior-level executives, Agho (2009) found that executives view leadership and followership as interrelated and that effective leaders and effective followers together can influence organizational outcomes (p. 159). Respondents were asked to rate leadership and followership characteristics, as well as to agree or disagree with statements about leadership and followership. Respondents indicated that leadership and followership are equally important, and that the actions of either can positively or negatively impact an organization's effectiveness. Agho concluded that “followership skills may be viewed as prerequisites to be an effective leader” (p. 165) and that global organizations should increase their focus on developing followers in order to achieve success.

Pro-active followership characteristics lead to good leader/follower dynamics, and resulting relationships allow for better performance from followers (Oc, Bashshur, & Moore, 2015; Whiteley, Sy, & Johnson, 2012). Followers importance in the leadership dynamic suggest that current leadership development programs will have to undergo a reorientation that

underscores the effectiveness of followers, and that it will need to be accepted that “leaders and followers will have shared responsibility for organizational successes or failures” (Agho, 2009, p. 165; Whiteley et al., 2012).

In addition, Agho (2009) stated that “employees have to simultaneously play the role of followers and leaders because of the nature of [the] bureaucratic or hierarchical model of organizations” (p. 160). For leaders to be effective and to avoid undermining organizational effectiveness, leaders must in their own right also be good followers. “There are individuals with excellent attributes of followers who may not be good leaders or even desire to be in a position of leadership, but it would be difficult to find a good leader who is also not a good follower” (Agho, 2009, p. 160).

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a contextual framework to examine how community college senior-level followers co-create the leadership process through their followership. In the review of the literature, followership studies in leadership research were reviewed to show a historical relationship between followership and leadership, leader-centric approaches to understanding followership, and follower-centric approaches. Next, emerging followership theories were examined including relational studies, role-based approaches, and leadership process perspectives and the foundation for this study, leadership process, was elaborated upon. Finally, examples of practical applications in followership theory were detailed to demonstrate how followership research is being used to improve the leadership dynamic.

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

Chapter Overview

“Researchers bring their own worldviews, paradigms, or sets of beliefs to the research project, and these inform the conduct and writing of the qualitative study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 15). The research question is restated below to emphasize the connection between the central question of this study and the methods used to answer it. The conduct and writing of this study is then outlined and includes discussion of the research approach and rationale, the population sampled, the procedure for data collection, and a description of how the data was analyzed. The chapter concludes with information on adherence to standards of trustworthiness, the researcher’s perspective, ethical considerations and a chapter summary.

Research Question

Developing methods for a qualitative research study requires that close attention be focused on the research question. As noted in chapter one, the research question for this study is as follows: What are the lived experiences and followership behaviors of community college senior-level followers in the co-creation of the leadership process with their supervisor presidents?

Research Approach and Design

“Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). The researcher in this study sought to better understand the phenomenon of how leadership is co-created between leaders and followers from the perspective of the participants, while simultaneously acknowledging the researcher can play an important

role in meaning-making. The research approach of interpretative phenomenological analysis satisfied these dual priorities and provided a method to better understand how leadership is co-created. The research approach and rationale for this study is described below and includes the paradigm in which it is constructed, a research method flowing from that paradigm, and a description of the procedures that were used to collect and analyze data.

Social Constructivist Paradigm

This study is based in the epistemological tradition of social constructivism, a paradigm in which there is no objective reality and understanding is derived from the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participant (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). As leadership can be viewed as a co-constructed process between leader and follower, the same dynamic can be found in social constructivism. The social constructivist paradigm in which “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (p. 20) provided the best philosophical framework to conduct this study (Creswell, 2013).

Social constructivism provided three important benefits that aided this study in the exploration of how the leadership process is co-constructed. First, social constructivism is interested in human activity from the perspective of those who have directly experienced it (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). The ontology of social constructivism is that reality is subjective and multiple, and the researcher wanted to ensure that the experiences of senior-level community college leaders were captured as closely as was possible in their multiple realities. Second, social constructivism allowed for broad questioning of participants so that the meaning of a situation could be constructed (Creswell, 2013). The axiology of social constructivism is the role that values play in participant perspectives. Trying to understand how leadership is co-created through follower experiences involved an exploration of the processes and context in

which individuals worked, and thus the values and beliefs they hold that influenced these experiences. Broad and very general questions were vital to helping individuals in this reconstruction. Third, social constructivism encourages interpretation of what researchers find based on the researcher's own background and experiences (Creswell, 2013). The epistemology of social constructivism is that the researcher plays the role of interpreter, and as a researcher who is also a senior-level community college follower, interpretation was guided by the researcher's own leadership experience in the community college environment.

Social constructivism aligns with the emerging followership theory, leadership process, explored in this study. Benson, Hardy, and Eys (2016) describe social constructivism as in alignment with a leadership process approach. Both involve co-construction, with social constructivism being the co-construction of meaning and the leadership process approach being the co-construction of leadership. Co-construction derives from relational interactions, and engagement in these relational interactions – whether between researcher and participant or leader and follower – results in co-creation (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Shamir, 2007). The symmetry of co-construction in both the methodology used to explore and the theory being explored made social constructivism a very appropriate choice as the paradigm for this research.

In addition, social constructivism helps to address what is missing from the research on leadership/followership. “Because our predominant approaches in leadership research have been survey data that capture individual perspectives, we know little about the nature of actual following and non-following behaviors in the leadership process” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014, p. 99). Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) urge studies of the leadership process approach to go beyond survey measures and focus on a range of methodologies, including qualitative approaches. Bentz and Shapiro (1998) also implore the use of qualitative methods when the intent of the research is to

understand experiences and an individual's perspective. Social constructivism, with its axiology on the value of participants' experiences and its ontology of subjective and multiple reality, leads to the use of qualitative exploration and helps to fill the gap of qualitative research on leadership and followership.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) permits a flexible and interpretative exploration process, and the flow of questioning, interpretation and meaning-making enables the participants and the researcher to actively co-construct their lived experiences (Alase, 2017; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In IPA shared and unique experiences among a small group of participants can be explored for greater meaning, and themes and super themes are then used to analyze the data (Smith, 1996). IPA is a recently developed qualitative approach that has evolved from the philosophical approach of phenomenology, and concepts such as hermeneutics and idiography, and at its core is a way to operationalize the combination of these theoretical underpinnings (Smith et al., 2009, p. 4).

The philosophy of phenomenology is based on the idea that human experience should be examined as it occurs, and traditional phenomenological inquiry focuses upon the descriptive nature of participant experiences (Manen, Higgins, & Riet, 2016). In this descriptive phenomenology, it is critical to bracket out presumptions in order to get to the essence of the phenomena. While IPA retains an emphasis on participant experiences and describing this essence, it goes beyond the descriptive approach and examines what participant words mean in the larger context of the experience (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Part of what occurs with IPA is the use of hermeneutics, the theory and practice of interpretation, to focus on what a person takes away from an experience. The philosopher

Heidegger, whose work built upon the origins of phenomenology, described a hermeneutic circle as the process of moving between the part and the whole, going back and forth to gain understanding of any given part (Smith et al., 2009, p. 28). In practice as part of this study, the hermeneutic circle moved between questions and answers interpreting and reinterpreting and in the process challenging initial understandings (Finlay, 2011, p. 53). There is a non-linear aspect in IPA, as “the process of analysis is iterative – we may move back and forth through a range of different ways of thinking about the data, rather than completing each step, one after the other” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 28).

In addition, Smith and Osborn (2003) describe IPA as involving a double hermeneutic in which the researcher is making sense of the participant who is making sense of the experience being explored. Both the participant and the researcher are engaged in interpretation with the participant interpreting their lived experience, and the researcher then trying to make sense of the participant’s meaning-making. Thus, first and foremost it is critical to obtain a clear description from the participant about their experience and how they interpreted their experience (utilizing descriptive phenomenology), then to create an interpretative account that uses the researcher’s sense-making to help bring an understanding of the participant’s interpretive description.

IPA was an appropriate research approach for this study because it took the exploration of followership experiences a step beyond the descriptive employed in pure phenomenology. The researcher and participants were co-constructing lived experiences, not unlike the co-construction of leadership in the leadership process approach that is the focus of the study. IPA also provided an idiographic focus that aligns with the study of a particular situation, in this case, the study of how leadership is co-created by leaders and followers (Creswell, 2013). IPA allowed the conversations of leadership, and how leadership was constructed to be told and this

was an appealing part of the research for a researcher interested in higher education leadership and the dynamics between community college presidents and their followers (Loo, 2012). IPA is considered by Alase (2017) to be a good research approach for new researchers.

Participants

The purpose of this study was to examine how senior-level community college leaders co-create the leadership process through their followership. To best understand this central phenomenon, individuals who occupy senior-level positions reporting directly to a two-year college chief executive officer were selected for the sample. Senior-level leaders in community colleges generally hold titles such as chief of staff, chief operations officer, provost, vice chancellor or vice president.

Sample Population

In order to select rich data that could be very useful to an IPA study, purposive sampling was used (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Smith et al. (2009) and Creswell (2013) recommend purposive sampling be employed in interpretative phenomenological analysis studies in order to focus on participants that have shared experiences. Perspectives of the participants rather than representation of a population is what is important in IPA, so the study utilized purposive sampling to ensure that selected participants had shared experiences in leadership and followership. Given the leadership process being explored it was important for participants to have three or more years' experience as a senior-level follower so they could provide rich data about how leadership is co-created in the community college.

In addition, the focus in this study was on perspective and not representation, so participants were purposively selected from colleges in one state to enhance homogeneity. Senior-level followers from public community colleges in the state of Maryland were used as the

participant pool. Maryland is the home state of the researcher, and the study of leaders in one state meets the recommendation by Smith et al. (2009) and Creswell (2013) for homogeneity while providing convenience in the research process for the researcher. Even though Maryland's public community colleges are not part of a system, leaders at these colleges have shared experiences. Leadership at all 16 institutions meet regularly in affinity groups and share experiences, challenges and opportunities at their colleges. The researcher has experienced community college leadership in different parts of the United States, and his experience has been that accrediting bodies, expectations of the population about community colleges, legislative and regulatory requirements, organizational structures, and traditions have an impact on how leadership is approached. Selecting participants from community colleges in one state helped avoid regional differences and provided a homogeneous sample, and given that the researcher is a senior-level community college leader in Maryland, sense-making of participants' experiences was enhanced by some understanding of leadership in this particular state.

Participant Selection

The researcher first obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board at Colorado State University before any prospective participants were contacted or selected. A copy of the memorandum from Colorado State University's IRB Coordinator declaring the study exempt and providing approval to conduct the research is included as Appendix A.

Potentially eligible participants were identified using a publicly available annual directory of community college leadership at Maryland's 16 community colleges compiled by the Maryland Association of Community Colleges (Maryland Association of Community Colleges, 2019). Public community colleges in Maryland are independent and not part of a state system, so each institution has a different senior-level structure with various positions reporting

to the college president. Some institutions have a leader for one area, and others have one leader responsible for multiple areas. The common denominators for senior-level status among participants were that they report to the president and have responsibility for a broad area(s) of the college or campus initiatives (academic affairs, administration, institutional affairs, student services, etc.). All senior-level followers from the 16 community colleges were included in the initial prospect pool with the exception of the researcher.

To gain an initial sample, three criteria were used:

- Being a current senior-level follower at a community college;
- Reporting directly to a community college chief executive officer (president); and
- Having at least three years of experience reporting directly to a community college chief executive officer (president).

The criteria were included in the E-mail Correspondence to Prospective Participants, and a copy of that correspondence is provided in Appendix B.

The E-mail Correspondence to Prospective Participants was sent to 82 individuals listed as officers at each of the 16 community colleges featured in the Maryland Association of Community College's 2019 Directory of Community Colleges (2019). An attachment to the e-mail was the Consent to Participate in a Research Study contained in Appendix C. Out of the 82 e-mails sent a total of four were returned as undeliverable. In addition, nine prospective participants responded that they did not meet the criteria for the study due to reporting to someone other than the president or not having reported to a president for at least three years. As a result of the original message, five prospective participants indicated that they were willing to participate in an interview.

The E-mail Correspondence to Prospective Participants along with the Consent to Participate in a Research Study was resent to the same list one month later, and two more

participants indicated that they were willing to participate in an interview. An additional two participants joined the study as a result of one of the first prospective participants forwarding the E-mail Correspondence to Prospective Participants.

Sample Size

Quality, not quantity, is considered valuable in IPA and “IPA studies usually benefit from a concentrated focus on a small number of cases” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 51). There is no set number of participants in an IPA study, though Alase (2017) stated that phenomenological studies generally have between two and 25 participants, and Polkinghorne (1989) advised phenomenological researchers to interview between five and ten participants. Creswell (2013) referenced ten in-depth interviews in the process of phenomenological inquiry.

The concept of saturation is also to be considered in qualitative studies when thinking about the sample size. Saturation, or redundancy, is the juncture at which no new information can be gained from including additional participants in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The use of saturation is a common technique to limit the number of participants in a study and avoid repetition. While it’s acceptable to employ saturation in a study like the one proposed here, Max van Manen, one of the champions of phenomenological theory, has stated that data saturation is not ultimately possible in true phenomenological studies because “there is no saturation point with respect to phenomenological meaning” (Manen et al., 2016, p. 5). While in the purest sense this is true regarding the philosophy of phenomenology, and to some extent in IPA, procedural methods and common sense dictate that at some point the lack of new information to be gained from additional participants is inefficient and not a good use of the researcher’s time.

Based on the literature and a review of similar IPA studies, it was estimated that it would take at least six but no more than 12 interviews to complete this study. There were a total of nine participants when saturation was ultimately reached.

Data Collection Procedures

In-depth interviews are the primary means for collecting data in IPA, and questions used in the interview process in IPA have generally been semi-structured (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005; Smith et al., 2009). Interviews used in this research collected rich data that met the needs of the study, and the data from those interviews is described in detail in chapter four of this dissertation.

Data Collection Preparation

Interview dates and times were established via e-mail at the convenience of the participants, and interviews took place between December 10, 2018 and February 7, 2019. The longer than expected timeframe for collecting data was due to the unavailability of many participants during each college's winter break, participant involvement in the peak period for spring semester preparation and registration and rescheduling that had to occur due to unexpected events on participant schedules. Additional electronic messages were used to communicate with prospective participants in order to reschedule interview dates and manage logistics for accessing the technology.

The nine participants willing to take part in this study were scheduled for interviews based on their availability after they returned the initialed Consent to Participate in a Research Study form (Appendix C) via e-mail. The receipt of the e-mail, along with their initials on the document affirming they agreed to have their interview recorded by both video and audio, served

as an electronic acceptance of consent. Each participant was scheduled for 90 minutes as promised in the consent form.

In order to access participants quickly and make the best use of participant and researcher time, interviews were conducted and recorded using conferencing software. The original intent was to use Skype conferencing software, but due to technical issues with Skype during the initial interview, Zoom conferencing software was used to conduct and record eight of the nine interviews. A digital voice recorder was utilized as a back-up to preserve interviews in case there were any technical difficulties with the conferencing software, and in the case of one interview there were technical difficulties that resulted in the digital audio recording being the sole record of the interview. Zoom recordings were stored in a password protected file by the researcher, and kept on a computer that utilizes Norton anti-virus and firewall protection. The digital voice recorder was stored in a safe, locked location when it was not in use.

Interview Process

Merriam (2009) states that due to the nature of qualitative research, it calls for more open-ended and less structured means of questioning, as the end result assumes “individual respondents define the world in unique ways” (p. 90). While a sole focus on the individual’s responses can be appropriate in phenomenological research, IPA requires an interpretative element and in some sense a dialogue between participant and researcher that is best suited to semi-structured interviewing. In this study, a semi-structured format of questioning was utilized allowing the researcher to get to the core of the research question while simultaneously bringing forth rich data about participant experiences in co-creating leadership. The largest portion of the semi-structured interview was guided by a list of questions prepared in advance that was

informed by research gathered in the literature review. The list of semi-structured questions is included in Appendix D.

Each interview began with a verbal confirmation that the participant had returned the signed Consent to Participate in a Research Study (Appendix C) and still wished to proceed as a participant. Next the participant was advised that they would be asked a series of prepared questions, but that their answers would determine follow-up questions and that they should expect a conversation with the participant leading the dialogue. Thereafter, a few grounding questions were asked to make the participant comfortable, and to collect basic information about the participant. Grounding questions covered topics such as how long the participant had served in their current position, how long they had reported to a community college president and background information about their career in higher education. To allow participants an opportunity to talk about leadership in general, each was asked to recount their most memorable experience as a leader.

After the grounding questions concluded, nine central questions were asked to collect data that would help to answer the research question in this study. The semi-structured questions contained in Appendix D guided the interview, and the interviewer asked probing, open-ended questions to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences. On occasion a direct question was asked to clarify a response that a participant made. Some central questions elicited broad responses, negating the need to ask a semi-structured questions that had been prepared in advance. Consistent with data collection described in IPA, throughout the interviews participants shared their insights into their lived experiences with leadership, followership and the process of leadership (Smith et al., 2009).

Interviews were transcribed by a transcriber based out of Washington, D.C. that does not work in higher education, and a confidentiality agreement was signed and kept on file to ensure that conversations with participants were held in the strictest confidence. After each interview, the recording was sent to the transcriber and within a week a transcript of the interview was received via e-mail. Upon receipt the researcher listened to the interview recording while reading the transcript to ensure that they matched, and errors were noted and corrected. The transcript was then sent to the participant and they were asked to review the transcript to ensure that it accurately reflected the interview. Final transcripts were saved and used for data analysis.

The final communication with each participant prior to the study's conclusion was a thank you note expressing gratitude for their participation in the research. After the research is defended and approved for final publication, a copy will be sent to each participant with an additional note of thanks. In addition, once the study is finalized the video and audio recordings will be destroyed.

Data Analysis

Interpretative phenomenological analysis is said to move from the particular to the shared, and from the descriptive to the interpretative (Smith et al., 2009). While IPA is still primarily focused on the lived experiences of participants, it ultimately returns to the double hermeneutic of making meaning of the participants' meaning of their lived experiences and the process of data analysis reflects this ultimate methodological goal. Data analysis in IPA is flexible, and Smith et al. (2009) state that there is no "right or wrong way of conducting this sort of analysis" (p. 80).

Though the newness of IPA as a research approach may be partly the reason for more flexibility in how research is analyzed, both Willig (2001) and Smith et al. (2009) provided guidance on the steps that should be taken in IPA data analysis and the procedures they have outlined were utilized in this study. First and foremost, as with other qualitative methods, the researcher immersed himself in the reading and rereading of transcripts as well as the audio recordings of the interviews. During each interview very few notes were taken so that the researcher could focus his entire attention on the participant. Immediately after an interview, the researcher listened to the audio recording and took comprehensive notes and reflected upon language and phrases used by the participant. Bracketing was used to shut out anything that interfered with the researcher's focus on listening to participant data. Recordings were listened to several times without taking notes in order to fully comprehend the words of participants.

After receiving a transcript from the transcriber, the researcher listened to the audio while reviewing the transcript and made corrections as necessary. Corrections were only made in form and not in substance in order to preserve the lived experience of the participant. The transcript was then shared with the participant to ensure that it reflected the conversation. Once any concerns or corrections were addressed from the participant's review, the transcript was considered to be final.

Next as suggested by Willig (2001) and Smith et al. (2009) initial noting was used as transcripts were read and reread. Figure 1 is an example of initial noting from one of the participant's transcripts in this study with personally identifiable information removed. Transcripts were reformatted to allow for wide margins, and words and phrases were underlined that helped to answer the research question in this study. In the right margins, words and phrases were identified that appeared to the researcher to be significant or that were repetitious. In the

Q: Okay, so turn around and talk about and describe your followership, particularly your followership in relation to your president that you work with and talk about what followership means to you.

Vision! Keeps coming up in conversation
Visions in sync.
Is this necessary for leadership?

Implementing president's vision important to followers

Conversation ←
Deference to the president ←

* Surprised by willingness to defer, why so willing?

Meeting ... process ... talking ↓
conversation part of decision-making

A: Well, I work for [the President]. So part of it is implementing her vision for the college. Fortunately, every president, well, I guess I can say the three presidents to whom I've reported, I can say that I've had no serious disagreement with their vision and my vision. So that's been very comfortable and very easy. Styles are another issue. And two of the presidents . . . I think our styles are very compatible, and the style for the president at [another institution] while I was there was not so compatible, so that was a bit of a problem. But anyway, for me it's really implementing their vision. And then sharing with them my vision on certain issues where they may not have thought about it up to this point or may not have thought about it. And I'll just give you one quick example. [The president] and I right now are talking about an advising model and we're talking about a component of the advising model with regards to adjunct faculty. As so we're having a discussion about how much of the load adjunct faculty can take. In the end it's her decision and so whatever she decides is what it will be. And I'm fine with what her decision will be. But I think mine is a little bit aggressive than hers, I think. And I think she might be open to that as well. So followership is not just a blind 'what do you want me to do,' but there is also a conversation involved here as well.

- President's vision
- No disagreement about vision - comfortable
- styles
- Implementing President's vision
- Sharing vision
- Discussion
- President's decision in the end
- Followership not blind
- Conversation

Q: So let's talk about, and you can use the example that you just used, or you can use a different example. Trying to get to that process of leading that you have with you and your community college president. You lead the college together at least within a certain aspect or area and talk to me about the process of engaging with her in creating leadership. What does that look like? Describe it. How do you go about making decisions together?

A: Well, I wouldn't say we meet routinely, but we meet when we need to. I mean [the president's] travel schedule is very hectic and so it's just kind of, and mine is getting a little bit more hectic, so we kind of catch each other as we can and talk. Which is fine. And

- meetings
- talking

Figure 1. Example of initial noting from a participant transcript

left margins, the researcher recorded in writing thoughts that came to mind while reading and rereading the transcripts as well as questions for reflection. As rereading continued themes in the transcripts were noted as a broader understanding of the data came into focus and the researcher began to develop overarching themes for analysis. This process of initial noting was time consuming as it required developing comprehensive notes and comments on the data provided.

The third step in this study was to develop emergent themes. The reading and rereading as well as the initial noting were largely participant-centered exploring what they said and how they interpreted their own experiences. Smith et al. (2009) described this third step as moving from the whole to the part, the part being those descriptions, notes and comments that were gleaned from steps one and two. It is the hermeneutic circle – moving apart from the whole of the data while simultaneously understanding that as the researcher you cannot completely separate yourself from the lived experiences of the participants. The result of step three was to produce chronological themes (i.e., the order they were produced in the transcripts) that came from participants, but that were also sifted through the researcher's analysis and interpretation.

The final step was to make connections among the themes and fit them together. There is no prescriptive process to dictate how this analysis should have been organized or conducted, and Smith et al. (2009) encouraged the researcher to keep an open mind during this stage of IPA. All of the comments, themes and overarching themes developed in the left margins of the transcripts were moved into one document for reflection by the researcher. Thereafter connections and patterns were made on this document, and the end result was a set of emergent themes for consideration. These emergent themes were recorded in a table and grouped together, with superordinate (broader) themes being created from the emergent themes. Discussion of the emergent and superordinate themes is contained in chapter four of this study.

Trustworthiness

The philosophical underpinnings and methodology guide the approach to participant selection, data collection and analysis (Jones et al., 2006). The methods of a study, however, are not only guided by philosophy and strategy, but by that which makes a study good. Rigor as interpreted in qualitative methodology works to help establish the goodness of a study and also informs participant selection, data collection procedures and data analysis.

Quantitative research defines rigor in terms of internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity (Merriam, 2009). While Merriam applied parallel concepts from quantitative methodology to qualitative studies, other researchers such as Lincoln and Guba (1985) have defined rigor in alternative terms broadly categorized as trustworthiness. The elements that comprise trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Jones et al., 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is these elements that guided the study.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent that reliable conclusions can be derived from the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Prolonged engagement and member validation were two techniques that were used to demonstrate credibility. There was interaction with each participant before they were interviewed to clarify logistics, collect the consent form, and to tend to other concerns from participants. Each interview lasted about an hour, and transcripts were shared with the participants to ensure that their transcripts were a reflection of our interviews. Once the study is finalized and approved, it will be shared with each participant. This prolonged engagement and member validation lend credibility to the study and help support its conclusions (Shenton, 2004).

Transferability

Transferability involves enhancing the ability to transfer results from one qualitative study to another by providing a highly descriptive, detailed presentation of the setting and participants of a study (Merriam, 2009, p. 27). When interviewing so few participants, thinking in terms of a representative sample is contrary to the purposive samples applied in IPA (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, pp. 9-10).

It was important in this study to protect the anonymity of participants because of the sensitive nature of leadership and decision-making between senior-level community college followers and their presidents in a small sample area, so detailed presentation of the setting and participants has been challenging. Those demographic details that can be shared are discussed in chapter four, particularly commonalities of leadership position and experience, and a robust description of the sample population is included earlier in this chapter. Sufficient description of the sample population and participants' positions and experience is provided so that future research may rely on the nature of these relationships in referencing the study.

Dependability

Dependability focuses on the research processes utilized, and whether these processes are appropriate to the methodology. As described earlier, IPA is a relatively new methodology with roots in well-established philosophies and concepts such as phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography. Relying on the work of Willig (2001) and Smith et al. (2009) research processes are utilized in this study that are established in IPA research. IPA analysis requires more flexibility than some other qualitative approaches, so systematic methods or procedures that detract from understanding participant meaning and researcher interpretation were not applied.

Confirmability

Confirmability ensures that research processes are properly conducted. In this study, a record of all research processes was kept to document what was done in the collection and interpretation of data. In addition, due to the descriptive and analytical nature of IPA, all comments, notes, observations and reflections that are critical to this study have been kept in a notebook. As indicated above participants were asked to review their transcripts, and each will receive a copy of the study upon its completion. The study includes rich descriptions of data collection procedures and data analysis in order to bolster its confirmability.

Researcher's Perspective

Research is influenced by the researcher, and in qualitative research this is particularly true where language and interaction between participant and researcher are the core of the data to be analyzed (Hunt, 2011). As leadership is inherently concerned with personal and positional power and how that power is used “to influence a group of individuals toward a common goal” (p. 9), it is important to recognize that the same pervasive issues of power distribution that exist in the leader/follower dynamic also exist in the researcher/participant relationship (Northouse, 2010).

Reflexivity

The researcher's interest in the study of leadership and followership developed out of his own experiences and a course on leadership development in his doctoral program. The study of two texts in particular on negative leadership resonated with the researcher because they gave scholarly explanations and classifications for personal experiences that had dominated the prior decade of his life. Kellerman's (2004) text on the topic of bad leadership put into context some of what the researcher experienced in a previous leader/follower relationship with a community

college president and helped in understanding the intricacies of such leadership. Lipman-Blumen's (2005) book on toxic leadership and why people follow toxic leaders, and followers' roles in perpetuating such leadership, led to a great deal of self-reflection for the researcher about what he had experienced in that dynamic and the decisions made during that relationship.

As the researcher moved on in his higher education career and had great experiences with other leaders, more focus was given to the relationship between leaders and followers in the community college. The researcher is interested in becoming a community college president, thus the study of how leadership is co-created between a president and senior-level followers took on even greater significance.

It was important in this study for the researcher to reflect upon and understand his own opinions and thoughts about how leadership is created. While IPA does not strive for purity in reflection and interpretation, and the researcher's interpretation is part of the methodology, it was still important to be aware of previous experiences, thoughts and opinions. During several interviews participants shared stories of toxic interactions that reminded the researcher of early experiences in higher education. The researcher was painfully aware of the similarities in some of the lived experiences of participant colleagues throughout the data collection process.

Ethical Considerations

Given the topic of this research the researcher knew he was likely to not only encounter issues of procedural ethics but what Guillemin and Gillam (2004) referred to as "ethics in practice" (p. 269). The sensitivity inherent in questions about leadership, followership, decision-making between senior-level community college followers and their presidents and behaviors in the leadership process led to some participants pausing and initially hesitating to share some lived experiences. From the researcher's personal experience he had first-hand knowledge of the

emotional roller coaster that is leadership, and this helped the researcher to be empathetic in the data collection process.

On two occasions during data collection, participants asked questions regarding the confidentiality of the lived experiences they were sharing and how the data would be shared in this study. Both participants were reassured that the experiences they were sharing would not be included with personally identifiable data that would expose their conversations to the public. In both cases, after the initial hesitation and questioning, participants continued to share their lived experiences and provided rich data that supported the study.

It was also critical to be forthright about the researcher's position in the study and the historical and personal investment made in this topic. Explaining how the researcher came to this study and personal biases and thoughts about how leadership is created were essential to ensuring the goodness of this research.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the research approach employed in this study including its basis in the epistemological tradition of social constructivism. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was explained in the context of this study as a method to describe participants' lived experiences while including the researcher's interpretative analysis as part of the study's findings.

Perspectives of the participants rather than representation of a population is critical in IPA, and purposive sampling was discussed as the means to obtain an appropriate sample for this study.

Data collection procedures were detailed, and the process of how data was analyzed using IPA was set forth. The chapter also discussed how trustworthiness was used to ensure the validity and quality of the study, and the researcher's perspective including reflexivity and ethical considerations were made transparent.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Chapter Overview

This chapter first provides information on the participants in this study, and then shares the findings of data collection from participant interviews. The findings address the research question in this study: What are the lived experiences and followership behaviors of community college senior-level followers in the co-creation of the leadership process with their supervisor presidents? Findings are organized by superordinate themes and rich descriptions from participants are provided for each emergent theme. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

Participants

There were nine participants interviewed for this study. The participants consisted of five women and four men, and they represented a broad variety of experience in higher education. Areas of higher education institutions represented included academic affairs, administrators in the president's office, resource development and student services. Participants all held senior-level positions in community colleges, and they each had reported to a community college chief executive officer for more than three years with total years reporting to a president/CEO ranging from three and a half to twenty six years. Titles represented by the participants included chief of staff,¹ executive associate,² provost, senior vice president, and vice president, Each of the

¹ Chief of staff positions in community colleges are generally responsible for directing the strategic operations of the president's office and coordinating interaction with the president's cabinet. The chief of staff represents the president on various committees and takes a lead role in assisting the president with management of the board of trustees.

² Executive associate positions in community colleges generally serve as the lead support role for the president. They sometimes serve as the president's liaison to the board of trustees and supervise staff for the president.

participants had either a master’s degree or a doctorate as their highest credential in higher education.

The perspectives of participants rather than representation of a population is what is important in interpretative phenomenological analysis, the methodology used for this research, so traditional demographics such as age and race were not collected. Table 1 displays the relevant demographics of study participants with pseudonyms used for names and titles generalized in order to protect the identities of study participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Title	Highest Degree Earned	Years Reporting to CEO
Andrew	Male	Provost	Doctorate	4.5
Anna	Female	Vice President	Doctorate	8.5
Carol	Female	Vice President	Doctorate	13
Jim	Male	Chief of Staff	Doctorate	8
John	Male	Vice President	Doctorate	4
Richard	Male	Vice President	Master’s	13
Sharon	Female	Vice President	Doctorate	3.5
Theresa	Female	Exec. Associate	Master’s	26
Veronica	Female	Vice President	Doctorate	6.5

Throughout the findings described in the following section names of institutions, interactions with specific individuals and other personal identifiers are masked to protect the identities of participants.

Superordinate and Emergent Themes

Four superordinate themes and eight emergent themes resulted from an analysis of participant data. The four superordinate themes are deference to the president, informed and interactive decision-making, vision and mission and respectful relationships. Emergent themes were initially developed, and superordinate themes were created after this initial analysis of the data. Emergent themes included role of the president, final decisions, planning and information gathering, conversation and collaboration, supporting the president’s vision, common belief in mission, trust and honesty and integrity. Table 2 displays how the four superordinate and eight emergent themes are connected.

Table 2

Superordinate and Emergent Themes

Superordinate Themes	Emergent Themes
Deference to the President	Role of the President Final Decisions
Informed and Interactive Decision-Making	Planning and Information Gathering Conversation and Collaboration
Vision and Mission	Supporting the President’s Vision Common Belief in Mission
Respectful Relationships	Trust Honesty and Integrity

The superordinate and emergent themes mentioned above helped to support the researcher's analysis of the data. In the next sections of this chapter, lived experiences of the participants for each of the four superordinate themes, as developed in the creation of the emergent themes, are described.

Deference to the President

Deference to the president was described by participants as an element that was important in the co-creation of leadership between the community college president leader and the senior-level follower. Deference was given to the role of the president in general, and in the leadership process when a final decision had to be made.

Role of the President

The participants discussed their appreciation for the role of president, and acknowledged that while leadership involves both the leader and the follower, they give the role of president deference in the leadership process because he/she is the formal leader of the institution. The respect and deference for the role was the case in situations where participants had good relationships with their presidents, and even in situations where there was tension between the president and senior-level follower. Deference toward the role of the president was also present whether the senior-level follower agreed with a president's decision or not. Role also became important for the follower, as senior-level followers in roles such as chief of staff related differently in terms of deference than vice presidents or provosts.

Some participants were very close in their relationships with their presidents, and even though the relationship was close, deference was still given. Carol, a vice president that has reported to three different presidents over thirteen years, described her close relationship with

one of her presidents and how the close relationship impacted her role as follower to the president:

I'm going to reflect back on the first president that I worked with. I became very close, and I considered that first president a good friend. We didn't hang out together, but there were times where we traveled and we - probably unheard of - but to save money we often shared a room on some of these meetings, so the opportunity to really build a relationship and toss things off of each other. I still approached her with extreme respect, but I was more willing to question. And when I questioned, usually it wasn't a problem, but there were a few times. You talk about someone who speaks softly but carries a big stick, there were one or two times where I got major push back and I think in that regard, I guess you could say I put my foot, because I think perhaps I was too comfortable, and I stepped out of that realm of follower and went into friend realm and I needed to back into that professional relationship.

Conversely, Anna, a vice president having reported eight and a half years to a president, described a tense relationship with her president and how even when the president made a decision that she did not agree with that the role and its place in the college structure was respected:

I just got the announcement one day that workforce was going to go over to this other vice president. And I was of course astonished. And asked why, this was about certifying learning, independent of it being credit or non-credit in ways that the contract training and continuing ed was not, and he said that he thought workforce development and con ed should be together. And you know, ultimately I get that, the organizational structure of the college is his. I get that.

John, a vice president that has reported to a president for four years, also described a difficult relationship with his president, but said that when there were disagreements that he was deferential. "I will follow her because that's what those that report to the president do."

Participants also shared that they have to put their personal feelings aside and respect the role of the president in the leadership process. Andrew, who serves in the role of provost and has reported to a president for four and a half years, described the presumption of good that is imputed to the president in his dealings with her:

I presume that the president has the good of the institution and the good of the students, and the good of the faculty and perspective there; no one died and left me in charge or no one died and left me with all the right answers, and so you know if the president says X and I want to say Y, and the president says okay, I understand your Y, but we are going to go with X, I say okay, fine.

Andrew qualified that the role of president is deferred to as long as assumption of good remains. Deference to the president remained “unless of course it gets to an ethical, moral level.” Theresa, an executive associate that has reported to a community college president for 26 years, concurred saying that “as long as the decision is serving the greater good, then it you know, it might not be the way you would do it, but it’s the way we’re doing it.”

Sharon, a vice president that has reported to a president for three and a half years, mentioned that deference to the role of the president had everything to do with the role instead of the person. She viewed her role as vice president as one that was “to support the CEO” and described that as a follower you must move beyond personal feelings toward a CEO:

Regardless of what you feel personally, you have to respect the role. And so I would say in terms of my followership, is I can look beyond the person because we are all flawed individuals and see the role and respect the role, even if and when I don't agree with the person in the role and a decision that he or she makes, and in my case that she makes, I can respect her right to make the decision, even when I am not in agreement.

Both Theresa and Jim, a chief of staff to a community college president for eight years, described that their roles in relation to the role of the president required deference, and that their relationship with their presidents was different than vice presidents or provosts. Theresa shared that vice presidents advocate, and that it impacts their followership and their willingness to accept decisions from the leader:

I think if I had a different expectation of my role, I would feel differently. But absolutely with vice presidents, and I've seen [accepting leadership] be deal breakers for vice presidents. You know over the years, I've seen it be deal breakers because many, many vice presidents are working to ultimately become presidents to get their Ph.D. and many times they have experience and responsibilities that are equal to the president, it just

happens to be that the president is the president. So I have seen that, I have seen it be deal breakers.

Jim described the role of the president as “very weighty” and compared it to being a judge. He had served as dean before becoming chief of staff, and offered that while a dean and a president both make decisions, “the type of decision-making, how you make that decision, what you are drawing on and the state of those decision are all very different. Very weighty in the role of a president.”

Even though the size of institutions where the participants are senior-level followers is not revealed in order to protect their identities, the size of the institution did not matter in terms of respect for the president’s role. Even in larger institutions where provosts and vice presidents have a great deal of autonomy and authority, participants acknowledged that they ultimately defer to the role of the president.

Final Decisions

Participants were asked to think about a time when they disagreed with their president, and to reflect on the ‘no’ they received. Every participant gave great deference to the president in decision-making, and in those situations where a ‘no’ was received from the president as an outcome of decision-making, deference to the leader was a guiding principle.

Richard, a vice president that has reported to presidents for 13 years, was emphatic about the president’s final decision-making and the importance of not taking a ‘no’ personally:

I’m a pretty smart guy and unless it is something that is illegal or clearly a violation of policy and procedure, it’s one and done. We have the conversation, decision is made, and for better or worse, we go with it. And I respect it and we make it happen. I don’t have to like it personally, but I just have to make sure it happens professionally. The trick is to not let people know how you feel personally about it.

Richard also shared that ultimate responsibility lies with the president. “I am very much of the theory that you have to have the leader who ultimately is responsible, makes the decisions, and for better or worse makes it all happen.”

Andrew also commented on the finality of decision-making stating about a president’s final decision that “in the end it’s her decision and so whatever she decides is what it will be.” Sharon reiterated that if the final decision was a ‘no’ that she reverted back to her philosophy about the role of a president. “There are some decisions I may not like, but I have to respect the role and would respect her right to make the decision as president.” John also added that he served at the pleasure of the president, and “a no from the president is a no.”

While final decisions were accepted by senior-level followers they did in some instances push back regarding a final decision. Veronica, a vice president that has reported to a president for six and a half years, shared that she would push back against a final ‘no’ in a respectful manner:

I do so in a respectful manner, but when I need to push back I will push back. Now, she is the president, if she says 'no this is the way we are going to do it, I don't care argument a, b and c,' then I will let go of that.

Jim indicated that he did not take ‘no’ as a solid, firm ‘no’ and was especially willing to push back if there was a firm belief in the position being advocated:

If you say ‘no’ to me, I will hear the word ‘no,’ and go away and think about why this was not acceptable. And if I still firmly believe that it is something we should do and that it is in the best interest of the team or the college or our students, I’m going to come back again and address the issue that caused the ‘no’ to begin with, put in all the interventions and the safeguards that created the ‘no.’

Sharon also shared that when advocating for a position that she would push back:

As a follower, I feel I have the right to advocate for students for faculty and staff, and for what I believe, but at the end of the day, when a decision has been made, whether I agree with the decision, whether or not I agree with the decision, my role is to support the decision and to support the CEO.

In addition, Sharon saw pushing back against a 'no' as being a good follower:

Because I think in being a leader you have to be, to be a great leader you have to be a very good follower, or even a great follower. And I think that is important. So I hear the 'no,' but not as a shut the door and do away with what you're doing. I see it as a challenge to demonstrate what I believe is a very good student success effort that will lead us to the desired outcomes and so I think in terms of my leadership, not taking the 'no' personally, number one. And not seeing it as a final answer. 'No' based on what she understands about what we're doing and so my role, and in terms of my leadership in terms of this initiative, is to provide more information to the president in hopes of getting her to see and support this effort. Now if that leads to a final 'no,' I go back to what I said earlier that there are some decisions that I may not like, but I have to respect the role and would respect her right to make the decision as president.

Accepting a 'no' in the leadership process was considered by some participants to be more palatable if there was an explanation. Jim explained that the environment in which a 'no' is received is important:

First of all it starts with what is the environment in which the 'no' is received. If it's an explained 'no,' then it's a much better 'no' than what appears to be an arbitrary 'no.' Arbitrary 'no's,' you are not creating a good environment for anybody. But an explained 'no' is important.

John also believed that an explanation of a decision was essential:

And there are many things that she does that I don't agree with but she is the leader and I serve at the pleasure of the president. So I do my best, I try to, when I go and present a 'no' to the folks that have proposed it, I try to present it in a way that they can learn from. I try to present it in a context that is rational, that doesn't appear to be just personal. I try to use it as an opportunity.

Theresa thought that an explanation of decision-making was not only important, but that it was imperative to successful leadership:

You know in my mind's eye, the part that makes the leadership is that the person who holds the leadership role comes back whether it's me or a group of us, and says I've made this decision, this is why I've made this decision as opposed to that decision, this is as the college president how we are going to move forward.

Anna added that if "you don't communicate about a decision that gets made it effects how people do their work."

Deference to the president is the first superordinate theme from the participants' reflections, and the emergent themes of role of the president and final decisions exhibit deference as a lived experience and followership behavior of community college senior-level followers in the co-creation of the leadership process with their supervisor presidents.

Informed and Interactive Decision-Making

Senior-level followers described how they gathered information for and interacted with their presidents to co-create leadership at their institutions. This informed and interactive decision-making is the second superordinate theme in these findings, and the theme is comprised of the emergent themes of planning and information gathering and conversation and collaboration.

Planning and Information Gathering

Participants were asked to describe the process of co-creating leadership for their colleges between them and their presidents. Much of what senior-level followers reported about the leadership process was planning proposals or initiatives as starting points toward decision-making, and also gathering information in response to questions presidents asked as they formulated decisions. How much they engaged in planning versus information gathering largely depended on their role and its relationship to the president.

Carol emphasized the importance of planning and being prepared when interacting with her president. "When I have all my ducks in a row, I come fully prepared and have data to back up where I am coming from, I've done my research." She described a decision-making process at her institution regarding the addition of academic programs where she did not fully plan and had to back track and gather more information:

Some of the new programming changes were not, what I consider immediately accepted and took a little extra time. I presented all the documents and the background and that

was presented to me - it was organically grown through the department heads, brought up through PAC [program advisory council] meeting and program advisory committees, different groups came together and suggested changes in curriculum, specifically in programming, and then I went through the curriculum committee, that process and after getting that information, I took it to the president and said that these are the recommendations what do you think, and he would say I need more information, or tell me why, or find more examples. In other words, I didn't do - my sales job was not good enough for the immediate slam dunk, so I had to step back and then I re-met with several of the involved people like department heads, the dean, just to say okay let me just make sure I understand this correctly, how can we make sure this brings value, and I gained more information, to answer some of his questions, and then I went above and beyond and tried to find further examples to help support. And then from there, I went back two or three times back and forth to work on the new programming and get his approval.

Anna also emphasized that planning was critical in her vice president role when approaching the co-creation of leadership with her president. Anticipating questions that might be asked was one of her key concerns:

So, I absolutely have to have my facts straight. So first of all, I think part of it is knowing what the situation is and for example, what is the faculty understanding, what is my understanding. Now, again while I very much value the faculty role, I absolutely understand that they also have a very limited perspective. Right? They generally don't understand what student services do, and I guarantee you they don't even know what the bursar's office is. So, part of what I need to do is really sort of manage both up and down. So trying to figure out what the situation is. So from a faculty perspective or from my perspective, what are the particular issues and make sure that I have data; make sure that I have a very clear understanding of what those issues are and absolutely making sure what the implication would be for the college in terms of policy changes, in terms of budget implications. Changes to structure, organization, governance and all of those things, and then to present to the president, a proposal with pieces of information, and then to have conversation about 'so this is what I see, this is what would be important for us to do, is there a way for us to move forward with this?'

Anna continued that part of planning an approach for the decision-making process with her president took what she termed 'leadership courage':

I keep coming back to this language of leadership courage. So my experience with my presidents is that generally they do ask for input, and their acceptance of input varies relative to the size of their ego and the passion of the project that they're working on. And so I think one of the things that I need to do is navigate and understand how invested a leader is in accomplishing something. And then try to figure out first of all, if there are questions or concerns how to raise those without it sounding like a personal attack, because sometimes however much we don't want to, we still take things

personally, no matter what level we are at. So to try to figure out how to navigate some questions or concerns, to make sure we understand what that particular perspective is.

Anna also believed that you must begin with the end in mind while planning and before starting the decision-making process with your president:

So you have to start with the end goal in mind and that is ‘what is it that you are trying to accomplish, and what kind of problem are you trying to solve, and what is it that you are trying to finish, do or report here at the end?’

Vice presidents like Carol and Anna described decision-making processes where they brought plans to the president for a decision. Richard, a vice president for 13 years, emphasized planning as one of his key responsibilities to the president. “Making sure we are always on the same page, and for my part is I always make sure she is well-prepared. I always want to make sure there are no surprises.” He talked about how he prepared a plan for the president to address a staffing matter:

I prepared a game plan for her, had her look over the drafts, see if it fit with the goals that she was trying to accomplish, and once she signed off on it, we were good to go. She was able to provide some of the resources that I needed, I was able to reallocate some, so it was a joint effort making sure those things were going to work.

Another vice president, Sharon, also said that she and vice presidents at her institution started the process of coming to a decision by bringing forth a proposal or plan. Sharon shared her efforts to make a change in athletics:

So we have an athletics program and that program was a Division ... program. We recently, in 2018, we [wanted to become] a . . . scholarship offering program. I needed the support of the president to be able to move forward. And went to the president with the idea, with a proposal, received her feedback. She requested specific information and I provided the information and she eventually, after providing all of the documentation and then working with my colleagues because of the implication say for the foundation for fundraising, and administrative and physical services for facilities use, and that sort of thing. Getting their support, getting their feedback on the proposal that I had submitted to my CEO and going back to her with the information and getting her approval to move forward.

Andrew, a provost, also noted that issues in additions to plans were brought up from senior-level followers as part of the decision-making process:

Generally, I will bring to her issues. I will bring to her issues and say okay, this is what has come up. Or this is what I'm engaged in the conversation with some faculty about or the entire faculty about. This is what I'm hearing and this is my response to that, this is what I think we should do, what do you think? And then we will have a conversation, and I would say that I can't really think of one issue yet where we haven't pretty quickly come to agreement in terms of how we move forward with this. And then I go back and implement it, or continue the conversation, whatever the case may be.

On the other hand, in positions such as chief of staff or executive associate that did not represent a division or area of the institution (academic affairs, student affairs, etc.) the role of the senior-level follower was not necessarily to bring plans, but instead to gather information and inform the president. Theresa, an executive associate, talked about her role in bringing information to the president to help inform decisions that needed to be made:

We will have a preliminary talk about where she would like to be headed on that issue and what she needs. And then I go back and do whatever I need to do to bring the information to us, whether gathering data, doing some original research and I'll take that to her and it's a back and forth which she clearly is always the decision-maker and we reach a point where my job is done and I've given her what she needs, and she makes the decision based on her long experience and what she feels is best.

Jim, a chief of staff, also talked about his role of informing the president:

So in my role as chief of staff, a big part of my work is to inform her about things that are going on, research those things, create options for her consideration, give her my thoughts about what possible paths lie ahead and how different decisions might be interpreted. She has a lot of people to give her that kind of advice, it's not just me. But I need to be her eyes and ears. So the first thing is knowledge of the organization, knowledge of the people and knowledge of any given situation.

Theresa and Jim reflected that their roles often involved information gathering, research and knowledge, as opposed to bringing plans or initiatives forward for decision-making with the president. Theresa differentiated between her role and a vice president's role, stating that a vice

president had to persuade a president during the co-creation of leadership while her role was only to inform:

I try really hard to make sure as I'm forming my thoughts that they are formed on information. So it's not about being persuasive necessarily. In the position that I've always held, if you are going to care if your idea is taken or not, you need to go find another position because this isn't the one for that. But I see it as my role and my opportunity to bring to the table information and so I work really hard to be clear, to be non-threatening, to put it out there. If I feel like it's not being heard, or not being understood, I have confidence and the ability to come back and say I would like to restate this another way, because I feel like my point is being missed. So, for me, it's more of persuasion through offering everything that I know about a topic, and confidence to make sure that at least people are paying attention and truly, unless I feel that it is egregious, I back off.

Jim characterized his chief of staff role as standing by the president instead of advocating to her:

When I think about what people are advocating for within the college, to the extent that it is being directed toward the president, I would describe that I am standing next to her or behind her when that is being made. And in some ways, I get involved in those efforts directly with the divisions before they come to the president. . . . I'm not personally trying to advocate, but I can serve in the role of being a sounding board for [vice presidents] first, hearing what they have to say and giving them some feedback about what their needs are. In fact, giving them feedback about any of their situations.

In addition to their role, the relationship between the senior-level follower and the president impacted the planning and information gathering process for some participants.

Richard believed that his good relationship with his current president helped make the decision-making process easy:

I think an interesting thing about leadership can be knowing when to be hands on and when to be hands off. [The president] has been very trusting of me and my team. When we create the plan, share it with her, get her feedback, and get the feedback and collaboration of others. We are allowed to run with it in the way we feel best and we keep her updated on it. So it's an interesting sense of leadership, is that leadership sometimes is just letting . . . I think in my cases she lets me go do what I need to do so she focuses with some of the other [vice presidents] that probably need that more hands on approach from her.

Andrew added that the strength of the relationship between himself and his president made the planning and information gathering process relaxed and very informal:

And when we get together we kind of cut right to it and again; I think we have a nice working relationship after a [period of time] where we can pretty much say to each other what we need to say, and it's understood in the appropriate context and it's good.

Conversely, when a participant had a difficult relationship with their president it had an impact on planning and information gathering. John talked about how a difficult relationship with his president required more time, and that the process of delivering plans and information was critical to ensuring that appropriate decisions resulted from the leadership process:

This is the difference between the two of our styles. She wants to meet with greater frequency. And I take an opportunity at those weekly one-on-one meetings to lay the foundation and lay the groundwork for what I hope to be able to then share with her as a proposal, that she has enough information, she is not surprised by it, and she can make a rational well-informed decision. I think that there are times when she is not prepared and goes by her gut or a hunch or an ill-informed belief that I have difficulty convincing her that this initiative or this project, this policy is worthwhile. She is a very strong personality, she is a very smart individual. So it does require a longer period of time than it does with most, but having established this process, I've established also credibility with her.

Due to the nature of the relationship John said that more planning and information gathering was necessary than with other leaders he had worked for to ensure that disagreements were met with counterarguments:

A lot of my time is spent in thinking not only about the arguments that I would make in support of something, but what could the counterarguments be. So I try to prepare, I try to prepare the president. I try to have the back and forth conversations where I think we may disagree in private so that we can get whatever it is we need to say between the two of us between the two of us and not out in the public.

Conversation and Collaboration

In addition to planning and information gathering, the second emergent theme that participants expressed in informed and interactive decision-making was conversation and collaboration. Participants described the back-and-forth conversation that occurs between them as senior-level followers and their leader presidents, and several noted the importance of conversation to their ability to co-create leadership. They also discussed how they

collaboratively work with the president, and other senior-level followers, to lead their institutions together.

Richard stressed the importance of communication and conversation in his relationship with the president:

Starts with meeting, being communicative. We have monthly meetings. I try not to spend a lot of time bothering her on small stuff. I save all my time with her for the bigger items and things that are related to the goals she wants to accomplish. It mostly starts with communication and conversation, not just text or email, but picking up the phone or meeting in person.

Carol shared the back-and-forth conversation which she and her president have engaged in while working on plans for a new building, including the academic programs to be added to it:

Trying to build a building and programming, the programming is going to be the challenging part because I think there are some programs that the president has in mind to be included, and I'm not sure I can find enough data to support them. So all I can do, and the way I will approach it is that I will continue to pull data and find arguments where I can and see how I can make it fit. And then provide questions, do we really want to go that route? Or can we look at it a little differently? The process so far I feel has been very back-and-forth and very give-and-take, so I have to continue to work that way.

Conversation between a senior-level follower and a president sometimes transpired over time as discussions were engaged in about a particular decision. Andrew reflected on a decision being made with his president that involved many conversations, and the importance of those conversations to his followership:

[The president] and I right now are talking about an advising model and we're talking about a component of the advising model with regards to adjunct faculty. As so we're having a discussion about how much of the load adjunct faculty can take. In the end it's her decision and so whatever she decides is what it will be. And I'm fine with what her decision will be. But I think mine is a little bit aggressive than hers, I think. And I think she might be open to that as well. So followership is not just a blind 'what do you want me to do,' but there is also a conversation involved here as well. . . . So, for example with this advising issue, I'm meeting with the entire faculty on Thursday and so I presume by then she and I will have settled this one particular issue with adjuncts, and I'll be able to go to them and say 'okay, based on the conversation that faculty and I have been having all fall,' and [the president's] been engaged in it intermittently, but I always go back to her and fill her in where we are. That is another aspect of how we create leadership

together. I constantly keep her informed about what's going on. I mean certainly not in the weeds kind of stuff necessarily, unless it necessitates that, but I mean I'm always informing her of stuff that I think she needs to know, or that I would want to know if I were in her position. So, I think I will be able to go back to the faculty Thursday and say 'okay, here is the deal' and that will be the fruition of a conversation that [the president] and I have had over time about getting to that point, and then it will be up to me to work with the faculty leadership and the faculty in general and implement this plan.

Carol also experienced conversations over time as her and her president planned for the merger of two institutions:

If I go back to the one event that was so memorable, the merging of the two institutions, that process involved extensive dialog, multiple meetings of getting together and the leader saying here is what we have to accomplish and to her direct reports to say now how are we going to do this? And taking that input from everybody involved and around the table, providing some guidance for the regulations that had to come into her ear through the chancellor or even the governor's office on how this was supposed to look. And her bringing in her own experiences from working with multiple groups and kind of telling stories kind of helping guide through that process through her storytelling, her relaying previous experiences, different ways to attack, we had multiple spreadsheets of what had to be done by when, there were timelines, committees formed, pulling people together the challenge about this specific event is that she was, we were joining with another institution for which she was also to be the leader and they weren't happy about it. They wanted to make sure their opinions were heard and they weren't being taken over. So she did not have equal followership in this event from those on the other side.

In addition to conversations being held over time, participants shared that during the conversations between follower and leader, other followers of the president and followers of the senior-level follower, were brought in to help with the creation of leadership. Anna described how the leader and senior-level follower had to step back and decide who needed to be involved before making a decision:

I think you need to back up a little bit and decide okay, so who are the people who need to be at the table here in that decision-making? Can we start with a particular draft, put something out there as a draft, ask people to add ideas on it, or is it something where we just start from the ground, the grassroots, ask for input and then grow it from there? So again I think ultimately it really depends on what the particular piece is on who needs to be involved in that.

Theresa reiterated that many people had to be part of leadership conversations as she shared how decisions are made at her institution:

We have a president's team here that is comprised of the vice presidents, myself an executive director of public relations and then the executive director of planning and research. So in [the president's] decision-making processes, she calls on all of us, sometimes as a group, sometimes as smaller groups, sometimes individually, to help make her decisions.

Sharon went even further in her reflection noting that the decision-making process and conversations that comprised the leadership process were in many ways communal, though the decision ultimately still resided with the president:

We all contribute to the decision and ultimately - and it depends on the issue. But let's say it's a decision that the president has to make. It is communal in terms of we all come and we talk about it, we give our perspectives, we weigh in on the issue and the president has to be the one to make the decision.

In Jim's stint as an acting president while his president was on sabbatical, he also concluded that many voices were important in the leadership process. "Listening to the experts at the table, getting input by everyone there, asking what do you think? What do you think? Actually being quiet for a lot of it is important."

Sharon and other participants were adamant that conversation was critical to the leadership process with their community college president, and that without it they would not be able to lead the college effectively. Sharon believed dialogue and conversation were a deal breaker for her in a relationship with a president:

I think where there is no opportunity to try and find agreement, I would feel challenged in that space. I believe strongly in advocacy. I believe as a leader myself hearing from those who are experts in a particular area. Hearing their perspective and giving - considering what I've heard as a factor in my decision-making. And so if I worked with someone or had a CEO who was not open to hearing a perspective that is different or may be different from her own, I would be challenged by that because we teach students to advocate. And I'm a strong advocate for what I believe. I'm also respectful. And in the end if the decision is no, I'm hopeful, and if the decision is no I hope it's based on what is best for our students and for the institution, and if that is true, then I can support and

respect that. Even if it isn't the decision that I wanted. In the end I can only respect the decision. But I would hope to have, because we work in higher education . . . we are supposed to have intellectual dialogue and we are supposed to bring our differences to the table and be able to support a perspective that is different from your own, while also being open to what others are bringing to the table. And then you walk away from that hopefully more knowledgeable than you were when you came to the table, and understanding that this is shared leadership. And the final decision will not always be the one that you supported, but I think it's in having that intellectual dialogue and debate.

Theresa echoed Sharon's perspective and stated that the back-and-forth between leader and followers was what constituted leadership:

I think when there is that conversation, then for me that is leadership. I think when leadership is lacking is when you don't hear back and all of the sudden you are headed in a direction that you didn't know you were headed in and I think the leader has failed in bringing folks along to his or her point of view, his or her decision.

Anna went even further reflecting that if conversation had occurred in a situation where a bad decision was made in her institution about integrating two departments, the outcome would have been a different leadership decision:

I think we all learn by bad example as by good. So I will say that I think what I have learned in that was you can't make big decisions about stuff like that without conversation. I mean I honestly believe that if there had been a conversation about the value of integrating continuing ed and workforce in a long and constructive way before announcing the change and just saying it's a done deal, I've made up my mind. You know, so yes. So it was leadership in that he was providing - no he was establishing his prerogative, but it was really bad leadership. Right? So leadership also is about power and he was pretty much saying it's my decision, too bad. But I think it was a bad form of leadership because I think the outcome could have been different.

Conversation was also described by some participants as collaboration and they discussed it as a key component of informed and interactive decision-making. Richard stated that collaboration was necessary in a community college. "You can't force feed things in the community college environment, on most things. You have to be collaborative, you have to get feedback, etc." Carol echoed that sentiment about collaboration between the leader and the follower:

The president could not operate an institution on his or her own. And so to be a leader you have to be able to work with the people that directly report or work for you. There is a dichotomy because they work with you even though they directly report to you. But I think myself, I approach things as working with, I have always had a collaborative approach.

Veronica described her collaboration as being a team player:

Because I will be the first one to say I'm a team player. Because I am a team player. I'm not going to make a decision at the expense of you as a leader, at the expense of your area or your division. That is not who I am, so my thing is how do we find consensus.

Finally, while Anna believed in collaboration she also worried about too much collaboration in the leadership process:

I will say that the president that I'm working with right now is highly collaborative, that she does ask for input, she has listening sessions, she asks for president's council to weigh in on stuff. Sometimes perhaps too much, because people weigh in on decisions that necessarily aren't theirs to make, particularly if it impinges on a particular area that I'm trying to make decisions about.

Informed and interactive decision-making was the second superordinate theme in this research, and the emergent themes of planning and information and conversation and collaboration show participants engaging in a leadership process with their presidents. Participants formulated plans and collected appropriate information to make decisions, and then joined their presidents in collaborative dialogue about the issues impacting their institutions.

Vision and Mission

Many senior-level followers shared that being in sync with the president's vision and keeping the focus on the mission of the institution were central to the leadership process. Vision and mission is the third superordinate theme that was developed from conversations with participants. The emergent themes of supporting the president's vision and a common belief in mission emanated from the reflections that were analyzed.

Supporting the President's Vision

Senior-level followers described an alignment with the vision established by the president that was central to the co-creation of leadership. Participants talked about the need for a vision from the president, their efforts to make that vision become reality and the consequences for the leadership process when vision was not established.

Vision was leadership, or at least a key component of it, for some participants. Richard defined leadership in a community college as the vision set by the president. "Leadership to me means that you are going to make sure that everything, all the goals that have been set by the president are going to be met or exceeded." Andrew agreed with Richard's declaration about leadership saying "I think leadership is about - I think I said this before - leadership is about vision." Jim also equated presidential vision and leadership:

So a big part, let me say a big portion of what happens and where [the president's] leadership unfolds is in the vision for where we are going. What we need to do at the college, and she has set some very big goals for us.

Understanding the president's vision was also described as a starting point for leadership. Anna explained how you had to figure out the vision and be clear about it in order to co-create leadership:

So to try to figure out how to navigate some questions or concerns, to make sure we understand what that particular perspective is and then honestly I know my job is to make sure that I do what the vision expects me to do. So what I may do when I'm talking to people about trying to accomplish the president's vision is to say, 'she set this work out for us, we have accomplished these six, seven, eight, ten things already, that are related to this, so here is maybe a slight swerve, I've talked to her about the concerns that I have, x, y and z, if there are others I am happy to take those forward to make sure that people have those things represented, but that our work is this and let's figure out how to do it, let's put a team together and let's have both a timetable and accountability.' So I absolutely recognize that because I work at the will of the president, I need to make that happen, but that doesn't mean I need to be a blind follower, I just need to be able to navigate the nuances of what those responsibilities mean.

Anna also shared that to understand the president's vision and implement it you had to consider the role of the president versus your own:

I think - so one of the things I recognize is that people have different perspectives on college need and the college vision. So, while I think I have a fairly broad understanding of what happens at community colleges, sort of on a fairly broad level, I absolutely recognize that my perspective really comes from the academic side of the house. So I recognize that a president has a larger perspective.

Theresa had a similar thought and she emphasized the importance of listening for vision and excluding your own. "One [should be] truly listening and really hearing what your president and what your board wants, not what you necessarily think is the best thing."

Making the president's vision a reality was important in response to the researcher's questions about how the president and senior-level follower make leadership together. Andrew explained that the president's vision was what attracted him to his position, and made it possible for him and his president to co-create leadership together:

Well, [I want] a vision. I definitely want someone with a vision and preferably a vision that is conducive to my own vision, and I don't mean to say that in a way that I can't learn from, I want to learn from [the president]. I mean that was one of the appeals to me of the job was that given who [the president] was, I thought I could learn from her and this could be really good. So as long in the tooth as I am in my career as it were, I mean I've still got an awful lot to learn and so for me, I want to work with a leader who's got vision and who can teach me things that I don't know, teach me things that I don't know I don't know.

Andrew went on to explain how implementing the president's vision was core to his responsibility as a senior-level follower:

Well, I work for [the president]. So part of it is implementing her vision for the college. Fortunately, every president - well, I guess I can say the three presidents to whom I've reported - I can say that I've had no serious disagreement with their vision and my vision. So that's been very comfortable and very easy. Styles are another issue. And two of the presidents . . . I think our styles are very compatible, and the style for the president at [another college] while I was there was not so compatible, so that was a bit of a problem. But anyway, for me it's really implementing their vision. And then sharing with them my vision on certain issues where they may not have thought about it up to this point or may not have thought about it.

The president's vision was described by some as the glue that held leadership between the president and the senior-level follower together. Veronica talked about challenges that her and her fellow senior-level followers were experiencing with their president, and that implementing the president's vision was a rallying point for them:

We have a VP meeting tomorrow to huddle to talk about that and how we are going to have a conversation with our president. And we know that we need to do it in a way where she doesn't feel she is being ganged up on. So we're going to shape it, what I'm going to suggest to my colleagues is that we shape this as one - we are glad to be here, we believe in her leadership and her vision, that we care about this college and that we want her to succeed as a president. And that we just want to talk with her about some things that are a concern to us that we feel need more attention so that we can make sure that not only is she successful, but the college is successful.

Andrew discussed that even when he and his president could not come to a decision, he relied upon vision when contemplating the leadership outcome. He shared how vision came into play when there was a disagreement:

Because what I was proposing wasn't necessarily consistent with what her overall vision was of the specific issue, or the larger issue of leadership in the college. . . . Again, it's not about me. It's about the president's leadership and vision and the presumption for the good there, and I may not understand the president's reasoning behind this decision, but this is what it is, okay we will go with it. And I'll implement it and will deal with the fallout.

John added that even though he and his president were at odds on a number of different issues, they could work together because they shared a vision for the institution:

First of all I know what my institution needs, I know what my team needs. And I think there is enough agreement on her end and on my end of what those needs are that there's very little conflict or disagreement in what we think are the priorities and how we solve them.

When presidential vision was perceived to be lacking, or there were concerns about the vision, it either led to an inability to continue to co-create leadership or made the senior-level follower nervous about future leadership creation. Richard reflected upon his experiences with a

president that eventually led to him leaving his institution. He recounted a time when the president called him to take on a new leadership position:

So he called me on a Saturday when I was with my son at a community event, and talks to me on the phone at 9:45 in the morning on a Saturday, so that starts off bad in terms of leadership, you have to respect work/life balance. But as soon as that call came in and I told him that I would consider it, but I didn't think it was the right thing, it was a very difficult conversation because I knew exactly what he was trying to get, and I didn't want to play that role for him. So he was looking for me to be someone who would kind of eliminate his enemies by either reallocating them to different areas or getting rid of them altogether, and I didn't want to play that part. I think in that particular situation with [the president], it created a problem of just knowing that there was no game plan, there was no vision, it didn't tie at all to student completion, really haphazard decision-making, so on my part it was quite stressful. Because I have to manage the people below me and basically what I try to do is get them to stay focused on the goals that I had for the [office], and not focus so much on the kind of haphazard approach of the president. So we were still meeting our fundraising goals and focused on scholarships and student completion in my area, and I tried to distance myself as much as I could from anything that the president was doing that didn't tie to those goals.

Richard offered further thoughts on the need for vision comparing how his former president lacked vision and his current president has a guiding vision for the institution, and that the absence of vision resulted in leadership not being created:

With [president one] I didn't feel like we were creating leadership, whereas with [president two] it's much more so. [President one] just wasn't the right fit from the start, and he didn't have a vision, didn't have a game plan. So you can't create leadership without it. That is where when [president two] came in, we changed our mission statement, we had a new vision, and we had a strategic plan. [President one] never got a strategic plan off the ground. So we have always had a map or a guideline to follow with strategic planning, and a vision and a mission with [president two].

While Anna didn't believe that presidential vision was lacking, she cautioned against letting the president's vision get too far removed from what she believed was possible:

So a leader needs to be very careful I think in being strategic about what initiatives and work the team needs to engage in. Because what you don't want is somebody who believes that we need to engage in the project du jour. I do think that there needs to be a very careful conversation about what priorities are and how to get people to do these priorities, because as you know particularly in the community college right now where we don't have growing funding streams, right? It's not like we have more personnel and

it's not like we have more money coming in in order for us to do the work that we need to do.

Common Belief in Mission

It was not only the president's vision that participants aligned with in the leadership process, but a common belief in the mission of their college and/or community colleges as a segment of higher education. Like the emergent theme of supporting the president's vision, a common belief in mission was mentioned by some participants as a guide post in the process of creating leadership, and when that commonality was not present it opened the door for difficulties in the leader/follower relationship.

Veronica shared a story about her belief in the college's mission that summarized how important mission is to leaders and followers:

I had a faculty member come to my office and say to me 'there are some people (and that could be five people for all I know) who hope that this president fails' . . . And I immediately got a bit heated and I said that is the wrong approach, it is one thing to disagree with someone or disagree with the president, there is nothing wrong with that. I said 'but to say that you want her to fail' I said 'what you are ultimately saying is that you want the college to fail.' And by having the college to fail, that means we are failing the students, and I said that is unacceptable.

Several participants described how a common belief in mission aided in the co-creation of leadership. Jim described how the shared belief in the community college mission between leader and follower impacted his followership:

So followership I think starts with - let me say my followership starts with a common belief in the mission. So I am, I am very dedicated to the community college mission and so is my leader. So we share that, we share many of the same values, things that are important to her are important to me, and I believe in her.

Theresa echoed the importance of mission stating that in her role “really truly listening to the mission, the goals and really getting that clear in my head” was vital to creating successful leadership with her president.

Carol, Richard and Sharon discussed how the community college mission of student success in their institutions drove leadership decisions. Carol described how defining mission was crucial in the leadership decisions regarding the merger of two institutions:

The process actually follows a very similar path of what I described for the merger of two colleges in that the institutional mission, goals, values, they are all defined, and they had been from before I came on board, and from that the leadership process was needing and going through various actions that needed to take place and saying how were we going to get it done, and then the leader [gave] wide berth as to how things could be accomplished. Pretty specific initiatives on what [needed] to be accomplished.

Richard reflected on mission as a leadership behavior in the community college:

I think in terms of leadership, best behaviors are the ones where everything has to be related to the mission, has to be related to the community college environment, student completion. I don't like to do anything - my big thing is return on investment. So anything that we are going to put money into or people into, what's the return on investment for student completion. And if you can't prove that to me, in some mostly quantitative way, but sometimes qualitative way, then we are not going to do it.

Sharon added that in making a successful leadership decision with her president, tying her initiative to a common belief in mission was necessary:

It wasn't enough to make the case for doing it. I had to demonstrate the support for student success because everything, and that's the point to make here, everything we do should come back to students and student success. And so that's something recent and where I got her support.

As in the discussion about supporting a president's vision, when there was not a common belief in the mission of the college, it resulted in bad leadership outcomes and a break in the leader/follower relationship. Carol reflected on her frustrations as a senior-level follower with a former president and that it was her belief that the president was not committed to the mission of the college:

All of her decisions were being made to make her look good immediately, and not consider long-term implications. And I feared - the rumor had it that she was coming in to get her three years prior to retirement and up her salary for a little bit, and that there was no demonstration of passion, commitment or concern for the mission of the college.

The emergent themes of supporting a president's vision and a belief in common mission comprised the third superordinate theme of vision and mission. Vision and mission helped senior-level followers create leadership with their community college presidents, and when vision and mission were not present it strained the leadership process.

Respectful Relationships

The fourth and final superordinate theme is respectful relationships. The relationship between a senior-level follower and their community college president was related by participants as essential to the co-creation of leadership. Trust was an emergent theme, and participants shared why trust was important to them and how broken trust could impact their relationship with the president. The leader's honesty and integrity was a second emergent theme, and statements about the need for honesty and integrity were given by participants. Some participants also shared stories of an absence of honesty and integrity in relationships as senior-level followers with their community college presidents.

Trust

Trust between leaders and followers was described by study participants as a core element of respectful relationships. Carol, when asked about what she valued in a relationship, immediately mentioned trust as well as respect. "Trust, one. Respect, there needs to be mutual respect." Likewise, Andrew in response to a question about what behaviors led to bad outcomes mentioned fear and the absence of trust:

I think a behavior that always results in a bad outcome is fear. And I guess along with fear is a lack of trust. So I guess fear and a lack of trust are behaviors that lead to no good, and transparency and trust are behaviors that lead to good ends.

Richard stated that due to the strong level of trust in his relationship with the president, it made the day-to-day relationship work very well. “I take very little of her time, because there is a lot of trust there and a lot of input and feedback and collaboration going on to get the job done.”

A dependence on trust was mentioned by some participants as a critical basis for the relationship between senior-level follower and president. For Veronica her ability to lead and be a senior-level follower was dependent on having autonomy and trust:

Yes, I have to have, in order for me to be healthy where I am, I have to have both. So I have to have the autonomy to lead, and support to lead, and I also have to have trust and faith in whom I'm following. And I think you can have both, and for me I have to have both.

Andrew described an implicit trust between him and his president:

Well, and again, you have to prove to me that I shouldn't trust you is the way that I go into it. So I mean I had a very interesting conversation with a friend of mine at [my college] here and for her you have to earn the trust, and for me you have to earn my lack of trust in you if you will. It's a very - the two of us have a very different diametrically opposed approach there. But that being said, for me again, it's just an implicit trust in the other, an implicit confidence in the other.

Theresa, a twenty-six year senior-level follower to multiple presidents, in her explanation of how new presidents need more attention talked about how trust is so important to the leader/follower relationship:

You're the supplier of information, you're just, it's a really important trust relationship that you have. Because they, especially new presidents, will ask you something that they may not ask their VPs or anybody else because they can't show that vulnerability. But if there is something they ask and I don't know the answer to, it's much easier for me to go find the answer and collect the information, than for a president to say I don't know what is going on.

Carol echoed Theresa's thoughts about trust, but indicated that it was not only the senior-level follower's trust that had to be present, but the president's trust in the senior-level follower. In describing her new relationship with a president, as opposed to the previous relationship that existed between the president and a long-time senior-level follower, she said:

Because my predecessor had been such a long-term employee, and I don't know how the relationship had worked previously, but I had the feeling that there wasn't a lot of questioning. I could be wrong, but it just felt like, from what I heard, my predecessor pretty much said 'yes, it's going to be this way' so having a new person, I think the president is still trying to feel where I come from, as far as have I demonstrated enough knowledge or action that he would consider trustworthy.

The lack of trust, or a breach in trust, was described by some participants as a behavior that caused a relationship to break down. Carol in talking about a relationship with her former president and her relationships with her own followers related what happens to the relationship when trust breaks down:

So I think it's very important that there is trust between the leaders and the followers. And when that trust is breached, I have a hard time getting past that, I work with trying to give opportunities to get that relationship to build. But I need people to tell me truthfully what they think.

Anna shared that there has to be trust up and down the line throughout a college in order for it to operate effectively, and that employees have to have trust in their president. "I don't want people to distrust the president. Because you can't function if there is a lot of distrust all the way up and down the line."

Building a relationship based on trust in order to avoid the ramifications of an absence of trust was reflected upon by both Sharon and Theresa, two senior-level followers that had experienced situations when trust wasn't present in the leader/follower relationship. Sharon talked about her trust relationship with her own followers, and explained how critical trust was to all leader/follower relationships throughout her institution.

And not just waiting until something happens to talk to people, but to have those relationships and build those relationships, and build that trust and that respect. And I'll tell you, I just had someone return from administrative leave. And it was a challenging situation. The one thing she said as she returned was, in terms of how information was shared and what people knew about her absence was that there were two things. One, she knew that I had not violated her confidence. So people know they can trust me. They can trust that I say what I mean, they can trust that I will hold their confidence no matter the situation. And it's the trust piece that I'm getting at. Although I placed this person on

administrative leave, there was still the trust that I was not out to do her harm, where it was not any maliciousness, it was my responsibility as a leader. . . . And so I think the trust is important, I think being consistent, and people seeing that you are who you say you are, and that you are consistently who you say you are. You're the leader that you're the same person whether you are sitting in the board room or you're sitting in the cafeteria with the students. Your ethics, your morals are the same, and they can trust that, even when they don't like our decisions. And I think that that's very important.

Theresa summarized how essential trust is to leader/follower relationships, and particularly for the president with their senior-level followers in a college community:

Because if you don't build your trust with your college community, with the people, with vice presidents, with your custodial staff, with everybody. If you are not a person, forget about being a president, if you are not a person they can trust, they know is watching out for their best interests regardless of what the decision has to be, sometimes maybe not such a great popular decision, then you are really sunk and I've seen that. I think folks can forget about that along the way. So for me, looking at it from way behind the scene, I think that is a big thing, I mean yes. You can be a great communicator and people can love you and if you make stupid decisions you know you're not there for long. I think it's really about relationships, relationships, relationships.

Honesty and Integrity

Like the emergent theme of trust, honesty and integrity developed as an emergent theme in the respectful relationships that senior-level followers create with their community college presidents. Participants stated that honesty and integrity were important behaviors in their relationships, and several shared experiences when the loss of honesty and integrity led to bad leadership outcomes.

Several participants described honesty and integrity as bedrock elements of a leader/follower relationship that could co-create leadership and make effective decisions.

Andrew related the centrality of honesty to his relationship with his president:

So I find that if a president is willing to be open and honest and direct so that I know where the president stands, then we are good to go. If I find that a president is fearful of being open or transparent, no good comes of that.

Richard, in answer to what behaviors resulted in good leadership outcomes with his president, also pointed to honesty:

Honesty is a big one. Yeah, because then you are dealing with two different stories. One person will be saying this, the leader will be saying something different that may or may not be true. And then you are giving people mixed messages and once you start doing that, people don't know what they are supposed to be doing.

John saw the need for honesty in the relationship between senior-level follower and the president. "I think there's a need for the leader and the follower to have a relationship that, once again, is open, is honest, is fair, [and] is consistent." He went on to talk about his leadership style and said that when the leader and follower had much different styles, as was the case with his current president, honesty still needed to exist in the relationship:

Different styles. It's partly political. I don't want to be the smartest person in the room, so I recognize good ideas. I give recognition to good ideas, I don't steal them, I might steal them, but I attribute them. And I think all of those elements and components - being open, honest, transparent, servant leadership - all of those things I try to demonstrate and model and hopefully people are able to give that back to me. And we are pretty respectful.

Integrity was also vital to some participants as they described what they needed in a relationship with their community college president. Carol declared "there needs to be the sense of integrity, from both ends" of the senior-level follower and president relationship. Veronica stated that the leader's integrity was essential to her relationship with the president, and to decision-making:

One of my mentors told me a long time ago that it means nothing if you don't have integrity. And so integrity is a big, big thing for me, and along with integrity comes transparency. . . . It's interesting I haven't read up on followership, but anyway what it means to me personally and professionally is that as a follower I am looking to you as the leader to have integrity that you can be somebody who is bold, decisive and fair.

Theresa concurred saying that integrity had to be present in decision-making between a leader and follower, and that she could live with decisions where there was integrity:

There have been many, many, many times when what I brought to the table wasn't the direction we finally took on things. For me personally, I don't have an issue with that as long as the direction we are going is legal, and there is I believe integrity.

Andrew also mentioned integrity and the line that would be crossed in the co-creation of leadership if integrity was not present:

I can still find the good regardless of the decision that is being made here and whether I agree with it or not. Unless of course it gets to an ethical, moral level. Once or twice maybe I could choke that down, but I think after a certain point it might be, we just don't share the same moral compass or the same moral view of the world.

Carol, Richard and Theresa shared experiences as senior-level followers with their community college presidents where the lack of integrity in the co-creation of the leadership process led to dissolution of the relationship and the inability to create leadership with their community college president. Carol discussed a situation with her president where the president didn't have the integrity to follow the rules on how student enrollment was reported in her state and the implications for retention and graduation reporting in the future:

The institution where I was, the state did not compensate based on FTE [full time equivalency]. So it truly was a bragging rights kind of thing. And we had been slowly growing our enrollment prior to [the president's] arrival. But we had implemented a huge thing that we knew would immediately impact it and that was no more late registration. So we didn't allow the students to come in at the last minute to register, so we had fewer students. And I talked with our data person and my concern was that the college down the road is going to be judged on its graduation rate, they were looking at outcomes that would in the future impact the institutional funding model. It wasn't fully developed, it wasn't fully in place, but there was a lot of discussion going on in the leadership group and the state. So I had the data guy pull out the data on the first-time, full-time freshman, which was going to create our cohort when looking at the graduation rate, and then I had it crosswalk with the people that never showed up and had gone through the first four weeks and we knew who wasn't there, who hadn't paid. We had 25 students still on our roster that weren't there, and were never going to be there. So I went to the president and I said before the census date I think it would be wise for us to drop these students and get them off of our so called enrollment because of what is going to happen three years from now, when we have to count them in the graduation rate. And she looked at me and said no. And so I kind of backed up and I went, I'm afraid this could be something that could affect accreditation, where our graduation rate drops significantly, it's a small cohort, I just want to make sure you understand the implications of keeping these phantom students on the roles, She said, 'no, don't worry about it' and

wouldn't even discuss it. At that point, probably at that point, or before, I decided she wasn't a leader.

Carol reported that it wasn't only this situation, but others that represented a lack of integrity that clouded her judgment of the leader. "I considered some of the things she was doing as inappropriate, so that also jaded my opinion towards her leadership."

Richard talked about a relationship with a former president of his institution, and he related an incident as an example of the bad outcomes that happen when integrity is not present:

So I will give you a good example. [The president] brought me in to meet with a faculty member about something that the faculty member had communicated, since I had communications under me. The faculty member had posted something publicly that [the president] just did not like. So he brought the faculty member to the office, had a brief conversation with the faculty member about niceties. And then said, "[Richard] has something to tell you" and he walked out of the room. And I was left to be the bad guy. And [the president] went into his office until I explained what the problem was with the faculty member, and in a calm way. And [the president] waited until, he was behind the closed door, waited until I was finished saying what I needed to say, and then he came back in and said 'okay, I think this meeting is over. Hope you guys have a good day.'

Richard continued about how the president's lack of integrity in this example of a bad leadership outcome made him feel:

That outcome in that was I was brought in as the hatchet person, or the bad guy, and that outcome was that I was left hung out to dry with the faculty member. And I don't oversee the faculty at all. . . . So the faculty member's boss wasn't even in the room, and I think that was intentional on the president's part. So that outcome there, I not only end up with a tough relationship with a faculty member, or experience with one, and then the faculty member's academic affairs [vice president] isn't even in the room, and now they are upset that I'm talking to the faculty without them, that was a really bad outcome.

Theresa's story about the lack of integrity that a president exhibited also related to the treatment of people she worked with:

So there have been very, very few times that - there has probably been one time in my career, for me the line was crossed. And then for me, I thought I need to be with another group of people to work with, because I'm not willing to do this. . . . So for me it's happened really one time in my career, and at that time I worked for a leader who, and it was less about a specific issue and more about treatment of people for me. So you know

the decision we disagreed on is his approach to dealing with people. And it manifested itself in exactly how he treated people, how he would have conversations like we are having, if a decision didn't go his way the dean, and at this point we were in a system so they were a lot of people, deans and vice presidents involved, he would summon these folks in and really call them on the carpet for something that might be fair, might not be fair. And my role, I was often called in to witness what was going on. So no I didn't enjoy being a part of that, seeing people treated that way, but it was more. I saw it as this is a leader, this is his decision on how to work with people, I can't agree with any of this. I can't to my fundamental roots, I don't agree this is how you try to help people grow, how you try to help make a different decision, get a direction to change, so I don't know what particular moment in time it was but I decided there was just a day, I thought I can't be part of this anymore because this isn't who I am as a person, this isn't who I am as an educator, this isn't the type of leader I want to be.

In the reflections shared by Carol, Richard and Theresa all three decided that due to the president's lack of integrity, they could not continue in a leader/follower relationship and they left their community colleges for other opportunities.

Respectful relationships was the fourth superordinate theme, and participants gave rich descriptions of what was important in their relationships with their presidents. The emergent themes of trust and honesty and integrity show senior-level followers that worked to build respectful relationships with their presidents, and how those relationships were impacted by the lack of trust and/or an absence of honesty and integrity.

Summary of Findings

This study was designed to help explore the lived experiences and followership behaviors of community college senior-level followers in the co-creation of the leadership process with their leader presidents. Nine senior-level followers who currently report to community college presidents shared rich descriptions of their followership that yielded eight emergent themes and four superordinate themes. The superordinate themes of deference to the president, informed and interactive decision-making, vision and mission and respectful relationships reflected

descriptions of senior-level followers that were committed to co-creating leadership with their presidents, and their positive and negative experiences in the leadership process.

Participants shared that deference to the president in the leadership process was ever present, and that they deferred to the role of the president and gave it significant respect when creating leadership. Even when a participant described a relationship with their president that was difficult, they still acknowledged the president's authority when creating leadership together. Final decisions in the leadership process were viewed by participants as ultimately the purview of the president. Some senior-level followers described how they would push back against a 'no' received from the president in the co-creation of leadership, but in the end deference to the president was the guiding principle. Participants also shared how a 'no' from the president was more palatable if it was accompanied by an explanation.

The leadership process as explained by participants included both planning and information gathering as well as conversation and collaboration in their efforts to help create leadership. This informed and interactive decision-making was a meaningful way in which the senior-level follower participated in the co-creation of leadership. Participants discussed how they engaged in the leadership process by developing initiatives and plans that were brought to the president. Presidents often asked questions of senior-level followers, and they reported back-and-forth interactivity that included information gathering to help inform the leadership process. Depending on the role of the senior-level follower there were different types of interactions with vice presidents and provosts tending to bring plans to their presidents, and chief of staff and executive associate positions focused on information gathering to inform the president. Participants stressed the importance of conversation with their presidents in the leadership

process, and they talked about collaborating with the president and other followers in order to create leadership outcomes.

Vision and mission were central to the leadership process described by participants. Senior-level followers described the need for a vision from their president with some directly equating presidential vision and leadership. Participants defined their senior-level follower role as helping to make the president's vision a reality, and it was the president's vision that acted as the glue that held the leadership process together. The co-creation of leadership broke down when the president didn't have a vision or there were concerns about it, and the result was senior-level followers that decided to move on from their follower role. Likewise, participants discussed the need for both leader and follower to have a common belief in mission. Mission was defined as either the mission of the institution, the mission of community colleges or the mission of student success. A common belief in mission was seen by senior-level followers to aid in the co-creation of leadership, and several participants shared how that common belief in mission drove the leadership process. As with vision, when a common belief in mission was not present, the result was bad leadership outcomes and a break in the leader/follower relationship.

Finally, respectful relationships were cited by participants as essential to the co-creation of leadership, particularly the behaviors of trust and honesty and integrity. Participants valued strong levels of trust in their relationships with their presidents, and they depended upon trust to be present to co-create leadership in their colleges. Trust was also described as a two-way street, with both the president and the senior-level follower needing to trust one another in order to effectively lead. Breaches in trust led to frayed relationships with their presidents, and participants reflected on the duty to build relationships based on trust because of its critical nature to the relationship between a senior-level follower and a president. Honesty and integrity

were also described as essential behaviors in relationships, and participants pointed to honesty and integrity as behaviors they wanted in a relationship with their president. Participants shared that they could accept negative decisions made by their presidents if integrity was present in the relationship. Three participants gave rich descriptions of situations in which there was a lack of integrity in the relationship with their community college president, and the absence of integrity ultimately resulted in all three leaving their community colleges.

Chapter five will discuss the findings presented in this study and provide interpretation and reflection on the data summarized here. Recommendations for future practice will be shared as well as suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Chapter Overview

This chapter focuses on a discussion of the findings shared in chapter four. Discussions are organized by the four superordinate themes developed in the research, and are reviewed in the context of the study's research question - What are the lived experiences and followership behaviors of community college senior-level followers in the co-creation of the leadership process with their supervisor presidents? Discussion of the findings also includes intersection with the literature as well as reflections from the researcher. Additional reflections from the researcher are included in the last section of the discussion of findings. The chapter continues with recommendations for future practice in community colleges as well as suggestions for future research, and a concluding statement about this study.

Discussion of Findings

Four superordinate themes including deference to the president, informed and interactive decision-making, vision and mission and respectful relationships emanated from the emergent themes formed from interviews with the participants. Discussion of the findings is organized by superordinate theme below, and each discussion includes connections to the literature as well as reflections from the researcher. The methodology used in this study, interpretative phenomenological analysis, relies on researcher reflections of participants' lived experiences as well as the researcher's own experiences to fully make meaning of the research (Smith & Osborn, 2003). In the last section, the researcher shares additional reflections about participant interviews not included in the findings.

Superordinate Theme One: Deference to the President

Deference to the president in the findings centered on the role of the president as well as participants' belief that the president served as the final decision-maker in the leadership process. The focus on deference was surprising to the researcher given attitudes about leadership and followership that have evolved in the literature. On the other hand, as theorized by Bastardo and Day (2019), deference may not be unexpected given the voluntary nature of deference and evolutionary tendencies toward followership.

Before the advent of progressive leadership theories and a focus on followership in the literature, leadership was often defined by the leader, what he did to others and how he influenced situations (Bligh, 2011). The great man theory, developed in the 19th century, opined that leaders were born and not developed, and given this conclusion their decisions were viewed as sacrosanct by those that followed (Allio, 2013; Bass & Bass, 2008; Hoffman, Woehr, Maldagen-Youngjohn, & Lyons, 2011).

While participants did not share an absolutist view of the community college president as the great man/great woman of their organization, they did believe in a high degree of deference due to the leader's role and their understanding of the president as the final decision-maker. Participants were even deferential when they did not agree with the final decision a president made. Some participants shared that they would push back against a negative decision respectfully, but the breaking point was if ethical or moral concerns existed about the decision.

Uhl-Bien (2006) described an entity perspective of relational leadership, an emerging followership theory, where the leader is viewed by the follower through followers' attributes, perspectives, behaviors and actions in their interactions with the leader. Shamir (2007) provided examples of how followers constructed their followership and discussed their expectations,

values and attitudes as part of how followers determine the latitude of leader behavior. As followers considered their interactions with the leader in the leadership process, this introspection on attitudes, values and behaviors appeared to be part of participants' thinking in how to co-create leadership with their community college presidents.

Participant responses about deference were also surprising in light of an emphasis on shared governance in higher education. Shared governance has many definitions but it can be broadly defined as “the set of practices under which college faculty and staff participate in significant decisions concerning the operation of their institutions” (American Federation of Teachers, 2006). Shared governance is an historic organizational structure in colleges and universities that has evolved to include more representation in decision-making processes (Olson, 2009). While one might expect people outside of higher education to cite deference as a vital part of the leader/follower relationship, it was interesting to hear senior-level followers with many years of higher education experience discuss the importance of deference. The preference for deference versus shared governance among community college senior-level followers may be an outgrowth of the difficulty community colleges have in executing the shared governance structure. Levin (2000) found it arguable as to whether shared governance even exists in the community college, and (Ugah, 2017) found that in Maryland community colleges, the colleges of participants in this study, shared governance policies are not implemented as detailed in institutional policies and agreements.

Superordinate Theme Two: Informed and Interactive Decision-Making

The findings expressed that planning and gathering information, as well as conversation and collaboration, were part of the informed and interactive decision-making engaged in between senior-level followers and their presidents. Participants described how initiatives were brought

forward by senior-level followers, and that information gathering was often in response to questions from the president or an attempt to convince the president that a plan should be implemented. Participants also talked about how they interacted back-and-forth with their presidents, sometimes over long periods of time, to arrive at a decision. Collaboration was mentioned by some participants as an essential part of decision-making, and sometimes others outside the leader/follower relationship were brought in to fully inform a decision.

Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) described an emerging theory of followership known as the leadership process approach that focuses on the co-creation of leadership by both leaders and followers. Leadership process assumes that “leadership can only occur through combined acts of leading and following” and the interplay between leader and follower is paramount not the qualities or characteristics of the leader (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014, p. 99). While leadership process was apparent throughout the reflections provided by participants, it was very much on display in lived experiences shared about informed and interactive decision-making. The dynamics of interaction and conversation in the co-construction of leadership were part of what senior-level followers described as their understanding of leadership, and they discussed how this dialogue was foundational to their relationship with their presidents.

It was also interesting that the role of the senior-level follower impacted how each participant operated in the process of informed and interactive decision-making. Vice presidents and provosts talked more about how they brought plans and initiatives to presidents and advocated for those plans in conversation with the president, while the chief of staff and executive associate roles gathered information in order to help inform decision-making or to protect the president in the decision-making process.

The researcher was not surprised by the finding of informed and interactive decision-making, and in thinking about how leadership is co-created, the back-and-forth conversation and collaboration have always been a hallmark of good leadership between the researcher as a senior-level follower and the presidents to which he has reported. When informed and interactive decision-making was not present, and there was more emphasis on deference and the president's role in the hierarchy of the organization, the opportunity for bad and uninformed leadership as well as toxic leadership was given more life. Given the complexities of modern leadership in the community college and the potential impact of bad decision-making on funding, it's hard to imagine how leadership in the 21st century is created without planning, information gathering, conversation and collaboration.

Superordinate Theme Three: Vision and Mission

Senior-level followers shared that supporting the president's vision and a common belief in mission were important when co-creating leadership. The president's vision was equated with leadership by some participants, and as core to a senior-level follower's responsibility by others. Followers also saw their followership as starting with a common belief in mission, with both the president and senior-level follower having to share a sense of mission in order to effectively lead.

In the participants' responses regarding a president's vision, leader-centric approaches such as transformational leadership and charismatic leadership can be heard. Both involve the leader convincing followers to exceed expected organizational performance, and focusing on positive qualities such as vision, charisma and values (Diaz-Saenz, 2011; Li et al., 2017; Sy et al., 2018). While both transformational and charismatic leadership perpetuate the idea of leaders acting on followers, both also involve partnership between the leader and follower (Yukl, 1999). As senior-level followers and community college presidents create leadership together,

partnership is critical for the leadership process and leadership co-construction to take place. The participants' reflections indicate that it is possible for leader-centric approaches such as transformational and charismatic leadership to exist simultaneously with follower-centric approaches and emerging theories of followership.

Lipman-Blumen (2005) warned of the dangers that the leader's vision poses to organizations, and how a vision – good or bad – as well as leader qualities such as charisma can make followers more vulnerable:

Believing in the special, god-like qualities of the leader makes it difficult to evaluate his claims to mana. Because we believe so wholeheartedly in that individual, because we dedicate ourselves completely to helping the leader realize her vision, that vision – like any other self-fulfilling prophecy – is more likely to come true. Yet, we attribute most of the success to the leader's vision, not necessarily to our own efforts or other contextual circumstances. (p. 136)

Such dedication to a leader's vision can make a follower vulnerable, especially senior-level followers that have close relationships with their presidents and are committed to their vision.

Returning to the first pages of this study in chapter one it is not hard to comprehend how followers such as senior-level followers in the Penn State University child abuse scandal, dedicated to the vision of the university president and its football coach, become agents for perpetuating bad, and in that case, evil outcomes. While no such tragic outcomes exist because of the actions of senior-level followers in this study, the danger of basing leadership co-creation in the president's vision or the charismatic partnership to fulfill a common mission, are worthy of reflection by senior-level followers as they consider how they co-create leadership.

Superordinate Theme Four: Respectful Relationships

Participants discussed the need for respectful relationships in order to co-create leadership. Trust and honesty and integrity were all seen as vital to healthy, respectful relationships that resulted in positive leadership outcomes.

It was not surprising that trust and honesty and integrity were emergent themes when followers discussed what behaviors led to good leadership outcomes as they co-created leadership with their presidents. Trust is a critical element between leader and follower, and researchers have discussed the importance of trust in the workplace (Brower, Lester, Korsgaard, & Dineen, 2009; Roussin & Webber, 2012). Trust has also been found to promote a good leader/follower relationship. (Kanji & Moura e Sa', 2001). Likewise, effective leaders and effective followers have cited honesty as a key characteristic in studies about leadership and followership (Agho, 2009; Baker, Mathis, & Stites-Doe, 2011). Kouzes and Posner (2003) discussed the need for leaders to have integrity stating that such leaders “are truthful, are trustworthy, have character, and have convictions” (p. 12).

The researcher was not surprised that trust and honesty and integrity were of such importance to senior-level followers as they discussed leadership co-creation. The researcher's experience with three community college presidents suggests that trust, honesty and integrity have to be present in order to create good leadership. Without these behaviors it is difficult for the leader/follower relationship to function, and the dynamic defaults to the leader acting on the follower as discussed in historical studies of leadership and leader-centric approaches described in the literature. Leadership is not impossible when trust, honesty and integrity are absent, but it becomes something different, something much more focused on the leader instead of co-creation between leader and follower.

Additional Researcher Reflections

The findings developed as superordinate and emergent themes, and the findings discussed in chapter four and above are the bulk of what participants shared with the researcher. In

addition to these findings, there were other observations to share that shed light on the leader/follower relationship.

It was interesting that some senior-level followers stated they had not thought about their own followership until they agreed to participate in this study. Followership was described as a new concept by some, and others asked for a definition of followership as questions began in the interview process. The reactions to studying followership mirrored what is presented in the literature, namely that followership is something relatively new in leadership literature and little explored (Bligh, 2011; Kelley, 2008). The researcher was glad to hear positive comments from participants about the need to further reflect on their own followership, and for the need to study the concept further.

Another reflection as the researcher read and reread the interviews was that senior-level followers, all leaders in their own community colleges, referenced concepts and theories discussed in the literature on leadership and followership. Terms such as active leadership, leading from the heart, management by walking around, organizational culture, participatory governance, servant leadership, shared governance and toxic leadership were all mentioned by at least one participant. The terms used and discussed by senior-level followers indicated they were at least somewhat aware of the literature involving leaders and followers, and given their potential to become community college presidents as they move through their careers, it was comforting to hear from others what the researcher has been studying throughout his doctoral journey.

The researcher was pleasantly surprised by the number of participants that discussed the need for professional development with their followers. There was care and concern expressed for followers of the senior-level leaders that participated in this research, and discussion included

the need for honest and critical performance evaluations, planning and goal setting and professional development plans. In addition, the health and wellness of their followers was noted by some participants. As discussed in the next section on recommendations for future practice, the need for followers to engage in professional development is essential to building leader/follower relationships that produce good leadership outcomes.

Finally, as the researcher listened to the participants discuss their followership reflections regarding deference, particularly those that were struggling in relationships with their presidents, a toxic leadership experience from the past kept coming to the forefront of the researcher's thinking and was expressed in the notes on some participant transcripts. The methodology used in this study, interpretative phenomenological analysis, encourages the "interpretative commentary of the researcher" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 9).

Both Kellerman's (2004) text on bad leadership and Lipman-Blumen's (2005) thoughts on toxic leadership were mentioned in the reflexivity section of this study in chapter three, and this literature helped the researcher understand bad leader/follower experiences in his early career. Lipman-Blumen's analysis regarding toxic leadership kept coming to the forefront of the researcher's thinking as participants talked about deference to the president.

Lipman-Blumen (2005) described rationalizations and control myths that followers engage in to perpetuate a leader's actions including protecting the general status quo (pp. 125-138). The researcher has always wondered if through his followership he perpetuated a toxic leader's actions and it was deference to the leader, particularly his deference to the role and the status quo power dynamic of leader acting on a follower, which drove thinking at the time. As the researcher interviewed some participants, it was unavoidable to hear deference to the

president in their experiences as a potential gateway to bad leadership outcomes and the same type of toxic leader/follower relationship experienced by the researcher.

Recommendations for Future Practice

As discussed in chapter one, leadership in higher education is undergoing major transitions. Community colleges are in the midst of an unprecedented leadership crisis as leaders retire and the requirements of leadership change (Garza et al., 2008; Reille & Kezar, 2010; Taylor & Killacky, 2010; Tekle, 2012). With leadership transition and a better understanding of followership there is an opportunity in the community college sector for changes in presidential search processes, presidential competencies, followership development and leader/follower evaluation. The recommendations for community colleges below are based on the findings and literature in this study.

Followership in Search Processes

“It is essential that trustees and college community stakeholders recognize that the presidential search and selection process is much more than merely a hiring event” (Drake, 2009, p. 317). The American Association of Community Colleges (2016) refers to the presidential search process as a “strategic imperative which supports the college’s well-being, assets, reputation, value proposition, and integrity, all while advancing the institution toward students’ success” (p. 4). The board of trustees at community colleges has responsibility for hiring the president, and in the selection process generally focuses on traits and characteristics, competencies developed for presidential searches, fit with the institution and educational credentials (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013; Barwick, 2002; Drake, 2009; VanDerLinden, 2004; Viniar, 2007).

In this study's findings interactive and informed decision-making was described by participants as essential to the leadership process between them and their community college president. Conversation and collaboration were seen by participants as part of effectively co-creating leadership, particularly the back-and-forth conversations that led to decision-making. If successful leadership is no longer seen as a leader acting upon a follower, then the ability for senior-level followers to interact well with the president is vital to a community college's success.

While senior-level followers may be involved in serving on presidential search committees or meeting the candidates, there is no literature or known practices regarding any consideration in the community college presidential search process as to how prospective presidents and existing senior-level followers will work together to co-create leadership. The introduction of scenarios in which prospective candidates and senior-level followers engage with one another to solve a problem, much like the informed and interactive decision-making described in this study's findings, could provide insight into how leader and followers would co-create leadership. Alternatively, simply having opportunities for senior-level followers to engage with prospective presidential candidates in informal settings such as lunch could give trustees feedback in the search process regarding how the leader and senior-level followers would interact together.

Followership in Presidential Competencies

In response to the leadership crisis in community colleges, the American Association of Community Colleges developed competencies for community college leaders (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). These competencies have been used by colleges developing their own succession plans as well as community college leadership doctoral

programs, and were updated in 2013 (p. 1). Five competencies were created including (a) organizational strategy; (b) institutional finance, research, fundraising and organizational management; (c) communication; (d) collaboration; and (e) community college advocacy (pp. 6-11). In 2018 a third edition of the competencies was released organized by leader-type including competencies for aspiring CEOs, new CEOs and CEOs (American Association of Community Colleges, 2018).

Collaboration was the closest that the American Association of Community College (2013) competencies came to mentioning followers or followership and the competency is generally focused on developing “a culture of collaboration on the institution’s campus” (p. 10) and on collaborating in the community. In the third edition, collaboration was expanded upon to include interconnectivity and interdependence among “faculty, staff, and administrators in advancing student success initiatives” (p. 74) and the importance of institutional team building was noted (American Association of Community Colleges, 2018). The latest competencies did not reference how presidents and their senior-level followers should work together to co-create leadership.

The findings in this study show that collaboration between leader and follower within the president’s leadership team is important to a successful community college presidency, and that understanding followership and how leaders and followers interact is crucial to creating leadership. Given the increasing focus on followership in leadership studies and the findings in this study, the American Association of Community Colleges, organizations involved in developing chief executive officers and community college doctoral programs should consider the introduction of followership as a competency. Use of an emerging followership theory such as leadership process could be the basis for such a competency. Presidents will also operate as

followers as they co-create leadership with chancellors of state systems and boards of trustees, and mastering the competencies of taking action as a follower to co-create leadership as well as interacting with senior-level followers will benefit the leadership process for institutions.

Followership in Professional Development Programs

The third recommendation as a result of this study and followership literature is making changes to professional development programs for presidents and senior-level followers at community colleges. Eddy (2009) stressed the importance of leadership development in community colleges needing “to value different means of learning about leading” (p. 200).

Shamir (2007) discussed how the leadership process approach necessitates that you develop not only leaders but followers. If the leader is viewed as only one element of the leadership process, it makes sense that followers would have to be developed in order to effectively contribute to the leadership equation (Shamir, 2007, p. xxix). Hosking (2007) explained how leadership development programs are largely targeted at the individual versus nurturing relational processes between leaders and followers. Moving away from the leader-centric focus, Lunsford and Brown (2017) asserted that leader development efforts need to embrace the leadership process approach and address leaders, followers and interactions influenced by organizational context.

In this study the findings detailed how important interactions with the president were to senior-level followers in the leadership process. The dynamics of the relationship with community college presidents were impacted by acknowledgement of deference to the president’s role, shared understandings of presidential vision and mission as well as the characteristics of trust, honesty and integrity that forged respectful relationships. If as Agho (2009) demonstrated that leadership and followership are equally important and both leader and

follower can positively or negatively impact organizational effectiveness, leadership development programs that focus solely on the role of the leader miss one-half of the team creating leadership. Community colleges should ensure that presidents and senior-level followers engage in professional development together, and providers of leadership training should adjust their professional development programs to account for both parts of the leadership process.

Followership in Human Resources Evaluation

Leadership does not exist without followership (Hollander, 2009). Given this assessment of leadership community colleges should be concerned about whether followers are being effective, and whether leaders are engaging in the successful co-creation of leadership with their followers.

Job performance evaluations that do not assess whether followers are appropriately engaging in their followership, or only assess the leader's characteristics and behaviors, do not accurately reflect how leadership is being co-created. In addition, a focus solely on leader achievement neglects the active role that followers have in leadership co-creation and ignores their contributions to leader outcomes (Shamir, 2007). As community college human resource departments design employee performance appraisal systems, assessing employee followership and leader effectiveness in leadership co-creation should be part of what is defined as successful employee performance.

Suggestions for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to explore how community college senior-level leaders, who are also followers in relationship to their community college presidents, co-create the leadership process through their followership. A social constructivism approach based in the

emerging followership theory of leadership process was utilized for this study, and there are a multitude of opportunities for future research involving leadership process (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014, p. 99). Suggestions for future research here are opportunities for additional study of the leadership process approach in the context of community college leadership and followership.

Expanded Sample Populations

This study is delimited to senior-level followers reporting directly to a two-year college chief executive officer in the state of Maryland. New research spread across regions or conducted nationally may produce different results, and would gather additional information about the experiences and behaviors of senior-level followers. Senior-level followers in this study had reported to a community college president for at least three years, so studies on new senior-level followers and what they experience in their first year of co-creating leadership with their community college presidents may provide insight on how to develop follower behaviors and leadership co-creation between presidents and new followers. A longitudinal analysis could study how followership behaviors and leadership co-creation with a president change over time.

Homogeneity

Senior-level followers were defined in this study as reporting directly to a president. Initially participants were expected to be limited to vice presidents of academic and student affairs, but it was suggested during the researcher's proposal meeting that the potential pool of participants be increased to account for a fairly small number of academic and student affairs vice presidents in Maryland community colleges. This alteration to the proposed study proved to be prescient as there was some difficulty in procuring participants even after the sample population was expanded to other college areas due to the amount of turnover occurring in senior-level administration at the time of the study.

The enlargement of the sample population allowed for two positions, chief of staff and executive associate, to be included in the study and while their reflections and lived experiences were extremely valuable to this research as explained in the findings, they sometimes had different follower experiences than vice presidents. One participant explained that “many, many vice presidents are working to ultimately become presidents . . . and many times they have experience and responsibilities that are equal to the president.” In addition, both participants that were not vice presidents viewed their position as deferring to the president and protecting the president.

In a future study, narrowing the sample population to vice presidents may help further explore followership behaviors in the co-creation of the leadership process and provide greater homogeneity to the sample population. Smith et al. (2009) and Creswell (2013) both urge researchers in interpretative phenomenological analysis to strive for homogeneity in their sample populations. In addition, limiting a sample population to vice presidents may illuminate followership behaviors in the leadership process that result from their desire to eventually become presidents. As explained in the statement of the problem in chapter one, one of the needs for this study was the leadership transition occurring in community colleges and to understand how future presidents view followership. Limiting the sample population to vice presidents that are interested in eventually becoming presidents could add to the richness of a future study.

President’s Perspective

This study only shares lived experiences from participants that are senior-level followers, and does not provide the perspectives of presidents as they co-create leadership with their followers. Future studies could engage presidents as the participants and mirror the questions

used in this study to explore their lived experiences with senior-level followers. Presidents that advanced to the presidency from senior-level leadership in the community college sector could share their followership experiences as senior-level followers before becoming presidents. In addition, future studies that explored leader/follower dyads and their lived experiences as they co-created leadership would assist in the discovery of how leadership is co-created.

One participant in this study served as acting president of a college while the president was unavailable. He briefly recounted his experience as a leader working with senior-level followers, and he described his interactions with the board of trustees as a follower in creating leadership with them. A future study could explore the followership experiences and behaviors of presidents as they co-create leadership with their boards of trustees.

Quantitative Approaches

The predominant methodological approach in the study of leadership has been quantitative studies focused on individual perspectives of leaders, or follower reactions to the actions of leaders (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). One of the reasons for the choice of a qualitative approach in this study was to add to the dearth of qualitative studies on followership, and to align the ontology and epistemology of the leadership process model with a constructivist approach (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014).

Though more qualitative studies on the co-creation of leadership and followership behaviors need to be conducted, quantitative approaches are also required. Studies of followership behavior effectiveness, discerning patterns in the co-creation of leadership and correlations between followership behaviors and outcomes in the leadership process are just some of the quantitative studies that could be conducted to expand the literature on followership.

Concluding Statement

This study focused on the lived experiences and followership behaviors of senior-level followers in the co-creation of the leadership process with their community college presidents. The research comes at a time when community colleges face a leadership crisis created by retirements, the failure to adequately plan for leader succession, and a lack of interest from academic leadership in positions that are now much more focused on government relations and fundraising. It is also a time when perceptions of leadership are changing and hierarchical notions of leadership are giving way to thoughts of leadership as collaborative and being a product of partnership and mutual influence.

As new leaders assume college presidencies or prepare to become future leaders, it is important to look at leadership in new ways. The study of followership provides an opportunity to view leadership through a new lens, and to understand how leaders and followers work together to co-create leadership. The lived experiences of senior-level followers reporting to a community college president were explored in this study, and the findings conveyed senior-level followers that believe deference to the president, informed and interactive decision-making, vision and mission and respectful relationships are important followership experiences and behaviors with their community college presidents. The study provided recommendations on how followership can become more ingrained in community college presidential selection processes, leadership development programs and employee performance evaluations, as well as suggestions for future research regarding how leadership is co-created by leaders and followers in the community college.

Leadership changes are happening at community colleges across the nation, and more changes are to come in a volatile, uncertain and complex higher education environment. The

participants in this study have added to an understanding of followership experiences and behaviors that increase the literature on followership in higher education, have shared insights for senior-level followers considering the community college presidency and have assisted leaders and followers as they consider how to best co-create leadership for their community colleges.

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APPENDIX A



Research Integrity & Compliance Review Office
Office of Vice President for Research
Fort Collins, CO 80523-2011
(970) 491-1553
FAX (970) 491-2293

Date: 11/26/2018

To: Leann Kaiser, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, School of Education
Bryan Newton, Doctoral Student, School of Education

From: IRB Coordinator, Research Integrity & Compliance Review Office
(RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu)

Re: An Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Senior-Level Community College
Followers in the Co-Creation of the Leadership Process

Funding: None

IRB ID: 081-19H **Review Date:** November 26, 2018
This project is valid from three years from the review date.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) Coordinator has reviewed this project and has declared the study exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations with conditions as described above and as described in [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)](#):

Category 2 - Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation

The IRB determination of exemption means that:

- **This project is valid for three years from the initial review.** After the three years, the file will be closed and no further research should be conducted. If the research needs to continue, please let the IRB Coordinator know before the end of the three years. You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.
- You must carry out the research as proposed in the Exempt application, including obtaining and documenting (signed) informed consent if stated in your application or if required by the IRB.
- Any modification of this research should be submitted to the IRB through an email to the IRB Coordinator, prior to implementing any changes, to determine if the project still meets the Federal criteria for exemption.
- Please notify the IRB Coordinator (RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu) if any problems or complaints of the research occur.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review by the IRB. **Only the IRB or designee may make the determination of exemption**, even if you conduct a similar study in the future.

APPENDIX B

E-mail Correspondence to Prospective Participants

Dear Participant,

My name is Bryan Newton and I am a researcher from Colorado State University in the School of Education. We are conducting a research study examining how community college senior-level leaders, who are also followers in relationship to their community college presidents, co-create the leadership process through their followership. Followership is defined by the study as the nature and impact of followers and following in the leadership process. The title of our project is *An Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Senior-Level Community College Followers in the Co-Creation of the Leadership Process*.

The Principal Investigator is Leann Kaiser, Ph.D., School of Education and the Co-Principal Investigator is Bryan Newton, School of Education. In the interest of full disclosure, it should be noted that Bryan Newton is also a senior-level leader at Wor-Wic Community College in Salisbury, Maryland.

We would like you to take part in an informal interview with the Co-Principal Investigator via Skype conferencing software. The interview will be recorded and transcribed. Participation will take approximately 60-90 minutes. Soon after the interview you will also be asked to review a transcript for accuracy and clarity. Both the interview and the review should take a maximum of three hours of your time. Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participation at any time without penalty.

In order to be part of this study, you must meet the following criteria:

- Be a current senior-level leader at a community college
- Report directly to a community college chief executive officer (president)
- Have at least three years of experience reporting directly to a community college chief executive officer (president)

We will publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private. All participant identifiers will be replaced with pseudonyms. We will record audio/video interviews using Skype conferencing software, and use a digital audio recorder as a safeguard, to accurately produce transcripts. The recordings will be shared with a professional transcriptionist that is not affiliated with any higher education institution. Once transcribed, the Skype recordings will be maintained in a password protected file on a computer with Norton anti-virus and firewall protection. The digital audio recorder will be stored in a locked file cabinet when not in use. All video and audio recordings will be destroyed at the conclusion of this study.

While there are no direct benefits to you, there is a benefit of adding to the growing literature on followership in hope of better understanding the leadership dynamic between leaders and followers. In addition, the study may also help higher education organizations and presidential search committees understand more about potential community college presidents, and how they will interact with those that they will lead.

There are no known risks associated with this study. If you agree to participate you will need to complete the attached Consent to Participate in a Research Study form and return it before the interview begins. Electronic copies of the completed form will be accepted.

If you would like to participate or have any questions, please contact Bryan Newton at bnewton@worwic.edu; 803-508-1561. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu; 970-491-1553.

Sincerely,

Leann Kaiser, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Colorado State University

Bryan Newton
Doctoral Student
Colorado State University

APPENDIX C

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: An Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Senior-Level Community College Followers in the Co-Creation of the Leadership Process

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Leann Kaiser, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, School of Education, leann.kaiser@colostate.edu; (307) 760-9282

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Bryan Newton, Doctoral Student, School of Education, bnewton@worwic.edu; (803) 508-1561

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? You have been asked to participate in this research study because you are a senior-level leader at a Maryland community college.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? The study will be conducted by the co-principal investigator, Bryan Newton, a doctoral student working on a dissertation study. In the interest of full disclosure, it should be noted that Bryan Newton is also a senior-level leader at Wor-Wic Community College in Salisbury, Maryland. The principal investigator, Dr. Leann Kaiser, will be available for support in all phases of the study, including data collection and analysis.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? The purpose of this study is to examine how community college senior-level leaders, who are also followers in relationship to their community college presidents, co-create the leadership process through their followership.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? You will participate in a 60-90 minute interview via Skype conferencing software and the interview will also be digitally recorded as a safeguard to avoid losing content. You will be invited to review the transcript of the interview for accuracy and clarity. You will also receive a copy of the study upon its completion.

You will be contacted via e-mail messages or phone calls to arrange the logistics of the interview, particularly place and time. Your total time commitment including review of the transcript will be no more than three hours.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? You will be asked to answer several interview questions relating to your experience as a senior-level leader at a community college. The interviews will be informal and you are encouraged to speak openly and honestly about your experiences. Once a transcript of our interview has been prepared, you will be asked to review it to make sure it is accurate and clearly reflects our conversation.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? You should only participate in this study if you are a current senior-level leader reporting to the chief executive officer (president) in a community college, and you have reported directly to a chief executive officer (president) for three or more years.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS? There are no known risks or discomforts to participation in this study. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? There are no direct benefits to you associated with this research. There is a benefit of adding to the growing literature on followership in hope of better understanding the leadership dynamic between leaders and followers. In addition, the study may also help higher education organizations and presidential search committees understand more about potential community college presidents, and how they will interact with those that they will lead.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE? We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law.

For this study, we will assign each participant a pseudonym and the only place your name will appear in our records is on the consent form and in our Excel file which links you to your pseudonym. The Excel file containing a link from your pseudonym to personally identifiable information will be held on a different computer than the computer storing data. Only the research team will have access to the link between you, your pseudonym and your data. The only exception to this is if we are asked to share the research files for audit purposes with the CSU Institutional Review Board ethics committee, if necessary.

CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY? You will be scheduled for an interview at a time that is convenient for you, however, we know issues may arise that would necessitate a change in schedule. Should this occur, the interview will be rescheduled once. If a participant is unable to participate in the rescheduled interview, they may be removed from the study.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS? Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the co-principal investigator, Bryan Newton at bnewton@worwic.edu; 803-508-1561. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu; 970-491-1553. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

APPENDIX D

Semi-structured Interview Questions

Grounding Questions

1. How long have you served in your current position? How many years have you reported directly to a community college chief executive officer?
2. Tell me about your background in higher education.
3. Tell me about your most memorable experience as a leader.

Central Questions

4. Please describe your leadership. What does leadership mean to you?
5. Please describe your followership. What does your followership mean to you?
6. How would you describe your process of leading as a senior-level community college leader?
7. Think about how you and your president lead the college together. What is the process you engage in with him/her to create leadership?
8. Think about a time when you and your president made a decision together for the college. Describe the conversation between you and your president that led to the decision.
9. Think about a time when you and your president agreed on a decision for the college. Describe the process of making that decision and the behaviors you engaged in while making that decision.
10. Think about a time when you and your president did not agree on a decision for the college. Describe the process of making that decision and the behaviors you engaged in while making that decision.
 - a. Would you describe the outcome as leadership? Please explain why.
 - b. How did you feel about the decision since you did not agree?
 - c. How did the outcome impact future decision-making with your president?
11. What behaviors in the leadership process have you experienced while being a senior-level community college leader that resulted in good outcomes? Bad outcomes?

12. What behaviors have you experienced in the leadership process while being a follower in your current role that resulted in good outcomes? Bad outcomes?