

DISSERTATION

COMMUNITY COLLEGE ONLINE LEARNING ADMINISTRATORS: HOW THEY  
MAKE SENSE OF THEIR JOURNEY

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

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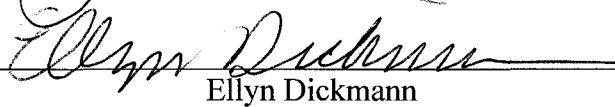
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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY JODENE DEKORTE ENTITLED COMMUNITY COLLEGE ONLINE LEARNING ADMINISTRATORS: HOW THEY MAKE SENSE OF THEIR JOURNEY BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.


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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### COMMUNITY COLLEGE ONLINE LEARNING ADMINISTRATORS: HOW THEY MAKE SENSE OF THEIR JOURNEY

This study examined the journey of community college online learning administrators. A phenomenological approach was used to answer the primary question of what is the essence of the life and professional experiences that influenced these administrators in their work. Ten participants from across the country were interviewed in relation to their experiences as online learning administrators. Participants were chosen as those having two to ten years experience as an online learning administrators at a community college with a student body of no more than 15,000 students. Data was collected through two in-depth interviews using a broad open-ended question interview format.

Analysis revealed that there were five main themes. First, barriers were the experiences or items that were difficult for the participants in their current position. Second, actions, were described as how the participants work in their current positions and how they see themselves leading. The third theme, observation of leadership, discusses what characteristics of leadership the participants have seen in superiors and how they view those people to be good or poor leaders. Fourth, working with groups, describes how the participants work with groups not only within their institutions but also within their community and state areas. Finally, current position, deals with the day-to-day details of the participants' jobs and their decision making process. One overarching phenomenon came out through all the main themes and subthemes, the essence of, people matter.

Research of distance learning leadership is not as complete as other topics in administrative issues; more studies are needed around the connections from administrative actions to student success and what role administrators play. Additionally, a grounded theory study to determine a possible leadership style specifically focusing on the essence of people matter and online learning may help grow this area for future leaders. Finally, this study and further research may help community colleges in selecting the best candidates with the paramount skills for these types of positions for online learning.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Researcher's Reflections

Everyone has a history, personal, professional, and educational. Everyone has a way of understanding how the world came to be, its design, and people's place in it. Everyone has a system of beliefs that determines how they approach and judge things that they encounter, whether in the form of beliefs, knowledge, and/or experiences. It is through many experiences that people begin to develop their own belief system and their own world view and how they see and interpret the world around them. I will attempt here to share with the reader, my world view in relation to my study: Community College Online Learning Administrators: How they make sense of their journey. I will discuss my own experiences with community colleges, the internet and online learning environments, my beliefs about education and online teaching, my personal beliefs, and my experiences with administrators.

#### *My Experience with Community Colleges*

My experience with community colleges began as a student. As a senior in high school, the time came to attend college or not, for me it was an easy decision. I wanted to go to school. However, choosing which school to attend: that was another story. I wanted what a lot of 18 year olds want; I wanted to move out of my parents' house, move away, go to a large university, meet a lot of new people, and be "free." However, my parents had other thoughts. They encouraged me to go to school, but they also encouraged (ok, required) me to pay for it myself. That meant that unless I was going to

get a full ride scholarship, and a great paying part time job, I wasn't going to that large university.

I didn't give up hope completely. Our community had a small community college nearby. With a couple of small scholarships; I thought for sure I could afford the community college. However, that meant I would not get everything on my "want list." I still wanted to move out, remember? So I moved about 30 miles away, to go to school at a somewhat larger community college.

While the community college was not my first option, nor did my parents think that the community college was the best education and way for me to go, it was however, the most affordable for me at the time. "Money talks" as they say. I had a great experience at the community college. I still was able to do all the things I wanted, I moved away, I met many new people, I had a great education, and I was "free." Looking back now that I am older and wiser, I thank my parents for helping me make that decision. I came from a small high school; and the smaller friendlier community college atmosphere was perfect for that transition. It helped me adapt to college life and the educational experience was fulfilling. I received a wonderful education, and my classes were stimulating and challenging. The classes were smaller; the instructors knew who I was and what I wanted to study. I didn't know it at the time but they were involved members of the community, they often saw and spoke to me at my job, and at other areas around the community, and they were committed to the mission of the community college.

After I completed my two-year degree at the community college, I did go to the larger university and finished my bachelor's degree. Several years later, I was married,

and had moved to another city, when I noticed the local community college where we lived. On a whim, I thought, I could teach there part time and bring in a little extra cash. I loved it. The community college was really where I found a passion for working with students. My passion was also shared by almost everyone who worked at the college. I stayed with the community college and left my other teaching obligations, and made the community college my full- time occupation for seven years. While in the midst of this study, I was offered and accepted a full time administrative position at a large for profit private online institution, however, I still teach one class each semester through the state community college system.

### ***My Experience With the Internet and Online Learning***

I completed my master's degree at a time when people were just beginning to research using the internet. It was during that time in 1997, that I saw "Yahoo Personals" for the first time; this was before e-harmony and other online dating services. I was doing some research, using Yahoo as my search engine when I saw the personals link. I thought "Who posts things on Yahoo Personals?" Yes, some were creepy as I expected, except for one, it was Kevin's. I said to myself, "Ok this is dumb," but I created an alias and emailed him through Yahoo personals and we talked there for a couple of months, then exchanged real emails, then talked on the phone several times and decided to meet. A year and a half later we were married and have been happily married for over nine years. It was also during this time that I took my first class on the Internet and learned how to use email and search engines effectively. I also created my first webpage during my Masters program.

When I began teaching at the community college I was asked to teach a class using a software package called Academic Systems. Two years later, I offered my first online class. When I was asked to teach online I thought, “How would this work without seeing my students at least twice a week to keep them on track? How would they and I handle it?” I know correspondence classes and teaching had been happening for a long time, but I did not have any experience with it. I thought to myself, “If I found my husband this way, how bad could online learning be?”

I set a plan to have my class ready by the spring semester. However, due to the great student interest and demand for this course online, I was asked to have it ready for fall. It was a lot of pressure to create an entire course and prepare it that fast, but I did it and much to my surprise, I loved it. I found I often could learn more about my students and get to know them on a much more personal level online than I did in the classroom. After eight years, I still enjoy teaching online.

I have also been a student of online learning. Much of my doctoral program was done in an online format. Our classes met once a week by phone, and one Friday a month also by phone. The rest of our discussions occurred within the online learning environment. I have learned a lot about teaching online by being a student in this setting. One of the most important things that the student experience has shown me is how important it is for me as an instructor to respond quickly to student questions and concerns. Since online learning can have an inherent delay, minimizing this delay for students can do a lot to help them feel more comfortable within the online learning environment. I have also learned that a timely response to students makes them feel as if they are a valued member of the online classroom.

### ***My Beliefs About Education and Online Teaching***

I believe all people should be treated with respect and should have the opportunity to grow in their fields, in whatever direction they choose is in their best interest. I believe all students should have the opportunity to learn. I know many are busy with family and work, which means that online learning without the regular time constraints of classroom learning works best for them at a time they can “go to class.”

My online teaching philosophy is simple. I believe the role of the online instructor is to help students acquire new knowledge by the learning of new concepts and ideas. Within an online learning environment, I believe that the community around the class needs to be developed to encourage the students to interact with one another and the instructor. I believe in life-long learning and empowering the student to take responsibility for their learning. The professor’s role in an online environment is a facilitator to the class, guiding the way that the class should proceed. She should offer encouragement and get students on track when necessary. The instructor should also be available to assist students when they need additional instruction. My goal is to allow the students to see how the skills that I present can be applied within their life.

I believe that there are three top characteristics of a good online instructor. The first characteristic is effective communication. The instructor must have strong written communication skills in order to be successful. I believe the online instructor must be able to communicate a safe, open, and inviting atmosphere in the online course in order to establish and continuously build a sense of community. The second characteristic is understanding adult learning theories. It is well known that the typical online student is often an adult returning to school to gain new knowledge to advance in his career.

Therefore, I feel it is critical to understand adult learners and their learning styles.

Finally, the good online instructor believes in life-long learning. I believe that online instructors should be an expert within their field. They should be actively learning to understand the changing needs of students within the online learning environment.

Instructors should understand the technology used within the course, the importance of building a community, and the time commitment necessary for success.

### ***My Personal Beliefs***

I am a very personal and private person. I understand that many times it is the small experiences that have led people to pursue a new or different area or field. I, for example, at first felt pushed to create the online courses, but now I see what a blessing that was for me, and how I have grown with the experiences not only in my online classes, but with my classroom courses and a new online administrative role as well. I also have strong expectations of myself, and push myself to continue to grow and learn within the field of online learning and education.

### ***Administrators***

Most people have worked for effective bosses and ineffective bosses. Within my career, I have had the opportunity to experience and work for what I feel to be both effective and ineffective administrators. I think all administrators should treat their subordinates with respect. I believe they should guide them, and help them to grow professionally. I was given the opportunity to be a leader at my previous institution in the online world. I was the college wide online lead for all online mathematics and education courses. I am now an academic department chair for the mathematics department, at my current institution. This is my first fully administrative position

guiding the department. These are some of the reasons I have felt the need to discover the experiences of other online learning administrators. What has brought them to the online learning arena? Are there shared experiences that bring people to the world of online learning at community colleges?

### **Dissertation Organization**

This dissertation will describe a research project, and will consist of six chapters. Chapter one, will describe my own personal reflections, including my personal experiences within community colleges and with online learning, and why I chose to do this study. This chapter will also will provide a discussion of how the literature led me to my study, a description of my research problem, my research questions, it will show a need for this research, and the researcher's perspective. Chapter two will contain a literature review. The literature review will discuss the American community college, online courses, and leadership theories. Chapter three will present my research design and methodology. The fourth chapter will introduce the reader to my participants helping the reader understand each participant's individual perspectives. Chapter five will discuss my data analysis and results and finally, chapter six will discuss the essence of the study as well as connections to the literature and implications for future studies.

### **Basis of the Study**

Online course offerings continue to increase rapidly with no sign of decreasing. Allen and Seaman (2004) found that 1.9 million students were enrolled in online courses in the fall of 2003, with 2.6 million students predicted by fall 2004. Allen and Seaman also found that the majority of schools felt that online learning was critical to their

strategy. In their 2007 survey, Allen and Seaman (2007) found there were almost 3.5 million students taking at least one online class in the fall of 2006. Lape and Hart (1997), reported that many of the respondents to their survey of leaders of the 29 community colleges in Michigan, felt distance education was important to their institution. Allen and Seaman (2004) also found that “the Associates degree granting institutions have the largest number of students taking at least one online course, representing about half of all the students studying online” (p. 7). In their 2007 survey, they found, “two-year associate’s institutions have the highest growth rates and account for over one-half of all online enrollments for the last five years” (p. 1). Community Colleges continue to expand these offerings and continue to meet the needs of their students.

As Vaughan (2000) and Cohen and Brawer (2003) stated, part of the mission of America’s community colleges is to provide access. Online courses provide a means for many students to take course work without having to go to the institution, thus providing one method of access for community college students. Therefore, with the increase in online course and program offerings at community colleges, (Allen & Seaman, 2004; Carnevale, 2001) institutions may be faced with the need to continue to change and expand their mission.

Community colleges have met the need of their students and are now offering many online courses (Allen & Seaman, 2003, 2004, 2007). With that increase of offerings, schools must now learn to properly administer those courses. They will need to have strong programs, and thus strong online learning administrators. Several authors have discussed the need to learn about the type of leadership styles that would be most effective in online learning administration (Beaudoin, 2003; Compura, 2003; Eddy,

Murphy, Spaulding, & Chandras, 1997; Floyd, 2003; Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005). The various types of leadership that these authors consider will be discussed in chapter two of this dissertation.

As I studied the research, I found that there were many publications about online learning. (Allen & Seaman, 2004; Carnevale, 2001; Conrad & Donaldson, 2004; Hoffman, 2003a, 2003b; Husmann & Miller, 2001; Lape & Hart, 1997; Maeroff, 2002; Palloff & Pratt, 1999, 2001, 2003; Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2002; Shapiro & Hughes, 2002; Simpson, 2003). However, only a handful discussed online learning leadership and how the type of leadership for online learning may be different than leadership for traditional learning (Beaudoin, 2003; Brown, 2002; Compora, 2003; Eddy, Murphy, Spaulding, & Chandras, 1997; Floyd, 2003; Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005; Marcus, 2004; Olson, 2002). This is the impetus of my research problem.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

I never thought I would be where I am in the online learning world. I was going to “just teach” in the classroom forever. I never anticipated what would happen with technology and how that would change how and when students would learn. I would guess that many online community college administrators also did not start out in the online learning arena. What were their experiences that brought them to their current positions? What were their experiences with different leadership styles? What leadership styles do they see themselves using? What are their leadership philosophies, experiences, and beliefs? I believe the answers to some of these questions can be best answered with qualitative research. I wanted to learn about community college administrators and how they came to be where they are, and how they make sense of their

journey. A quantitative method of study would not have worked well for my study, as it could not give me the in depth understanding that I desired about my participants experiences. Hence, I used a qualitative method of study.

I believed that a phenomenological method would be a useful tool for understanding the meaning of my participants' experiences. Creswell (1998), said “a *phenomenological study* describes the meaning of the *lived experiences* for several individuals about a concept or *the phenomenon*” (p. 51). Likewise, Moustakas (1994), described a phenomenological study as a procedure of studying several individuals to develop patterns and relationships of meaning. For this study, I believed that this method of research will allow me to understand the meaning and essence of my participants' experiences. Therefore, I did a phenomenological study of the life and professional experiences of online learning community college administrators. Are there similarities, in those experiences? I believed that asking a small group of people in that field what their life and professional experiences have been, would be helpful in learning about how they came to the position in which they were serving during the study.

### **Research Questions**

The primary research question for my phenomenology research study was what is the essence of the life and professional experiences that influenced these administrators in their work? The sub-questions were: What were their experiences that brought them here? What were their experiences with different leadership styles? What leadership styles do they see themselves using? What are their leadership philosophies, experiences, and beliefs? What central themes emerge? What specific interaction and conditions have

been influential for these people? What are the resulting strategies and outcomes they currently use in their positions?

### **Need or Significance**

My literature review shows that there is a need for research in the area of online learning administrative leadership. While there is a tremendous amount of research in the area of best practices of teaching online courses, there is very little research in the area of leadership for online learning administrators.

The findings from this study may be used to further the knowledge on online learning administrators at community colleges. An understanding of online learning administrators at community colleges may help community colleges select the best candidates to serve in these roles. It may also help community colleges and institutions of higher education better understand the types of leaders and leadership styles that are best suited to online learning environments, as well as what types of training and development may be necessary for online learning administrators.

### **Researcher's Perspective**

A researcher perspective and explanation of biases is essential to a well thought out phenomenological study. I know, as a researcher, I brought many biases to this study, and it was necessary for me to monitor these to fully engage in the understanding of the experiences of community college online learning administrators and their lived and professional experiences. I was involved in community colleges for seven years. I found them to be a place for students to engage in various learning techniques and topics. During that time, I served in various leadership positions within my department. I served for four years as the department chair of the mathematics and education department. I

also served one and a half years as the online lead for all mathematics and education courses college-wide.

During the entire seven years I was involved in the community college system, I also was an instructor in the classroom as well as online. In the past year, I have served in a fully administrative online position. In these positions, I learned a lot about leadership. I have developed my own leadership style that works for me and my personality based on the experiences I have had in this position, as well as what I have learned in my coursework for my PhD. However, I needed to put aside my preconceived notions about leadership at the community colleges. When I interviewed my participants, I put aside my predetermined conclusions and observed what the participant experienced.

### **Conclusion**

Chapter one provided the framework of this study. It provided an overview and introduction to my study. I have shared stories from my life, to give the reader an understanding of my own journey and how I have experienced online learning. I have used this to show why I have such a great interest in this area of study. I have also provided a justification for my study. Chapter one also provided significance of this study, statement of the problem(s), and research questions. In the next chapter, I will discuss the relevant literature to provide an expanded discussion for my study.

## CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

Institutions today are feeling pressure to offer online courses and programs, and as a result online course offerings are growing across the nation. Bruce Chaloux, director of the Southern Regional Education Board's Electronic Campus recently estimated that "today only 10 to 15 percent of all colleges and universities in the United States have avoided creating significant online programs" (as cited in Carnevale, 2001, ¶2). The trend has continued and the last few years have seen a dramatic increase in online education across campuses nationwide

Today, institutions may be moving toward online learning, not because it is more suitable, but because it is likely to attract more students and generate additional profits. Because online courses and programs are becoming more common in higher education, I am interested in what the literature said about community college administrative leaders responsible for online education. Is administrative leadership in online education a unique type of leadership? Do leaders need to change their focus from the issues around technology to a larger view of the impact of technology within the institution? In this chapter, I will review the literature concerning three major themes.

The first major theme, I will explore is "The American Community College." In this section, I will first discuss the history and mission of the American community college. Next, I will discuss demographics of the American community college. Finally, I will explore the future context of American community colleges.

In my second theme, “Online Courses” I will discuss a brief history of distance learning. Then I will discuss online learning communities, delivery methods, and communication tools used in online courses.

My third theme is “Leadership Theories”. Within this theme, I will discuss several sub-themes in relation to leadership theories. The sub-themes are (a) types of leadership that affect the distance learning leader, (b) essential qualities of an effective distance learning leader, (c) an emerging distance learning leadership model and (d) the need for further research. These three themes will give the reader the background they need to understand the issues around online learning leadership as related to the community college.

### **The American Community College**

In order to discuss administration of online learning within the American Community College, it is important to have an understanding of the history, mission, demographics, and the future of the American Community College. This literature indicates there are many issues affecting the American Community College today as it tries to achieve its mission.

#### ***History and Mission***

The American Community College has many roots in our nation’s history as the demand for access for a college education grew. Community colleges often branched off of area high schools and provided a way to offer students the first two years of college without leaving the community. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, 2006), since the first community colleges began in the early 1900’s, the

number of community colleges has grown to over 1100 institutions enrolling over 11 million students.

As the number of community colleges grew, the mission of the community college expanded. Today's community colleges serve students on their terms in unique ways. Open access has been a major impetus for developing institutions of higher education, particularly the community college. According to Vaughan (2000), the community college mission is "to provide access to postsecondary educational programs and services that lead to strong, more vital communities" (p. 3). Vaughan discussed how open access and equity, comprehensiveness, community, teaching and learning, and life-long learning shape this mission. This account concurred with Cohen and Brawer's (2003) view that most community colleges include "academic preparation, vocational-technical education, continuing education, developmental education, and community service" (p. 20). Today's comprehensive community college is a result from the expansion of the community college mission in America.

### ***Demographics***

It is important to understand the student body at the American comprehensive community college. According to Cohen and Brawer (2003), "two words sum up the students: *number* and *variety*" (p. 37). According to the AACC (2006), currently there are 11.6 million students enrolled at community colleges. Of those students 60% are enrolled part time. The type of student that the American community college serves is generally different than a four-year university. Typically, the four-year university student will come from an immediate family that includes a college graduate (Vaughan, 2000). Bragg (2001), agreed with Vaughan stating, the typical community college student is a

first generation student. She expanded on this description of the average community college student when she noted the student as more likely to be an older adult female, attending part time due to work and family commitments.

Vaughan (2000) also expanded on his description of the typical community college student. He felt that today more students are citizens first, and students second. This means that while college attendance is important, it depends on availability of time and money. Cohen and Brawer (2003) agreed and said that many in the community college student population would not attend college were it not for the two-year institution.

### ***Future Context***

Community Colleges continue to try new things to keep up with student demands (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Vaughan, 2000). Some institutions have considered expanding their offerings to include bachelor's degrees (Vaughan, 2000). Cohen and Brawer (2003) said the "areas of community education most promising for future development are those that have taken the community colleges away from their higher education affiliation." The mission of the community college will continue to expand as it tries to meet the needs of its students. As this mission expands, so will how and when courses are offered and technology may play a role in that change.

Technology is also impacting the role of the community college, though how much is still somewhat in question. Cohen and Brawer (2003) believed that "regardless of the spread of multimedia, interactive media, and other distance-learning technologies that are currently available, classroom-centered instruction will not only not disappear, it will not even diminish very much as a percentage of instructional effort" (p. 417).

Vaughan (2000) noted however that, “Because of the convenience it affords, more students will want to take distance education courses” (p. 28). The vastness of distance learning has blurred the lines of college service regions allowing students from virtually anywhere to enroll at the institution of their choice. Because of this technological development, the growth of private sector institutions may also impact attendance at a community college (Vaughan, 2000). Because, the community college is unique in higher education in that its mission is to serve all, how will administrative leaders respond to the needs of their community? If they do not respond with new program and course offerings will people seek out other educational opportunities? How will private industry and education affect how students choose education? Since online education is borderless, how will this impact funding and service areas? These are all difficult questions for online learning administrators.

## **Online Courses**

### ***History***

Students have taken courses from a distance for many years. First, students enrolled in correspondence courses, then tele-courses, and now online courses. Distance education has a long history within the higher education community, but in this section I will focus on the version of distance education delivered via the Internet or online courses. In these courses, the student is working on a computer and interfacing with the class and the instructor primarily with email and discussion groups.

Rudestam and Scholenholz-Read (2002) gave a brief history of distance education and stated that the use of computers for assisting education can be traced to the 1960s. Computer conferencing systems, developed by Turoff in 1970, are the forerunners for

today's online course content management systems. Since that time, educators have adapted e-mail and computer conferencing into educational environments. Now, traditional boundaries such as geography and synchronous, in person class meetings no longer impede student participation in higher education.

During the transformation from traditional correspondence to online learning, there was controversy over the reliability, pedagogical acceptance, and quality of the courses (Maeroff, 2002; Palloff & Pratt, 2001). However, Palloff and Pratt (2001) stated, "regardless of the debate, distance education is a phenomenon that is here to stay" (p. 4). Online learning is likely to continue to expand within institutions.

### ***Online Learning Communities***

In order to have a successful online learning program, institutions and instructors need to create online learning communities (Palloff & Pratt, 1999, 2003). Many authors believe that to create a successful online learning community, the instructor must prepare for the community before the course begins (Beaubien, 2002; Rheingold, 1998; Maeroff, 2003). Maeroff (2002), Palloff and Pratt (2003), and Hofmann (2003) discussed the need for the instructor to create a course that recognizes the diversity of the online students as well as to create a course that will motivate the students. There are a variety of different methods and tools available to the instructor, who must decide which delivery methods and communication tools will be best used by the class.

Research from current practitioners in distance learning shows that a productive online learning community requires input from both the instructor and the student (Hoffman, 2003a; Palloff & Pratt, 2003). The instructor's role is to encourage and support the students' learning opportunities within the course. The instructor also defines

the structure and expectations for building the online learning community, and then guides the community. It is the students' responsibilities to actively participate within the online course and to assist in making the online learning community prosper. One way that students and instructors make a learning community work, is by using many different delivery method and communication tools within the online course.

### ***Delivery Methods and Communication Tools in Online Courses***

The communication tools used within the course facilitate students building connections to the course. Communication within the online learning environment is extremely important. Instructors and students must work together to help maintain and support the learning community within their class (Hoffman, 2003a; Palloff & Pratt, 1999, 2003). There are many communication tools and delivery methods for an instructor to choose from, but most delivery methods and tools fall into two categories, synchronous and asynchronous.

***Synchronous systems.*** Synchronous systems are those which enable simultaneous interaction between the participants even though they may be at different locations. Examples of real-time communications include chat, videoconferencing, and teleconferencing (Palloff & Pratt, 2001). Many students taking an online course prefer to have synchronous communication with their instructor and other members in the class. For these students being able to exchange ideas with others and receive feedback quickly is important.

An online seminar or chat room usually involves a scheduled online discussion. This approach "replicates some of the spontaneity of the classroom" (Maeroff, 2002, p. 46). In a chat room all students are sitting at their computers at the same time, messages

on a digital network go back and forth in real time, allowing everyone to participate (Maeroff, 2002). This helps keep some students from dominating the discussion as often happens in a face-to-face discussion within a traditional classroom. However, this does not give students the chance to give long un-interrupted, in-depth arguments that they may have in a traditional classroom setting (Maeroff, 2002).

During a teleconference or videoconference, students are given the opportunity to provide deeper arguments within a class discussion (Maeroff, 2002). Both can allow for a dynamic exchange without relying on participants typing skills, thus emulating a traditional classroom environment (Maeroff, 2002). Teleconferencing is limited in that it provides a voice only exchange, with each member of the class sitting alone using her own telephone. The lack of visual material in this case limits the class experience for some students (Maeroff, 2002).

Videoconferencing differs from teleconferencing by adding a visual component either as a two-way visual conference where everyone can see the other members of the group or a unidirectional broadcast conference where the participants can only see the presenter. Video conferencing resembles a traditional classroom where all members can interact in a dynamic visual environment. Because synchronous systems allow students to see each other and have conversations in “real-time”, they have many opportunities to get to know each other and thus create a strong bond and a well-established learning community (Maeroff, 2002; Palloff & Pratt, 1999). Of course, synchronous tools also require a time to be scheduled when all students have agreed to meet to participate.

*Asynchronous systems.* Many students, however, enroll in an online course because they find it difficult to be at a specific place at a specific time (Maeroff, 2002;

Palloff & Pratt, 2003). These students prefer asynchronous instruction and opportunities. Asynchronous systems are those that involve students communicating at different times and in different places. Participants in the course will access asynchronous systems at a time that is convenient for them. This type of communication is independent of the participants' schedules (Maeroff, 2002; Palloff & Pratt, 2001, 2003). Examples of asynchronous systems include threaded discussion boards, email, and recorded video.

One important type of asynchronous communication is the discussion or bulletin board. Instructors can post questions for students to answer based on the course readings and objectives. Students are given direction on how to respond and deadlines are given for their postings (Palloff & Pratt, 1999). Students then post their responses, read what others have written, and reply. These postings are often "sewn together incorporating the entries in chronological succession: a threaded discussion" (Maeroff, 2003, p. 66). Threaded discussions allow students to follow the conversation by noting the order of posted messages as well as the timeframe between messages.

As Swan (2002) noted,

Because, it is asynchronous, online discussion also affords participants the opportunity to reflect on their classmates' contributions while creating their own writing before posting it. This creates certain mindfulness among students and a culture of reflection in an online course. (p. 158)

Other times students are broken into smaller groups with their own discussion area. This allows the students to communicate as smaller groups and work together on group projects. A separate discussion area for groups allows them to have their own conversations pertaining to the goals of the smaller group (Palloff & Pratt, 1999).

Email is another widely used asynchronous communication tool. It is often used in both traditional and online courses. It provides students with an easy way to ask a question without going to meet the instructor or calling her on the phone. Email is “a portal that remains open regardless of a student’s distance from campus and whether or not instructors are actually in their offices” (Maeroff, 2003, p. 63). Email allows communication to occur at hours when students would not normally be able to reach instructors at their office or home.

Another type of asynchronous delivery method is the use of video, often in the form of video tapes, CD-ROMS, and DVDs (Maeroff, 2002). These tools provide an opportunity to distribute a wide range of material to all students. They also allow the student to replay a lesson several times for her convenience if the concepts were not understood the first time. These methods often supplement the material in the online classroom or may substitute for other online activities.

Hoffman (2003a) is a strong supporter of using both asynchronous and synchronous systems in the online classroom. She suggested that, online programs, “include both asynchronous and synchronous interactions to be most effective” (Delivery methodology, ¶ 2). Just as different teaching and learning methods are used in the traditional classroom; different methods are also needed in a successful online learning environment. Maeroff (2002), Palloff and Pratt (1999, 2001, 2003), and Hoffman (2003a) all agreed that interaction between the students and instructors needs to occur. However, they also felt that how the interaction is accomplished is not as important as making sure the interaction happens and that students feel safe during the process. An administrator can aid an instructor in this process, using an appropriate leadership styles.

## Leadership Theories

### *Types of Leadership*

In discussing leadership styles that may be relevant to distance learning leaders, it is important to understand the literature reporting various theories of leadership. A leadership style is “how you behave when you are trying to influence the performance of someone else,” (Blanchard, Zigarmi, & Zigarmi, 1985, p. 46). Within this section, I will discuss Situational leadership, Transformational leadership, and Kotter’s *Leading Change* (Kotter, 1996). I have chosen to focus on these leadership styles, because the traits associated within these leadership styles are most often emphasized in discussions of online learning leadership (Beaudoin, 2003; Compora, 2003; Eddy, Murphy, Spaulding, & Chandras, 1997; Husmann & Miller, 2001; Marcus, 2004; Pahal, 1999).

***Situational Leadership.*** Situational leadership was first described by Hersey and Blanchard (Blanchard, et al., 1985) in 1969. Since that time it has evolved and been applied to organizational leadership, training and development (Blanchard, et al., 1985). Situational leadership is the process of using different approaches of leadership with different people in different situations (Northouse, 2004). Additionally, situational leadership emphasizes the difference between management and leadership (Hersey, 1984). Hersey said that management was working to meet organizational goals, where leadership is influencing the behavior of others. The basic premise to the theory is that different people possess different skills, and different tasks calls for different approaches. Therefore, their supervisor should treat workers differently and tasks differently. In other words, “to be an effective leader requires that an individual adapt his or her style to the demands of different situations” (Northouse, 2004, p. 87). Because each person is

different, the leader must be able to change and match his style to best meet the ability and commitment of the employee. This can be difficult to accomplish.

Blanchard et al. (1985) believed that to be an effective situational leader a person must learn three skills; flexibility, diagnosis, and partnering. First, flexibility is the ability to use different leadership styles in different situations. A leader must know whether his approach should be more directive or more supportive based on the individual and the task.

Second, diagnosis is the ability to determine the most appropriate style for the person and the situation. As the person grows, the style of leadership will change. Situational leadership assumes each subordinate may be at a different development level (Northouse, 2004). Blanchard et al. (1985) identified four levels of competence and commitment. These are high competence, high commitment; moderate to high competence, variable commitment; some to low competence, low commitment; and low competence, high commitment. In any situation "the first task for a leader is to diagnose the nature of the situation" (Northouse, 2004, p. 91), and where the subordinate lies within the four development levels.

Finally, partnering is the ability to work with each person to determine the leadership style he or she may need the most for each task at hand. A leader should be able to help each subordinate create goals that are specific, measurable, motivating, attainable, relevant, and trackable (Blanchard et al., 1985). When the goals are created, the leader should work with the subordinate to determine what development level she is at, so that the leader will know what type of leadership style to use. A situational leader

must also realize that the subordinate will move from one development level to another and the types of leadership used will also need to change (Northouse, 2004).

Once a leader has mastered the three main skills of flexibility, diagnosis, and partnering, Blanchard et al. (1985) believe the leader will be able to focus on four main leadership styles though they note there is no one best overall leadership style. The four leadership styles are directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating.

The directing style is appropriate for leading inexperienced people, or for followers who have some skills but are unfamiliar with the task. This corresponds to the development level of low competence, high commitment. In this style, the leader would give directions, supervise carefully, and give frequent feedback to help get subordinates started (Blanchard et al. , 1985; Northouse, 2004). This is a one way leadership style “in which the leader directs the followers toward accomplishing tasks and reaching goals” (Hersey, 1984, p. 37).

The second style, coaching, is appropriate for people who are in the development level of low competence, low commitment. These people are still somewhat inexperienced, and they also need to build self-esteem in relation to the task. In this style, the leader would still give direction, however, he would also give encouragement and praise (Blanchard et al. , 1985; Northouse, 2004). The leader in this style would provide guidance and opportunities for the employee to gain clarification on the task at hand.

The third style, supporting, is for people who do not need as much direction, but may need more support to bring out the employees’ skills for the task, or for those in the high competence, variable commitment development level (Blanchard et al. , 1985;

Northouse, 2004). Hersey (1984), explained how this style was much different than the previous two styles. In the directing and coaching styles, the leader was giving the direction, however, in the supporting style, the leader “provides encouragement, promotes discussion, and asks for contributions from the followers” (p. 38). Finally, the fourth style, delegating, is for people who are able to work by themselves with little or no supervision or support. This is referred to as the high competence, high commitment development level. In this style, the leader offers less direction and gives the subordinate more control of how the task is completed (Blanchard et al. , 1985; Northouse, 2004).

Because each subordinate may be at one development level in one aspect of their job and at another level for another aspect, Blanchard et. al. (1985) stated that “once you and one of your people have agreed on three to five goals, then as that person’s manager you might have to use different leadership styles in managing his or her performance on those various goals” (p. 61). Hersey (1984), noted that when

the ability and willingness of followers vary, leaders need to have the sensitivity and diagnostic ability to recognize and appreciate the differences. Yet even with good diagnostic skills, leaders may still be ineffective unless they can adapt their leadership style to meet the demands of their environment. (p. 57)

This means that leaders need to adapt their style to the situation and the employee.

Northouse (2004) has pointed out the strengths of situational leadership. He stated that situational leadership emphasizes leader flexibility. A leader should understand his subordinate has needs and adapt his style to those needs, and help the subordinate to learn new skills. Blanchard et al. (1985) agreed with Northouse when they said, “Everyone is a potential high performer, some people just need a little help along

the way” (p. 100). It is the situational leader’s job to make sure to supply the directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating needed to help his employees reach their potential.

***Transformational Leadership.*** Transformational leadership is a type of leadership, which is regarded as more developmental and constructive for both individuals and the organization when compared to other types of leadership. Northouse (2004) defined transformational leadership as, “a process that changes and transforms individuals. It is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals, and includes assessing followers’ motives, satisfying their needs, and treating them as full human beings,” (p. 169). Transformational leaders act as role models, encouraging employees to be innovative and thus achieve a collective vision.

Bass (1994; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999) identified four components of transformational leadership. They are (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration. These components are necessary for transformational leadership to occur and for a leader to move followers to the transformational style.

The first factor, idealized influence, describes the leader who acts as a role model for followers. Avolio (1994) said “idealized influence represents the building of trust and respect in followers” (p. 132). This lays the groundwork for changes in how an organization operates. Bass and Avolio (1994) said the transformational leader “avoids using power for personal gain and only when needed” (p. 3). They also stated trust for both follower and leader is created on a firm ethical and moral foundation.

The second element, inspirational motivation is “descriptive of leaders who communicate high expectations to followers, inspiring them through motivation to

become committed to and a part of the shared vision in the organization” (Northouse, 2004, pp. 175-176). Inspirational motivation is a strong element in helping the organization create a vision. “Thus the requirement of the leader is one of continuous reinvigoration of others to pursue or modify the vision as organizational needs change” (Avolio, 1994, p. 133). This implies that the leader appeals to what is right for the organization and what needs to be done, and provides the drive for everyone to move forward to reach the goals and shared vision of the organization.

The third component, intellectual stimulation, refers to “leadership that stimulates followers to be creative and innovative, and to challenge their own beliefs and values as well of those of the leader and the organization” (Northouse, 2004, p. 177). Bass and Avolio (1994) affirmed transformational leaders encourage subordinates to think in new ways, and the subordinates are not criticized when their ideas are different from that of the leader. The leader’s vision supplies the support for others to see how they connect to the organization’s goals.

Finally the fourth factor, individual consideration, is demonstrative of the leader who considers “each follower as an individual and provides coaching, mentoring and growth opportunities” (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, Individualized Consideration, ¶ 1). The transformational leader acts as a mentor to their subordinates to help them grow. Bass and Avolio (1994) said “the leader’s behavior demonstrates acceptance of individual differences” (p. 4). This means that the leader may give more encouragement and guidance to some employees while allowing others more autonomy. This approach helps to educate and form the next generation of leaders.

It is common for a transformational leader to create a vision, based on the collective thoughts of many others within the organization. The transformational leader then sets “out to empower followers and nurture them in change. They attempt to raise the consciousness in individuals and to get them to transcend their own self-interests for the sake of others,” (Northouse, 2004, p. 182). Transformational leaders are the change agents within their organization, by creating the map of where their organization is heading and empowering those within the organization to carry out the vision.

Burns (2003), stated that there are three standards that define transformational leadership. The first of these three is virtue. Virtue is the desired standard of conduct within a society. The second standard Burns stated was ethics. Ethics involves the integrity and trustworthiness of the leader. Finally, values are the third standard that distinguishes transformational leadership. Values can be classified as personal, social, cultural and work, and they help leaders conduct their lives in a meaningful way. Burns felt, that if leaders can use these three effectively to inspire changes they are for the better of his followers.

**Kotter.** Kotter (1996) is another author who has discussed how to bring about change within an organization. He also confirmed the need for the leader to have a clear and strong vision. His book *Leading Change* is a prescription for leaders explaining how to bring about organizational change successfully. Kotter developed an eight stage process for leaders to follow. The steps are (a) establishing a sense of urgency, (b) creating the guiding coalition, (c) developing a vision and strategy, (d) communicating the change vision, (e) empowering employees for broad-based action, (f) creating short-term wins, (g) consolidating gains and producing more change, and (h) anchoring new

approaches in the culture. Kotter believed his eight steps must be followed in order to facilitate change. Skipping steps only gives the illusion of speed. Also, without following all the steps, the changes will never completely stick within the organization.

The first stage in Kotter's (1996) process; establishing a sense of urgency, deals with the need to examine the current market for vulnerabilities within the organization. It is important to create a feeling for the need to change within the organization. Kotter explained that a high level of complacency and a low sense of urgency will impede progress. One way to develop a sense of urgency is to create a visible crisis, so employees will feel compelled to address problems within the company.

The second step, creating the guiding coalition, involves creating a trusted group of people strong enough and with positions in key areas to bring about the change. Kotter (1996) also gave four key characteristics of membership for creating the guiding coalition. The first characteristic is position power, or having enough people who are main line managers. Second, is expertise, the group must include people who are experienced in the areas of change. The third characteristic is credibility. It is important to have people in the group who will be taken seriously by others. Finally, the last characteristic is leadership. The group needs proven leaders to guide the change process.

Kotter's (1996) third step in the change process is developing a vision and strategy. Kotter, believed "vision refers to a picture of the future with some implicit or explicit commentary on why people should strive to create that future" (p. 68). He said there are three purposes to a vision. First, it clarifies the direction for change. Second, it motivates people to move in the appropriate direction. And third, it coordinates the actions of individuals in an efficient way. Kotter also noted that an effective vision has

the characteristics of being imaginable, desirable, feasible, focused, flexible, and communicable. Kotter felt that “without vision, strategy making can be a much more contentious activity” (p. 71).

Kotter’s (1996) fourth step in the change process, communicating the change vision, involves using every possible means to continually communicate the new vision and strategies, and also having the guiding coalition model the new behavior. Kotter described the key elements of effective communication of the vision as simplicity; metaphor, analogy, and example; multiple forums; repetition; leadership by example; explanation of seeming inconsistencies; and give-and-take.

The fifth step of Kotter’s (1996) process is empowering broad-based action. He described how to do this by getting rid of obstacles, changing systems, or structures that undermine the vision, provide the necessary training employees need, and encouraging risk taking and nontraditional ideas.

The sixth step in the change process is generating short-term wins. Kotter said to do this, it is important for leaders to plan for visible improvements, create win situations, and recognize and reward those who made the wins possible. This will help build momentum within the change process.

The seventh step is consolidating gains and producing more change. This step involves using credibility to make continual changes in systems and structures to fit the transformation vision, hiring, promoting, developing employees who can continue to execute the change, and also energizing the process with new projects.

Finally, the eighth step in Kotter’s (1996) change process is anchoring new approaches in the culture. This means the change process is not complete until the new

practices and behaviors become the norm. He says this must come last and not first.

Above all, Kotter warned against claiming victory too soon and feels an important thing to remember is that “major change takes time, sometimes lots of time” (p. 119).

Table 1, shows the characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses of situational leadership, transformational leadership and Kotter’s *Leading Change*. When looking at the above leadership theories, there are some similar characteristics, such as leading each person as an individual taking care of his or her needs, creating a vision, and changing the culture of the organization.

**Table 1**

Comparison of Situational and Transformational Leadership, and Kotter’s Leading Change

|                             | <b>Characteristics</b>   | <b>Strengths</b>  | <b>Weaknesses</b>  |
|-----------------------------|--|---|--|
| Situational Leadership      | Unique for each subordinate and flexible                       | Easily understood and therefore practical   | Not a lot of research to backup the method   |
|                             | Style is modified by observing the subordinate                 | Prescriptive so that once a leader knows where a subordinate is, they know exactly what to do | Difficult to implement with a large number of subordinates or when dealing with a group as whole |
|                             | Focuses on leadership in situations                            | Emphasizes leadership flexibility   | Does not take into account the various backgrounds and education of the subordinates             |
|                             | Emphasizes the difference between management and leadership.   | Reminds the leader to treat the subordinate as an individual                                  |  |
|                             | Leaders act as a mentor to subordinates                        | Well known and frequently used  |  |
| Transformational Leadership | Ability to articulate the vision and change the culture of the | Widely researched   | Unclear parameters   |
|                             |  | Involves  | Often seen a   |

|        |  |   |  |
|--------|--|---|--|
|        | <p>organization</p> <p>Perceived as being an agent for radical change</p> <p>People oriented leadership style</p> <p>Organizational growth over specific individual growth</p> <p>Concerned with emotions, values, and ethics</p> <p>Empowers followers and nurture them to change.</p> <p>Leaders act as a mentor to subordinates</p> | <p>subordinates: the needs of others are central to the theory</p> <p>Leadership style makes sense to people</p> <p>Leadership is a process that occurs between followers and leaders</p>                     | <p>personality trait rather than a behavior that people can learn</p> <p>Open to abuse</p> <p>Difficult to apply at managerial levels</p>  |
| Kotter | <p>Head of the organization drives the change of the culture and vision.</p> <p>Strong and well communicated vision</p> <p>Recognizing the difference between management and leadership</p> <p>Motivating and inspiring people to overcome change</p>  | <p>Well structured process</p> <p>Communication about what is happening and where things are going</p> <p>Involvement of everyone</p> <p>Progress can be felt by the accomplishment of intermediate goals</p> | <p>You must follow the eight stages in order without skipping to make a permanent change</p> <p>Potential to take a long period of time to implement fully</p> <p>May fail if complacency levels are high</p> <p>Not having leaders that know the difference between leadership and management</p> |

Note. Information from *Leading Change* by J.P. Kotter, 1996, Boston: Harvard Business School Press, and *Leadership: Theory and practice* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), by P.G. Northouse, 2004, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

*Beaudoin.* The purpose of Beaudoin's (2003) article was to understand the role of leadership in distance education settings. The article is a literature review that examined current research and writings in this area. Beaudoin offered suggestions for those involved in distance education leadership as well as promoted further study of distance education leadership. The article gave a brief review of early leaders in relation to correspondence courses and how those courses moved to distance education and then on to online learning. Beaudoin (2003) then analyzed literature in the field by conducting a review of various works published from 1999 to 2003. Beaudoin found that the writings in distance education do not offer much in regards to leadership. Beaudoin (2003) then focused on what type of leadership style might be the most suitable for leadership in distance education, as technology continues to change. He discussed three types of leadership: transformational leadership, situational leadership, and a combination of both styles of leadership.

Next, the article turned to how leaders within distance learning should view themselves as well as giving some best practices to those involved in or wanting to have leadership roles in distance learning. This article is significant not only because it shows what types of leadership styles might prove to be useful for those in distance education administration. It also points out that there has not been a lot of research in this area, and therefore there are significant opportunities for research in this area.

Because of the lack of research for leadership within distance education, Beaudoin (2003) looked at research within continuing education to identify appropriate leadership traits and skills. He found attributes needed in continuing education

leadership, will also apply to distance education leadership. The traits and skills are to be able to:

analyze systems and conduct environmental scans; be aware of power; manage both conflict and agreement and reach consensus; understand the impact of institutional culture; function with ambiguity, complexity and decentralization; utilize tactical and strategic planning; and demonstrate the value of the educational organization to multiple constituencies.

Because of this similarity of traits and skills Beaudoin believed the literature on continuing education regarding leadership was applicable to distance education.

Beaudoin (2003), was not the only researcher who has shown interest in online learning administrators and their roles at the institutions they serve.

***Husmann and Miller.*** Husmann and Miller (2001) surveyed 26 higher education administrators who manage distance-learning programs. The authors used a Delphi survey. The participants were encouraged to communicate their perceptions on the subject in response to open-ended questions. Descriptive statistics were then used to analyze the data. In the first round of the study, the administrators were asked, “What can administrators in distance education programs do to improve distance learning program quality and success” (Research Methods, ¶2). Findings from the first round were then collected and 104 statements were identified. In the second round of the study, statements developed in response to the first round were rated on a 1 to 5 Likert-type scale, and in the third round, normative group data were presented to study participants and they were given the opportunity to modify their responses.

Husmann and Miller (2001) described what current higher education administrators found they needed in institutions that are currently offering distance education courses. Three main findings relevant to this study were reported. First, the authors noted distance education seems to parallel traditional curricula in the sense that the work of the administrative team, can impact the quality of the online learning environment. Second, “the findings, as related by distance education administrators, suggest that they see their job as one of facilitating program quality rather than owning responsibility for program success” Discussion, ¶ 2). This means the industry of distance education relates well to the role of continuing education leadership. Third, the researchers found that administrators believe the quality of a program is based, overwhelmingly on the performance of the faculty. The authors concluded their discussion of administrator perceptions on the quality of distance learning programs with suggestions on what administrators and faculty will need to do in order to improve and offer these initiatives. Distance education leadership requires an administrator to be more hands off and to rethink their role (Husmann and Miller, 2001; Beaudoin, 2003; Marcus, 2004).

Husmann and Miller (2001) agreed with the findings of Beaudoin (2003), confirming that these traits and skills were similar to traits and skills found in other leaders. These mainly are to be able to:

focus primarily on a vision and mission; to develop a unique and inspirational view of the future; to empower and energize others to implement their vision; to press their organization to continuously improve; to widely communicate, and

live that vision; to integrate congruent values into the culture they are influencing; and to profoundly inspire and affect their followers' aspirations.

Because distance learning is tightly coupled with technology, a study of effective leadership from an information technology perspective could prove insightful.

***Pahal and Marcus.*** Pahal (1999) discussed effective leadership from an information technology (IT) viewpoint. Her paper presented her definition of IT leadership and its applicable use in today's environment. She looked at the literature concerning leadership and information technology to develop her definition of information technology leadership. She agreed with Beaudoin when she said, "IT leadership requires many of the characteristics common to all leaders, but also requires special abilities and insights into technology's impact" (Introduction, ¶1). She maintains the opinion that for effective leadership there is a need for "a combination of inherited leadership traits combined with effective leadership training" (An Emerging IT Leadership Paradigm, ¶ 6). According to Pahal, IT leaders should possess characteristics such as vision, trust, and open-mindedness.

Beaudoin (2003) and Pahal (1999) were not the only authors who found vision to be a main trait for distance learning administrative leaders. Marcus (2004) also derived from her reading of literature that vision is an important trait. She found that,

by being aware of change, and open to change, the leader in distance education is more likely to (1) recognize a need for change at any given moment, (2) acknowledge the probable reactions of the constituents towards change, (3) react appropriately to the responses to the proposed changes. (¶ 12)

The reader can see these authors came to the same conclusion that vision is an important characteristic for distance education leaders as was found in transformational leadership, and Kotter's (1996) *Leading Change*.

**Eddy, Murphy, Spaulding, and Chandras.** Eddy, Murphy, Spaulding, and Chandras (1997) looked at the literature concerning different types of leadership practices needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for higher education. Their article discussed areas where they thought new leadership practices will be necessary. From their research, one of the types of leadership they considered would be important is distance education leadership. They found that an academic leader would need two skills for leading effectively within distance learning. First is, "an appreciation and understanding of the relationship between education, technology, time, distance, location is essential" (p. 330). Second, because of the rapidly changing field of technology, and how information is disseminated, "academic executives must rapidly learn to control and harness this process" (p. 330). Therefore, the academic leader needs to have the skill and desire to succeed in distance education leadership.

**Brown and Black.** Brown (2002) used her experience teaching a class titled "Virtual Leadership", that is open to graduate students who are mid-career professionals in a variety of industries, to discuss the new skills needed for leaders in the information age. She felt that leadership in a virtual environment has special characteristics. She acknowledged that some of the characteristics are "unique to environments where human face-to-face interaction is limited or entirely absent" (p. 377). She went on to say, "both new technical skills and new people skills are required in addition to many of the same skills that leaders typically have been identified as needing" (p. 377).

Leaders do not need to be an expert in the field but should understand how technology can affect teaching and learning (Beaudoin, 2003; Pahal, 1999; Eddy et.al., 1997). Leadership does not mean being an expert but understanding who within your organization is, and how to facilitate them to be of assistance to the organization in achieving its goals.

Many authors have tried to answer several questions. What can be done to increase the number of leaders in distance learning? Is there a leadership style that is most appropriate for distance education? As we have seen one of the pervasive views that came from the research was distance-learning leaders need to have a vision (Beaudoin, 2004; Pahal, 1999; Black, 2003; Brown, 2002).

Black (2003) depicted organizations as organisms and she used this metaphor throughout her paper. Her paper “applies the metaphor to adult and in particular distance education management and organizations is an attempt to conceptualize the incredibly complex reality of management and organizational life” (Introduction, ¶1). She believed “thinking in terms of holistic systems, potentially will help managers-leaders select appropriate approaches to management and leadership” (Conclusion, ¶1). Black’s (2003) argument was

the breadth and depth of change is needed and charismatic, transformational, visionary leadership that is required will more readily occur if a systems approach --- but a creative, dynamic organic one rather than a static, mechanical one --- is in place to infuse and support them. (The Challenge, ¶7)

As the authors have stated above distance learning leadership is a field that requires a special type of leadership. Below, I will discuss what is found in the literature on what a distance learning leadership model might look like.

### ***An Emerging Distance-Learning Leadership Model***

Only a few authors have discussed what an online learning leadership model might look like (Beaubien, 2002; Black, 2003; Compore, 2003; Marcus, 2004; Olson, 2002; Pahal, 1999). In this section I will look at what these authors have found about effective online learning leadership.

As the field of distance learning emerged and a few teachers and organizations began creating and offering increasingly amounts of courses and programs online, efforts were made to “legitimize distance education by offering evidence that it was comparable to classroom-based instruction” (Beaudoin, 2003). However, Beaudoin felt that

largely absent throughout this period of research and writing in this emerging field was any focused consideration of the dimension of leadership and its impact on the obvious growth and apparent success of distance education at literally hundreds of institutions worldwide.

Organizations will have to consider changes to their structures to ensure that their new leadership addresses the needs of distance education.

In fact, some made a distinction between leaders and managers of distance learning programs. Beaudoin (2003) said leadership in distance education “is defined as a set of attitudes and behaviors that create conditions for innovative change, that enable individuals and organizations to share a vision and move in its direction, and that contribute to the management and operationalization of ideas.” Pahal (1999) found

“some people see the leaders as a motivator, while others define a leader as one having extraordinary vision and decision-making power” (An Emerging IT Leadership Paradigm ¶1). Marcus (2004) described the difference between leaders and managers. She observed that leaders should redefine the limitations people give themselves by inspiring others to new levels. In contrast, managers are good at making sure an institution and its operations are as efficient as possible. Olson (2002), who wrote about the strategies for effective online administration and governance, concurred when she said,

leadership in online education is new terrain for many administrators and faculty. As educators and leaders, we are working toward development of a new context for leading and connecting in relational nonhierarchical structure. We are trying to expand our leadership behaviors and actions by applying them in radically new contexts that require us to unlearn and relearn new rules of leadership. (p. 250)

The role of the higher education leader within the distance education hierarchy is changing.

Many authors found the new distance learning leadership model would involve leaders who practiced transformational leadership (Beaudoin, 2003; Black 2003; Olson, 2002; Marcus, 2004), a form of leadership that accepts and applies the traits discussed above. Beaudoin (2003) felt transformational leadership “remains a particularly compelling model for distance education leaders today because organizational practices long entrenched in educational entities urgently require reshaping to adapt to environmental changes”. He continued and said,

transformational leaders in education must be capable of helping its stakeholders (e.g., administrators, faculty, students, trustees), recognize that there are obvious

benefits in doing business in new ways, and that they can no longer afford the luxury of adopting new ways of teaching and learning in an incremental fashion to which academics are so accustomed and comfortable in doing.

Black (2003) also believed different approaches to leadership are required within distance education. Adaptation to new techniques in leadership is a key skill of the distance education leader.

Beaudoin (2003) and Marcus (2004) also found that the new model would not only need transformational leaders but also leaders who practice situational leadership, where a leader chooses a style that is appropriate for the situation. Beaudoin felt, “leaders must create conditions conducive to energy, initiative and innovation in their particular milieu, and bring others along, both above and below them in the organizational hierarchy”. Beaudoin also felt,

in fusing these two approaches, the leader diagnoses the unique situation in the immediate environment, and then transforms it as far along the change continuum as necessary, through a collaborative style. In this way, a climate less resistant to and more receptive toward distance education is created, often in an incremental fashion as the situation is gradually transformed.

Leaders need to be able to recognize situations before they occur, so they can then deal with the situations and are able to transform them into favorable outcomes for the institution.

Another approach was investigated in a qualitative study by Compura (2003) using a case study research design. The study was conducted to examine current practices of distance education programs at six selected institutions of higher education in

Ohio during the 1999 – 2000 academic year. Relevant data was found in 12 areas of distance learning programs, which led to the development of a distance learning administrative operational model. The 12 areas were (a) content of the distance education program's mission statement; (b) needs assessment procedure; (c) hierarchical approval of courses; (d) delivery systems; (e) student demographics; (f) course acquisition, development, and evaluation criteria and procedures; (g) selection of distance education instructors; (h) distance education course teaching/management procedures; (i) matriculation of distance learners; (j) budgeting; (k) marketing procedures; and (l) formative and summative evaluation of the individual courses and the entire distance education program.

The results of this study revealed, “a discrepancy between the literature cited and the actual practice of the institutions surveyed” (Conclusion, ¶1). Compora (2003) found that institutions were not following established guidelines and procedures with regard to the development, administration, and management of distance education programs. For this reason, and based on this research, Compora developed a nine step component model to address the administrative needs of most distance education programs. Compora identified his model as, Distance Education Administrative Operative Model. The nine steps are assessment, budget, coordination, delivery methods, evaluation, faculty involvement and training, generate a mission statement, hierarchical approval system, and implementation of support systems.

The results of this research indicated that distance learning programs are not being designed using system design models, even though trends and operational practices were

revealed in this study. Compora (2003) as with the other above cited authors believed that further research is needed.

### ***The Need for Further Research***

Many authors agreed (Beaubien, 2002; Compora, 2003; Lape & Hart, 1997; Marcus, 2004), that there is a need for further research in the area of online learning leadership. In this section, I will discuss the literature pertaining to the needs of further research in this area of online learning leadership.

At the time of her article, Marcus (2004) was a student in Educational Leadership with a focus on E-Learning. In her literature review, she found there was very little written about academic administration for distance learning leaders. She found that the characteristics, requirements, and actions of distance learning leaders have “not been adequately defined by the current research” (Summary, ¶ 1). Others have endorsed Marcus’s conclusion (Beaudoin, 2003; Lape & Hart, 1997).

Beaudoin’s (2003) research about leadership in distance education found that in “over a four year period, several widely read sources of research and writing in distance education theory and practice offer us very little indeed on the topic of leadership.” His research focused on the current literature around the rapid increase of distance education delivery systems. Beaudoin identified three reasons why there had not been much research in distance learning leadership. First, he believed that the research and writing on the topic was not mature enough and that the researchers had not spent time on comparing distance education with traditional education. Second, leadership had not been recognized as a separate topic for administration. Therefore, the research into planning and administration of distance education was seen as sufficient. Finally,

Beaudoin determined the topic of distance learning leadership had been ignored because many in the field did not see its use. Thus, research into distance learning leadership is still unfolding.

Beaudoin (2003) discussed why, outside of the corporate sector, the area of distance education leadership has been largely ignored. He believed that those who are researching distance learning focus more on the differences between distance education and conventional method learning environments rather than the administrative issues. He stated there are people who dismiss leadership training as something not useful to an administrator, because quantifying leadership is not easy. We may now be at a point where more research is needed in this field of the distance-learning leader to enable institutions to prepare for the future. This research could be in effective methods of distance learning leadership such as what traits are common to leaders in other administration areas or unique to distance education administration.

Lape and Hart (1997) also reported that more research is needed. The purpose of their study was to assess the level of awareness and understanding of distance education of key community college leaders and differences within key leadership groups. They selected leaders from the 29 community colleges in the state of Michigan, and surveyed people in five leadership groups: the president, the chief financial officer, the dean of liberal studies, the chair of social science division, and the media service director.

A total of 145 surveys were mailed with a response from 116 individuals. The questionnaire consisted of items with closed responses, with continuous Likert scale responses, and one open response item. The survey items were identified based on a

review of the literature. Analysis of variance was used to determine if the means of the groups were equal.

The study findings were organized into three main themes. First, planning for distance education revealed most respondents believed that distance education was important to their institution and it was necessary for distance education to be compatible with the institution's mission. Second, the results showed that the majority of the participants agreed with current literature and felt distance students performed as well as traditional students, and that changes in teaching styles and presentation of the content is necessary for online learning. Third, the majority of the respondents felt distance education was cost-effective, and that both the costs and benefits of distance education should be computed to assess cost-effectiveness. However, in all three themes further analysis revealed differences at the 0.05 alpha level among the five leadership groups.

The findings of this study are important because they help identify factors that may increase the likelihood of adopting distance education methods, and because of the differences between the five leadership groups, it also identifies areas that impedes the adoption of distance education. These findings led Lape and Hart (1997) to conclude that "without the support of all leadership groups, the practice of distance education will remain on the margin of practice in the community college" (p. 20). Given the findings of Lape and Hart and those of the above researchers, it is evident more research in the area of distance learning academic leadership is essential.

### **Synthesis**

Now more than ever, academic leaders must look at the path that their institutions are on and determine the needs for the institution to continue to be effective. The

literature shows that online learning is dynamic with many areas for future growth. One of those areas is in how online learning administrators are able to adequately lead their institutions in an online environment. In this synthesis, I will discuss how this is tied to this literature review, and how this is tied into my research questions.

Dramatic changes in how institutions deliver courses are occurring and current leaders must be prepared to lead their institutions into this new generation of learning. Beaudoin (2003) said, “institutional decision makers need to be informed and enlightened enough to ask fundamental questions that could influence their institution’s future viability.” Olson (2002) agreed, “One of the primary challenges facing administrators is leadership of these online programs” (p. 238). The challenge of the distance learning administrative leader will be to envision what these online programs will need, then lead the institutions for the next decade.

Beaudoin (2003) also felt as these changes in education continue, current leaders must be able to function in both the traditional and nontraditional educational formats. This is because skills in both formats are needed while transitions are happening. Pahal agreed when she discussed the thoughts of Retired General Colin Powell by saying, “Leaders in the new millennium will....require that people have a vision of where they want to lead, how to choose the right people, and how to accomplish objectives that flow from visions” (Introduction, ¶ 2). Organizations will need to plan not only on how and who to hire to accomplish this, but also how to train their current employees to be effective distance learning leaders.

This is not easy for institutions to do. Black (2003) also confirmed how difficult the changes are for institutions. She said,

all too often existing systems, structures, and processes stand in the way. Some organizations fail to recognize they have problems. Others simply do not have good mechanisms in place to react to and adapt to environmental changes. Some exhibit organizational inertia: Their sluggish, bureaucratic structures mean they cannot change quickly enough, even if they would like to. (The Challenge ¶ 4)

Organizations need to develop processes for dealing with these evolutions. Olson (2002) suggested three ways that administrators can work through this transition. Those ways were:

(a) understand the benefits and constraints of the classroom model (current reality), (b) develop an appropriate business model that fits the mission and goals of an online program (future reality), and (c) be prepared to chart a multiyear path (road map) starting with the future vision of the online environment and working backward toward the current reality over a 1- to 3-year time horizon. (p. 241)

She also noted this is an ongoing process “because people come into the system with the behaviors and actions learned in the traditional governance model” (p. 254). Being able to lead effectively requires knowing what changes can occur and what changes will require dealing with resistance from those affected by the change.

Beaudoin (2003) summed it up well when he said, in short, distance education managers must see themselves, and be seen, as educational leaders who, through less directing and more motivating, facilitate the articulation, development, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by a wider academic community.

The distance education leader inspires those to work with him by his focus on education rather than delegating his workload out to those below him. A distance-learning leader is one who others trust and look to, to give them direction. They are much more than a traditional manager who is mainly concerned with the bottom line of the institution. A distance learning administrative leader will need to have a vision of goals for the institution, be able to look at each situation and help the institution to make the necessary transformational changes needed to reach those goals.

It is how a community college online learning administrator faces these challenges and reaches these goals that have led me to my research questions. The literature above tells us a great deal about community colleges, online learning, and online courses. However, it does not tell us many specific things about online learning administrators or the leadership styles that may be more effective for online learning administrators. That is why I was interested in their experiences and how they make sense of them, how they came to be where they are in their position during the study, and how they perceive and practice leadership.

### **Conclusion**

Distance education leadership is an emerging field of research. The future will show how important this role is going to be for institutions. While the distance education leader has many similarities to other forms of leadership, new characteristics and skills must also be developed. Successful, higher education, distance education leaders lead not by direct control, but by inspiring those around them with their vision.

Many in administration have not had the opportunity to receive leadership training within the field of distance education. This appears to be primarily because

many have not thought of it as necessary training. In addition, the research for how to be an effective distance-learning administrative leader is still maturing. There is also a strong need for the distance-learning leader to understand the relationship between technology and teaching. This type of administrator must understand how technology can enhance the learning experience for the both the student and the instructor.

Finally, research of distance learning leadership is not as complete as other topics in administrative issues. In order for institutions to have effective distance-learning leaders in the future this topic needs to be more thoroughly addressed in future research. From the above review of the literature, we can see that many of the authors doing research in this area agree that the distance education leader is a new form of leader that warrants further study.

## **CHAPTER 3 - METHOD**

In chapter three, I will explain the methodology I used for my study. First, I will discuss my research design and rationale to support my choice of not only qualitative study, but also the phenomenological approach used to answer my research questions. Second, I will describe my participants for my study. Third, I will explain how I collected and analyzed my data. Finally, I will conclude chapter three with validations of trustworthiness within my study.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

My study explored the lived professional and life experiences of online community college administrators and how they make sense of their journeys. In this section, I will describe the research design and address the rationale for the selection of qualitative research for this study, and in particular why a phenomenological approach was chosen.

Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The research builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

It is through the process of qualitative research that the researchers can construct a holistic picture that will identify the aspects of human experiences in natural settings. Such detailed information about community college online learning administrators was

needed to answer my research questions. My interest in this study was not to establish comparisons using statistical data or to develop a cause and effect relationship, as seen in a quantitative study, but instead I was interested in the discovery and describing of the lived professional and life experiences of online community college administrators and how they made sense of their journeys. My professional experience with community colleges, administration, and online learning, reinforced this perspective for me.

When looking at qualitative research it was important to choose an approach that best fit the research questions. I determined that the choice of a phenomenological study was the best fit for the primary question: What is the essence of the lived professional and life experiences of online community college administrators and how do they make sense of their journeys? A phenomenological study also would help answer my sub-questions: What were their experiences that brought them here? What were their experiences with different leadership styles? What leadership styles do they see themselves using? What are their leadership philosophies, experiences, and beliefs? What central themes emerge? What specific interaction and conditions have been influential for these people? What are the resulting strategies and outcomes they currently use in their positions? As Moustakas stated (1994) the “empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience” (p. 13). By understanding the lived professional and life experiences of the participants, I was able to best answer my research questions.

The purpose of this phenomenological study of community college online learning administrators was to determine how they make sense of their journey, and how

their journey has influenced their current leadership role. The research focused on 10 community college online learning administrators who were identified to be leaders within distance learning.

### **Participants**

Selection of my participants was critical to my study. I wanted to limit the study to community college online learning administrators. However, because I was integrally involved in online learning in the Colorado Community College System and know many of the online learning administrators at various institutions within the Colorado Community College System, I did not want to be influenced by looking only at Colorado community college online learning administrators. Therefore, I needed to explore other areas.

I believed that a convenience sampling of participants who are involved in online learning administration at community colleges was the most appropriate method for getting my participants. I contacted online learning administrative organizations and journals to inquire of them if they will act as gatekeepers for my participants. I contacted editorial staff at The Online Journal of Distance Learning Administrators, and also The League for Innovation in the Community College. I was able to find a gatekeeper at the League for Innovation in the Community College. My gatekeeper was able to send out information to their list of people who serve in an administrative role for online learning at institutions. Those who were interested in participating were able to contact me directly. Thirteen possible participants volunteered, and from these thirteen I was able to find seven participants that fit the characteristics I was looking for. For this study I was not concerned about having participants from any particular area of the country. I chose

my participants as those having 2-10 years experience as an online learning administrators at a community college with a student body of no more than 15,000 students, to keep all the schools similar in size, but not too large of management structures.

The first step as various administrators contacted me via email was to look up their institutions online to look at the size of their institution. If their institution did not fit my criteria for size, I replied to the volunteer, and thanked them for their desire to help me with my study. I carefully explained the type of administrator I was looking for, and let them know that their institution did not fit these criteria. For those, whose institution did meet my initial size criteria, I also contacted them via email and gave them more detail about my study and confirmed the time they had been an online learning administrator. After the first seven participants were identified through this process, the sampling continued through a snowball effect to a total of ten participants in different regions across the country. It was through this process that I was able to identify my participants.

### **Data Collection**

Once I identified my participants, I needed to schedule a practical time for me to travel to their area of the country and interview them. This involved careful scheduling and frequent communication with each participant to ensure that I was able to make travel plans, schedule a suitable location for us to meet, and at a convenient time for my participant.

I collected data for my study through face-to-face interviews that I scheduled to last between 60 and 90 minutes. I had broad discussion topics for my interview guide for

each participant (Appendix A). The broad open-ended question interview format encouraged participants to describe their experiences in their own words, and allowed them to share their personal and professional stories.

The initial interview was scheduled at a mutually convenient time. I conducted the face-to-face interviews at a place that was convenient for the participants. This most often was in a conference room at a local hotel or at a local library. During the interview, I provided each participant with an introduction to both my study and myself. I provided each participant with a copy of the informed consent, as well as explained the expectations and time commitment of the participant (Appendix B).

I was careful to ensure participant confidentiality. I used measures such as pseudonyms and coding systems for interview transcriptions and other data collection. I believe that assuring the participants confidentiality allowed them to feel “safe” in exploring the phenomenon completely and fully, allowing them to be open and honest with me. With permission from each individual participant, I audio recorded each interview. After the interview, I emailed a thank you note to the participants. Once the interviews were transcribed, I emailed each participant a copy of the transcription of their interview.

After each participant had an opportunity to examine the transcribed initial interview, a follow-up interview was scheduled and conducted by telephone. Participants were informed that the time required for this follow-up interview would be no more than 30 minutes. In the first part of the second interview, the participants and I reviewed the transcript of the initial interview for accuracy. This allowed for comments and clarifications to be noted. The second part of the follow-up interview was an opportunity

to focus on follow-up questions of transcriptions from the first interviews and information I saw from other participants. I concluded this second interview with an invitation for the participants to share any additional aspects of online learning administration that might aid me in understanding the phenomenon.

Following the second interview, I again emailed the transcription of the second interview to each participant for review and to thank them for their participation and time. I asked the participants for any final thoughts about their experiences and brought closure to their role in the study. I also provided information to each participant into how they can access the final report of the study.

Throughout the study, field notes were added to augment the transcripts and make them as complete as possible. Field notes were descriptive and reflective in nature, and included descriptions of the settings, descriptions of the participants, and accounts of happenings during the interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

For my data analysis I followed the Moustakas (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method for data analysis in my study. Moustakas (1994) described four major processes in phenomenological research. Those processes are epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis.

The first process epoche is often referred to as bracketing. This is a process the researcher uses to set aside preconceived ideas and notions about the phenomenon to be studied. During this first process I set aside my own ideas about this phenomenon and tried observing it from the voices of the participants. I participated in the epoche process in the initial beginnings of my study and continued to do so throughout the study. I

reviewed my completed journals to reflect on my experience as I interviewed each participant. I used this process to set aside any personal values, biases and pre-judgments that I had, so that I might better understand the phenomenon through my participants' voice.

The second process, phenomenological reduction, or horizontalization refers to giving each statement that the participant makes equal value. After the interviews were transcribed I initially read the transcript of each interview several times in order to get a sense for the entire interview as a whole. I looked at each statement made by each participant with equal value; these statements were collapsed into nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping units of meaning of the individual experiences, using an Access Database. Later, I deleted statements that were determined to be irrelevant to the topic. The remaining statements were combined into themes. This is similar to the process that Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to as developing open codes, followed by axial coding and ending with selective coding. Both processes are concerned with narrowing the scope of the data for the next stage in data analysis. I finished the horizontalizational process by identifying preliminary key concepts and themes that emerged from these experiences, and integrated them into textural descriptions of what was experienced by each participant.

I was concerned that analyzing the data may break up the interviews and lose the intent of the meaning of the participants' words. I have examined the study that Stoeckel (Stoeckel, 2004) used and found the way she was able to share her results with the reader and still preserve the intent of her participants very informative. Therefore, I want to use a similar approach in this study, in addition to the database mentioned above. I created a

profile of each participant to capture the depth of their experiences, using pictures for each participant and the themes that had emerged (Appendix C and D).

The third process, imaginative variation, is to “seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles or functions” (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 97-98). This process guides the researcher to arrive at universal descriptions of how the phenomenon is experienced. During this stage, I formed composite structural qualities to provide a universal description of how the phenomenon was experienced. This process analyzed how an experience affected the participant by creating an alternate version of the experience from an imagined perspective. I needed a way to present my findings in a way that would honor the participants’ words again I will turn to Stoeckel (Stoeckel, 2004). To achieve this goal of the imagined perspective, the data are presented as an imaginary conversation with the participants, with me as their moderator. The participants’ voices are based on their personal interview transcripts. Using this procedure, I created a virtual meeting of the participants and analyzed the areas of the participants’ experiences that were common to them.

Finally, the last process is synthesis. In this step, I synthesized the composite textural and structural descriptions to develop the meanings and essence of the phenomenon. The reader is able to see how I arrived at the themes, and how they relate to this study. I first introduce each main theme, and at the end of each theme, a brief statement helps the reader tie each piece together.

## **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness of the research relates to the researcher's ability to not only conduct the research, but also to present the results in a fair and unbiased way in the best interest of the participants. In this section, I will discuss the trustworthiness of this study as it is relating to credibility, dependability, and transferability.

### ***Credibility***

I established credibility in several ways. First, I engaged in the epoche process. I clarified my personal biases in relation to this research. I began this above in chapter one in my discussion of my perspective as a researcher. After each interview was transcribed, I shared my transcriptions with each participant, as a way of member checking. This allowed each participant a chance to comment on accuracy and to add clarification. In addition, I also recorded my thoughts and feelings in a reflective journal, included with my field notes as I progressed through the study.

### ***Dependability***

Dependability was established by using a peer review process. Peer review occurred through my Colorado State University advisor, and my methodologist to confirm the findings and strengthen the study design. I also maintained my field notes, coded transcripts, coding process, and interpretation of my analysis. This established an audit trail, as a form of trustworthiness.

### ***Transferability***

I established transferability of my study by providing rich and thorough descriptions of my participants' experiences. This study happened in a natural setting and deals with human experiences. While every aspect may not be appropriate to all

settings. I provide sufficient detail of the method and findings to allow the reader the opportunity to determine the applicability to other situations.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on my study of community college online learning administrators. I have discussed my rationale for conducting my study in the qualitative stance and more specifically a phenomenology. I have also shared with the reader, who my participants were, in addition to how I collected and analyzed my data. Finally, I have discussed trustworthiness as it applies to this study.

Upon completion of my data analysis, I am able to present my participants in chapter four, to allow the reader insight on who the participants are and the background they experienced that brought them to the conversation. In chapter five, I will summarize my findings, and provide a discussion of the outcomes. In chapter six, I will discuss the essence of the phenomenon, the connections to the literature, the implications for future studies, and conclude my study.

## CHAPTER 4 - THE PARTICIPANTS

I started this study to learn about community college administrators and how they came to be where they are, and how they make sense of their journey. I found myself completely immersed in the online education world, and I felt it was important to understand, what were their experiences that brought them to their current positions? What were their experiences with different leadership styles? What leadership styles do they see themselves using? What are their leadership philosophies, experiences, and beliefs? To answer these questions, I chose a phenomenological study for this research.

I was fortunate to have ten participants who were willing to be involved in my study. To study my participants, I traveled to their location and met them in various public areas. I met many participants in public libraries or in a conference room of the hotel where I stayed. My participants were very gracious to give of their time and agreed to meet me away from their campus during their busy days, and in many cases, on a Saturday morning or afternoon. After my first interview with each participant, we met again via telephone to discuss the first interview and to follow up on any additional questions I had or thoughts they wanted to share.

In this chapter, I will first discuss the method I used to develop the main themes that emerged from the study. Then, I will give a brief background of each participant to help the reader understand who each person is and how each one came to be in their current positions. In chapter five, I will discuss the data analysis process and introduce

each theme, and show how those themes manifested from the research using illustrative quotations from the participants in the form of a group discussion.

After transcribing and coding both interviews for each participant, I was concerned that analyzing the data may break up the interviews and lose the intent of the meaning of the participants' words. I examined the study that Stoeckel (Stoeckel, 2004) used and found the way she was able to share her results with the reader and still preserve the intent of her participants very informative. Therefore, I chose to use a similar approach in this study.

I decided that it would help the reader to have a better understanding of each participant and their history that brought them to their current positions. I was mindful in creating a profile of each participant to capture the depth of their experiences, (Appendix D) using pictures for each participant. I used these pictures to help me develop my themes and subthemes and this in turn helped me describe the phenomenon of online learning administrators.

In the following section, I took each participant, in the order of their first interview and using their words as much as possible, created a history, and introduction to each participant. My first question to each participant was "tell me about your history and how you became involved in education, online learning and administration." This allowed me to understand the background of each participant and how that history may have shaped who they are today. The following introduction and history of each person is based on their answer to this question.

***Sheri: Director of Distance Learning***

Well, ok. Let's see. I started out majoring in finance, picked up a degree in finance, which was my first Bachelor's. [I] was a Cost Accountant for a little bit,

and then... my parents owned their own business. It was 1979, and they bought a TRS-80 Radio Shack Computer. ... That was the beginning of my technology. So it's been almost 30 years that I've been involved in technology, and just troubleshooting that and learning the basic programming.... That evolved when I was a Cost Accountant, they moved to computers within the office, and so I just became the person that was involved in choosing all that. ... So I was more into the programming and basic hardware stuff. ...

By then I was doing things for friends and all, so I was kinda self-employed for a time while I was having kids and, you know, doing the "mom" thing.... About 1990 I went back to college. I wanted to take a few computer classes, and they had a whole degree called CIS Systems Analysis and Design which is what I majored in so I ended up getting a second Bachelor's. And that was really what got me really moving in technology and really started getting my career going.

From there ...I got a job in academics, in the University. ... And I was a little lab tech, setting up labs, and at the time when we set up the labs we had to run from computer to computer, putting floppy disks in to install programs and switching, you know, the configurations so we could go from one network to another network, and all that fun stuff that we never have to worry about any more. ...It was fun.

Then we started a Microsoft Certification Program, and at that time my supervisor moved to corporate, and I took his place as the Manager of Instructional Technology. I was in that position for a while, and then at that time we set up all the classrooms with the multi-media systems and we set a lot of standards, which was really cool. I mean a really cool time. ...

I worked for [the private university] for eight years... and after a few years in the technology area, I started overseeing a beta hybrid program. It was a server. I started with the hardware, and that's why it came to me. ... That was my first introduction to academics – before that I spoke no "academic," [be]cause I was always in technology. ... [During this time I also received a graduate degree in an online program.]

That evolved ... and we were working with the processes and figuring out how it was all gonna work. Set up the basic foundation for that. Set up standards, set up processes... and over time we got that kinda going and everything was good, but I wanted to get into something that was, I thought, would be more focused on academics, and a little less on revenue. ... [And so I moved to a different university], ...[where I used] some synchronized delivery – so it was kinda new and I wanted to learn more about that, and be involved in that and they had the basic ideas, but they didn't have the infra-structure, and so I spent the next year and a half building the infra-structure. ... Then the opportunity came up ... where I work now, and ...it was just too tempting. [I have been here for about 3 years.]

Sheri started out in the tech industry, so the technical aspects of distance learning were familiar to her. However, she found her love of academics through working with a large private university. She learned a lot about online learning and how to set up and develop a program while working at the private university. She realized she enjoyed working in the academic arena and moved into the smaller community college where she could focus more on academics, while still leveraging her technical background.

***Glen: Director of eLearning***

I've turned out, Umm - Let me back up. I was a high school dropout, and so I joined the military and [I] retired out of the military ... and didn't know what I was gonna do. Education wasn't even a, you know, a piece of it because I got my GED while I was in the military. I got out, and I thought, "I want to be a nurse". I wanted to be a nurse, of all things, because you know ... at the time, ... it was exploding. There [were] jobs everywhere. And so I went in and tested, and failed miserably. [I] couldn't get into the nursing program plus [there was] a wait list to get in. ...

And so on my way out, back to my car ... I passed by the College of Education. I thought, "Wow", summers off! This is a true story! And so ... I went in there and, talked to ... the advisors, got into the program, and got my Bachelor's Degree in secondary education with a minor in History, minor in Educational Technologies....

It was hard to find a job as a social studies teacher. There are just so many of [th]em, so I found a job as a Technology Instructor in a middle school.... I was teaching computers in the middle school, for three years and I woke up and realized, you know, this isn't probably what I want to be doing very much longer. It's a tough job. ...

So, the following year I went back to school [and] got my Master's Degree in Information Systems, Educational Information Systems. ... Once I completed my Master's Degree I found a part-time job with a community college ... and I started teaching for them part-time and trying to get a full-time job. ... While at the community college ... we had just gotten an internet connection at the college, and so myself and one other math instructor put up web pages and you know, put our syllabus online, and started playing with it. It was real basic back then.

That's what got me interested in this, and then a couple of years later, of course, course management systems started showing up, and you know, WebCT, Blackboard, ... and so, the college that I was working at, purchased WebCT and, asked for some volunteers to work on building some online courses, and I said,

“Yeah, let’s do that.” Thinking it would lead into a full-time job, which it did. The next year, they hired me full-time to teach and develop, online classes with the college, and help develop the program. So, I helped develop their entire online program, and three other colleges in the state, contacted me and asked me to help set up their programs. So I was working for four colleges one full-time, and the other three, part-time, setting up their online programs. ... I really got into ... developing the back side of the course management systems, helping the instructors develop their courses, helping them learn how to teach online, because, it’s tough, it’s tough.

As I was doin’ that, I presented at a couple of conferences, and a represent of [a large university] was there, and asked if I’d help build a program in the Continuing Education Department, on certifying teachers ... to teach online. And so, I worked with them for four years, and helped them develop all of that. ... They’re the ones that got me interested in ... movin’ on to get my Doctorate. ... I found a Community College Leadership program. ... [I] went through that, [and] never dreamed I’d get into the administration side of online education. I always loved the faculty side of online, because, it’s a lot of fun. ...

But, I had this opportunity to go to work for [where I am now.]... I really wasn’t sure if I wanted the job or not. I went and read the job description, went and talked to the Vice-President that I’d be reporting to, reviewed the information in the interview, and really wasn’t sure, and, I thought, “Ah, what the heck? ... I’ll put an application in”. ... They called for an interview, and we went through the interview, and [I] was hired. And for the last three years, coming up on three years, now with the college, they had not had any distance education at all.... I started a distance education program from the ground up. ...

While Glen didn’t have a strong original educational background, he learned how important education was for him while he was in the military and upon the completion of his GED. After leaving the military, Glen needed to choose what would be the best career choice for him and he found he liked education when he “stumbled” into the education building of his college, and became a social studies teacher. After earning a Master’s degree he discovered the community college and has stayed within that realm ever since, even completing a doctoral degree in community college leadership. While in this process, he learned that he had good skills and a high satisfaction with working within distance learning programs and developing a strong program.

***Ruby: Coordinator for Distance Learning***

I started out in Engineering, and my husband was going to graduate school. ... I had been in the Peace Corps, and I had taught English, ... and my whole family are all educators...and I here I am at [the state] university, ... I think I'm gonna study Teaching ESL. And so, I did that. And it was actually, it ended up being a degree in Adult Education. And I thought, you know... if I go back overseas, that'll help me teach English, as a second language, but, I'll probably stay in Engineering.

Well, then we moved ... and there weren't really a lot of jobs in engineering, at least not the kind of stuff that I did. But there was an opening at the community college to run a grant funded program for them, and, I just happened to have the right degree and I was like, "Sure, I'll try that". I mean, it was the first time I ever did any kind of administration. ....So, anyway it's kinda funny how things happened, so I've been doin' it ever since!

I was at the smallest community college in [the state.] ... I was the Director of Professional Technical Education. ... Part of the Director of Professional Technical Education's job, at the time, was to be in charge of distance learning. Because, there was no distance learning program, we tried to figure out what that meant. And, I guess that was '92. ... I was there for about eight years and then, I left for a couple of years, and I went traveling. ... I came back ... and settled in this area ... and when I showed up there wasn't really much of a program [at this school.] I mean, there were some people teaching online, but they were in the early adopter stage. ...

So, the dean asked me to get it organized, and actually they had no position at the time. I was just like a special projects person or something like that. ... [After a couple of years] I said, "You know, I think we need to re-work my job description." ... I just did any project that the dean needed to get done like, distance ed, and then I was the administrator for a couple of professional technical programs, and... I was doin' all this stuff, and which was fine, because I had that broad background. ... Because it got so important, and it took up more and more of my time ... I've tried to get rid of all the other stuff and just focus on that. I think it's been kinda like over the years, I've done all this stuff, and this was part of it, as that part grew, it kinda, it took over my pie!

Like Glen and Sheri, Ruby, did not start out with the intention of pursuing an educational career. When she moved to an area where she could not pursue the career, she intended she embarked on an educational career, joining a small local community college. She remained within the community college system holding several positions over her career and her role has grown to include more distance learning responsibilities.

***Betty: Distance Learning Coordinator***

I started off as an undergrad in ... 1991. At that time, my whole purpose in life was to be a pediatrician, and have the Air Force pay for it. Somewhere around my sophomore year, I said “No, I don’t want to be in the Air Force, and no, I don’t want to have anything to do with the medical profession. So what am I gonna do?”

“Mmmm, well, my best friends in School of Ed. Let me try that.” So, I got my undergraduate degree in, English and Biology Education, High School Education. I taught high school for, two years. After that, and while I was an undergrad ... I also worked part time in the libraries, and, I really enjoyed that. So, after two years of teaching high school students, I said, “High school is not for me.” So, I went back and got my Master’s in Library Science. ... I graduated from there ... and got a job at a public library. [I] was there for a year. I saw a job opening [for a librarian here.]... [I] took the job ... and moved to the area.

I was a librarian at the community college for about four years, when our distance learning administrator retired. ... While I loved being a librarian, I did not care for the person I worked for. ... So I said, “Let me apply for this position,” and I got it. And so, I kinda just “stumbled” into distance learning administration. My job as a librarian ... was working with online data bases, doing cataloging, so I was familiar with doing a lot of stuff online, but not necessarily distance learning.

While I was at the library... I started taking some doctoral classes to see if I liked them, and then ... I was formally admitted to the program, and my program is Higher Education Administration. ... That’s my history, I think.

Betty also did not start out in education, like Glen she has a military background but in the Air Force. Additionally, like Glen, she came across the school of education and studied high school education. She soon moved to library science and then to the community college. She chose to move to the distance learning area, mainly for a change of pace, even though she did not have experience with it. We saw above that Glen had a doctorate in community college leadership; likewise, Betty is earning a degree in higher education administration.

***Sharyn: Assistant Dean for Instructional Learning Technologies***

Sure. Right out of college I was doing an internship and I got a full-time position at a small company ... doing the multi-media development for them, and I worked for them for about five years, and we moved from just still images to multi-media

development to web development. ... Then my job shifted into doing administration of the systems, and I was bored out of my skull.

So, I thought maybe I had all this good knowledge, maybe I could go and teach someone what I know about doing web-development. And I started teaching at a few of the local colleges in the area, got a full-time position, and I was Professor of Computer Technologies. ... I was in that role for about six years. While I was in that role of actively teaching, I also became department chair, and I was department chair for four years. And, it was in 2000 that the state system ... decided we really need to offer online courses, [be]cause lots of other places are offering online courses. ...

We didn't have a Director of Distance Learning at the institution. ... I don't even know if there was any thought, it was just like: "Oh, the system's offering to pay us money, whoo-hoo". ... I had been teaching somewhat online the entire time that I had been there, because, we had a "home-grown" system ... that the department had created ... it was basically a very scaled down course management system. And, the system said, "we're looking at getting this thing called Blackboard," and after much hemming and hawing as a department, we said, "Ok, you know, we've always been the trend setters, we've been doing this distance education thing for years." ... And so we said, "Ok, you know, we'll do this – we'll do this Blackboard thing". And so, I had been teaching basically hybrid courses, so this was a chance for me to develop and do an online course.

Well, it was decided, at some point, after we actually started offering, five classes, 10 classes, 15 classes, that maybe somebody should oversee this as a, part-time, release time position, and so I don't remember if I volunteered or I was asked, but I was given a course release ... to take over this as Director of Online Learning.  
...

When I took over ... I think we were probably three or four years into offering online courses. And there was a "system group" that got together – representatives from all the colleges---and at that point, I got on to this little committee, and I would go to these meetings. And it was like ... "students really need some help outside of normal operating hours. Maybe we should have a Help Desk." ... There are a lot of these pieces that we really didn't think about....

So I helped get the program ... off the ground [there.]... And then, I had finished up my Master's program in Organization and Management, and I had really hit the apex of where I could go in [that institution.] They weren't looking to make the Distance Learning Director a full-time position. There was no place in academic affairs that I could move to, and so I sought a different position. And I ended up [here] as their Director of Distance Learning, and that's where I am right now. [Currently, I'm also in a Leadership and Change program for my Doctorate Degree.]

Again, Sharyn did not start out in an education arena. However, through teaching she found that her career satisfaction was higher when she taught people how to do tasks, rather than actually doing the tasks herself. While she was teaching, she began to take on leadership roles within her department serving as department chair. Her group was also very innovative at her institution when it began to offer some distance learning courses. Sharyn decided to leave her first institution so that she could pursue more leadership and administrative roles. Like Betty, she is also in a leadership type doctoral program.

***David: Director of Distance and Global Education***

OK, I'll try to make this as concise as possible. I worked for many years in various other occupations. Before I ever got into education I worked as a television director and producer, for instance, for several years. As a matter of fact, I got to my first job at the college here... in the Public Information Office because of my media background. So that's how I got to working in a college; although in previous years as a television person, I also worked at a university in the university television operations, so I've always had some connection with higher-ed I guess. But anyway, eighteen years ago I started [here.] I worked in the media office for about five years, and then came the advent of the modern age of "distance learning". ... So I became the, Regional Coordinator for the [state] Communications Network still working at the college though. And that's a two-way interactive TV system that we have used heavily since the day it started. So that's how I got into distance learning. ...

And then, I went through various other occupations at the college. I could never have stayed at that college as long as I have if I haven't have had four or five discretely different occupations there. I was the AV Services Director for a while. They called it learning technologies in those days, and worked with the phone system, all kinds of tele-communications things. ...

[I] worked through all of that until the advent of the age of Online Education, which for practical purposes came about in the late '90's. My college president decided that our college needed to be in that in a big way. ... I became the Director of Distance Learning in I think 1999. And, we've just continued to grow from there!

David has been in education for many years, in many different contexts, though he started out with a media background. He found part of his love of working at his college, was that he was able to have many different jobs throughout his long tenure with

them. It was part of his background in media technologies that he became the director of distance learning and has been able to continue to grow that program over the past years.

***Ruth: Dean of Extended Learning Services***

You know, it's interesting. I grew up with a college professor of sorts as a father. Although, I didn't think of him as that, because we were in the Air Force. ... But it never occurred to me that college would be the place where I'd want to be. ...

My mother was the one that always said, "Get your teaching certificate so you have something to fall back on." My dad said, "Do whatever you want." So like many, I went to college. I started out as an education major, and then switched majors to Philosophy and Bible. But again, my focus was gonna be church education. So education has always been the passion. It's just how it has worked out in my life.

When I first graduated from college I worked for about three years in Christian Ed, and then like everybody else after three years, you're burned out, because it's a crazy job. And at the same time, I went and got my Master's in Education, and the goal was to write curriculum. ...I never did that. I came [to this state] to teach in a small Christian school. A friend of mine had started it. He was the first principal and he called me and said, "My English teacher decided not to come, I need you to be here in a week". I said, "Sure, you betcha – no problem". So I came [here] for a year in 1976.

Then, I got married to a pharmacist. We owned drug stores. I did retail for a long time, but all through that you teach. You teach either in the church or however you do it. I've never ever not been teaching! In fact, it's all I could do sometimes; not to just stand in the drug store and correct grammar! ...

But in 1993, umm, I was working here, for the [newspaper,] and [the owner] said you're going with me to Toastmasters. And it was at 6:00 in the morning at the college, and I gave my first speech, and the president of the colleges was there and the Dean of Arts and Sciences. And they said to me as soon as I was done, "Do you have a degree? What can you teach?" So I began teaching ... in '93 as an adjunct and I did adjunct instructing for them up through '99. And then [I] switched to being a Grant Writer. I decided to move from working part-time here and part-time there into full-time at the college. ...

My boss was the Chief Academic Officer. And I was in her office one day with a grant proposal, and she said, "We're gonna try this online thing----teaching courses over the internet. I don't know how it's gonna work, but are you interested?" Much as I said my whole life, "I don't know, but sure – you betcha—I'll try." So I was our first online instructor in the fall of 2000, ... and that's how we got started in online. And it took about a year, and I was writing some grants for the online consortium we're part of, and then I became the faculty

trainer for the consortium four hrs a week which grew to eight hours a week, which grew to 12 hours a week. ... So I began to be part of the consortium staff fairly early on, and continued to teach courses. ...

About four years ago, ... [I] gave up the grant writing, and became Director of Distance Learning. And then this summer they elevated ... the distance learning and our high school programs to a division level, and I became a Dean of Extended Learning this fall. So the administration was something I never thought about in my life. Teaching in the college was not what I thought about in my life, but it's where I belong. ... I love the community college. It's something I knew nothing of, growing up.... So that's how I got into online with that, and even though I'm a dean, I'm still teaching a class.

With Ruth, we see someone who has always wanted to be in education. She entered her college education with the idea that her career would be involved in some form within education. Even though she worked in retail for a few years, she felt she was always teaching in other areas of her life. She found the community college, through a newspaper job she had, and so she fell into the community college, teaching part time. Soon, she moved to a full time job at the community college and eventually into distance learning. Ruth admits that administration is not where she thought she would end up, but she does feel that this is where she belongs.

***Kristie: Online Learning Coordinator***

[Well, I was in the Army.] I had just gotten out of the Army, taken a job with the federal government, working a GF5 job. .... And, I took another secretary job in the Criminal Investigation Division Office, and I my main job was to prepare all the reports for court. ... I also was a Health Insurance Investigator. I did surveillance and stuff like that, and that kept me on my toes a lot too. ...

I originally started in my college as the, Emergency Management degree developer, and so I was with the main instructor for a two year degree program online. ... This was our college's first, experience with online so we decided we would develop a full program to do that. ... That's because that's my background and all that. I then learned how to use the technology. ... The online platform we use; learning that was something new. Then we went through a number of online folks our administrators. ... I've probably been doing this about two and a half years as the administrator.

They asked me, "Would you apply for the job?" And I'm like, "Well, I don't have the educational qualifications you're looking for." [Be]cause they were looking for a Masters in Ed Technology and mine is in Criminal Justice. So I said, "I really don't think I'm gonna match your stuff," and they had so much trouble finding somebody ... so they, they adjusted that for me so I could qualify. And so that's how I fell into that. ... I like the technology and all that so that's not really a bad fit for me. ... I also was looking around for programs to get a doctorate and I saw they have they have online legal programs where you can get a law degree and I said, "That's what I want to do; I want a law degree." So I am pursuing that right now. I guess that's pretty much it.

Kristie, like Glen, was in the military before joining education and online learning. She started at the college by developing a degree in emergency management as a two year online program. This was the institutions first endeavor into online learning. Because of her background she was offered a job as the director of the online learning program. Kristie also has an interest in the legal system and is currently pursuing a degree in law.

***Brian: Distance Learning Coordinator***

This goes back a few years, I've only actually been teaching as the community [college] ... for ten years. That is really when I first started. I worked part-time ... 15 years ago. ... And then I came here, and just before I retired from my previous job, I worked for [another university.]...

Now before that, I was a military recruiter for 13 years, so my career has been in the military. And so that kind of transitioned me from recruiter, human resources, marketing, and sales. So my first class [here] was a sales and part promotion class that I was hired for. Then it was a ... Human Resource Management course, and then I gradually worked my hours, and so I've been Adjunct for 10 years. And then when the position came open for a part-time, half-time Distance Learning pool, then I put my time in for that.

When I was at [the other] university I did correspondence courses. ... So when I asked for the job [here,] and interviewed and accepted it, I thought I knew more about distance learning than I really did. So, I've learned a lot.

Brian started at the community college as did Sharyn and Ruth as a part time faculty member. However, before the community college, he was in the military like others in this study. While teaching at the community college, he learned about distance

learning from teaching some correspondence courses. Because of this experience it led him to accept the position as the distance learning coordinator at his institution.

***Brenda: Director of Library and Alternative Delivery***

I actually started out; my undergraduate degree is a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Graphic Communications. I actually only worked as a designer for about a year after college and then went to work for a company ... and it ended up being computer training, on the whole graphics industry. And that was when the Macintosh first came out and when that whole industry was moving from doing drawing and paste-up on boards to doing them on computer. ... There was, lots to do, lots of training to do ... moving a whole industry. ...

I discovered that I really had a gift for being able to, to teach or to train, and to especially take technical terms and put them into laymen's terms, ... and help people to make that transition. [And] then ... what actually happened when I was doing all that work, there was this gentleman that I was working with who had a friend at [a] community college and he said ... "They really need somebody to teach Illustrator." I'm like, "I could never do that! I need to work one-on-one with corporate clients!" ... And they were desperate as we know now as to how that can happen. And so, I said yes, and it was kinda fun. ...

So that was my first move into community college. In that we moved back [here] and actually in that, five or six year time frame, a lot of people had already made the move. So that training goldmine was pretty much mined. So I moved back [here]; applied at [the] community college to teach in their multi-media department, and taught. I started teaching there as an adjunct. I started out as an adjunct teacher, and I did some other road-warrior stuff, I taught at [several different places,] but, all classrooms. ...

[Here] they had what was called the Center for Teaching Excellence. And I went to a couple of seminars where they talked about teaching strategies, which to me that was like left field, but for some reason it really hit home. I realized that I loved education and had a passion for that. So, after teaching part-time for several years, I actually left [the community college]... and got my Master's degree ... [in an] Information and Learning Technology program.

I taught at [a university] for a while, and then ended up back here at [the community college] as their administrator for online learning. So that's my journey. I know. You never know what's gonna get somebody someplace.

Brenda started out in the industry of graphic communications. While in a position using her first degree, she learned she was able to communicate with and train others effectively. A friend at a local community college encouraged her to take those skills and

teach. She found that she did enjoy it and began her career in education. She has taught at several schools, and through that she found she had a passion for education and learning new things. She left the community college to earn a degree in information and learning technologies, and then returned to the community college as an administrator for online learning.

### ***Conclusion***

This section provided a brief introduction to each participant and their history. It gives a background to their journey and how it has brought them into their current positions. The reader can see above that many of these participants did not start out with the intention of being in education. Those that did however did not anticipate the administrative roles they are now in. This background information will provide the basis for the analysis of the participants' words, and how the themes will be revealed. Through the use of these introductions, the reader will be able to go back to the data to help understand how the various themes were derived. The reader will learn more about each participant through the data analysis process and learn how the lived experiences of these participants have shaped who they are today and how they serve in their respective positions.

## CHAPTER 5 – A CONVERSATION WITH THE PARTICIPANTS

The purpose of this phenomenological study of community college online learning administrators was to determine how they make sense of their journey, and how their journey has influenced their current leadership role. After creating the individual stories of each person, I continued with Moustakas's (1994) method of phenomenological reduction to categorize the interviews. As he stated the "empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience" (p. 13). I used this thought and Moustakas's process for analyzing my data and developing my themes.

Analysis revealed that the participants' experiences happened through five main themes, (a) Barriers, (b) Actions, (c) Observation of Leadership, (d) Working with Groups, and (e) Current Position. The first theme, barriers deals with experiences that the participants described that were or continue to be difficult for them in their current positions. These often were items that made it more difficult for them to complete the job and fulfill their vision. The second theme, actions evolved as the participants discussed how they worked within their positions, and how they see themselves leading. The third theme, observation of leadership, discusses what characteristics the participants have seen in the superiors they themselves have worked for, and how they have perceived those people to be either good or poor leaders. The fourth theme, working with groups, developed as the participants discussed how they must work not only with groups within

their institutions but also with groups within their community and state areas as well. Finally, the theme, current position, developed as the participants discussed the day to day details of their jobs and their decision making process.

After the themes were developed, I had to look for a way to present my findings in a way that would honor the participants' words, again I turned to Stoeckel (Stoeckel, 2004). To achieve this goal, the data is presented as a conversation with the ten participants, with me serving as their moderator. The participants' voices are based on their personal interview transcripts. I use brackets to help the flow of the "conversation". Using this procedure I created a virtual meeting of the ten participants. Although they did not actually meet, here they participate in a roundtable discussion. Through this conversation, the reader will be able to see how I arrived at the themes, and how the themes relate to this study. Each main theme is introduced and at the end of each theme, a brief statement will assist the reader to tie each piece together. I will end the chapter with each participant discussing what they feel their next steps in their careers will be. This will help the reader understand the journey metaphor and the path each participant may pursue.

### **Barriers**

There are barriers everyone must face. In the case of these participants they all faced similar barriers. Three main subthemes are related to barriers, which are (a) traditional mindset, (b) understanding position within the institution, and (c) other barriers. Traditional mindset is described as those who are having difficulty realizing the value of distance learning and making the change from traditional learning to other modes of instruction. Here, the participants discuss how they work with those people.

The second subtheme, understanding position within the institution, relates to where distance learning fits within each participant's institution. The participants describe how they may find themselves and distance learning in various parts of the institution. Finally, other barriers, are those that the participants face such as budget and communicating to the institution where distance learning is heading. Here, I will investigate each of these subthemes in the context of the conversation with the participants as a group.

### ***Traditional Mindset***

**Moderator:** Welcome, it is great that you were all able to meet with me today. Thank you for your time; I appreciate you taking time from your busy schedules to have this discussion with us. In my earlier conversations with each of you, you discussed how difficult it is to bring everyone on board with the idea of online learning. Can you share some of those thoughts with the rest of the group here?

**David:** Higher Education is, as I'm sure you know, is notorious for, just damn near being "set in stone". It just does not want to change.

**Ruby:** I think there's always challenges when you do something different. I mean, when you organize something that can be sort of threatening to people. In the beginning there was a lot of people who were threatened by online classes – thought it was going to take their job away, and aren't they of less quality, and all this kind of stuff, you know?

**Ruth:** There's that real struggle to get people who've been in the classroom sometimes for 20 years or 30 to imagine the virtual classroom. So that's an issue. We have been a threat to the establishment, and as we have said now grades are online, now this is online---it's just threatening to people.

**David:** It's pretty obvious to anybody who wants to look at it, that online education and everything connected with it, has changed the face of education. Certainly, the face of higher education. It's long-since done that; it's a done deal! It's still changing, and it's gonna continue to for as long as there's a human species. But, (clear throat) the change has already occurred as far as I am concerned, and as far as most of the people I work with are concerned, and certainly, as far as most but not all of the instructors I work with are concerned. There's always gonna be a few that just refuse to believe the evidence in front of their eyes. But as far as I'm concerned, it's a done deal.

**Kristie:** Sometimes that's a challenge too. Is getting across to people that, umm, technology is a part of the world now and we need to get on the wagon here!

**Sheri:** [I agree]. Traditional mindset is a huge barrier, and it doesn't matter if it's faculty, it is also in student services, it's in administration.

**Moderator:** Now, I don't expect us to come up with complete answers, but how have you managed to work through this barrier and bring people on board so to speak?

**Glen:** [For me and my institution, the board was] unsure what distance learning was. So I, I actually had to do several presentations to the board on what the history of distance-learning at [our school was], where we are now, and where I project us to be in five years.

**Betty:** On our side, the curriculum side, we work with, faculty, we work with students, and distance learning really is an out-dated misnomer for what we are! [We do support and train everyone that's involved in distance learning].

**Moderator:** It really sounds like, this idea of people thinking in the traditional mindset of how education works and looks, has been something many of you have had to work through, and in some cases still struggle with occasionally. This is truly something that institutions can look at to help support you in your everyday roles.

Here the reader can see that even though their respective institutions have had distance or online learning for many years, they still struggled with how it is viewed and valued by their institutions. David discussed this in relation to higher education in general and how difficult it is for change to take place. We see that the participants need to spend time helping people understand not only the role of distance learning but how distance learning can be effective for students and the institution.

### ***Understanding Position within the Institution***

**Moderator:** As we discussed some of the barriers that you each face at your institutions. You talked about, the idea of organizational fit with your institution and where online learning fits. Can you share with the others here today, how that has been for you?

**Sheri:** [I'll start], I've been there two and a half years, and I've had five supervisors! Three were academic, one was technology, and now I am in Student Services. And they haven't quite figured out (laughing) where I should go.

**Sharyn:** My definition of the college, kind of where I fit, is somewhat hazy. I'm not considered a Dean. I'm not always invited to Dean's Counsel. I'm not invited to uh, student services meetings. I think, a question for the institution is to figure out, what are they gonna do with me? Am I a Director of a campus – like, you know, “physical” campus – umm, or am I a Dean of an area – and we haven't figured out as an institution how to treat [that].

**Kristie:** I personally, I think that I ---my position should either be in IT or it should be in instruction. Right now, we're in economic development. And, you know, it's not my decision but I don't think that's a good fit for us, because so much of what I do ... it's all instructional related. [Since we last talked], the vice president of instruction she has kind of thrown down the gauntlet. I guess in their cabinet meeting with just the vice presidents and the president meetings together. But apparently she's thrown down the gauntlet saying she wants online education in her department, and uh, I've had some conversations with her about the directions she wants to take with it, and all that, and it's a much better fit.

**Ruby:** I also sort of straddle instruction and IT. I think, it's just..., keep integrating, IT with instruction, and keeping integrating distance learning with instruction in general. I think it's a good....it's a good way to go. ... They sent me over to IT with the the idea that I would be like a physical bridge between them.

**Sheri:** [That's] the other major barrier is ego. Territory. And people everywhere have their own little territories, their own little worlds that they've built, and they don't like it being encroached upon. And unfortunately, distance learning encroaches on everybody. It gets into everybody's little pockets and they feel uncomfortable with that.

**Sharyn:** [For me it] was “enlightening” to see that you could roll out a program without thinking about all the pieces. [I have seen this at two institutions in two different states].

**Betty:** [Same here], this department was kind of started on the “fly” – let's try a few courses, see how it goes, and no policies and procedures were ever set in stone.

**David:** Yep. Yep. Precisely! What you described is exactly my experience, and the experience of this college.

This ambiguity, of where distance learning fits in, is something I did hear from my participants, repeatedly as they described how their programs started small and then evolved slowly from tele-courses, to a few single courses online. And then all of a

sudden, their institutions realized they had a lot of things happening online and they had not done anything to support their students, and faculty. And then they had to almost backtrack in some ways, to get it all pulled together, and with that they needed to decide where online learning fits within their institutions, and the structure that needs to be in place to support it. They have also struggled with where distance learning “lives” at their institution and how it is integrated with all the various other components as well, and with that how to work with all the various agencies as we will see in the theme working with groups. Finding the proper place in the institution for distance learning can affect the growth of the distance learning program. As we will see below, this is an issue with barriers such as FTE and budgeting.

### ***Other Barriers***

**Moderator:** We have talked about the barriers you have faced, and here today we talked briefly about the idea of overcoming the traditional mindset and where online learning fits within your individual institutions and how that is somewhat vague. Let’s talk now about some other barriers that you all face. I will throw it out there; I remember when we each talked that many of you discussed budget and the cost of online learning, would anyone like to discuss how this relates to their position?

**Kristie:** I have zero dollars in my budget. And so I’m struggling with that. You see since I’ve been in a position and I never had a budget.

**Brian:** I have a budget, but I can’t touch it. [It is only] a profit center for DL.

**Glen:** [Gosh, when we first talked], I was asking for half a million! It passed with umm, with no problems at all. E-learning or distance learning at any college is the most expensive program at the college, you can’t get around it!

**Moderator:** Wow! What a difference for each of you! Some of you talked about budget in terms of FTE, and enrollment. How does FTE relate to you?

**David:** All they [upper administration] ever want to know is: Are our numbers growing? Which, of course right now, they are. Good thing I can say that. I, I shudder to think, if I couldn’t! The day will come when I can’t. Then what?  
(Laughing)

**Betty:** It's gonna halt the machine! I call this the FTE machine.

**Ruth:** It's a real barrier on campus. Because we're growing 30%, but the college isn't growing 30% so the students are moving from on-ground to online, and that's threatening.

**Sharyn:** Part of it is over-coming the mindset, that of we're "enrollment driven." You know, and I think that that's something, I guess, that when I look forward, I would like to change. I don't want to just be enrollment driven.

**David:** [I agree but] I have to continue to grow what we're doing, and especially try to make it better. I mean, my college's administration, as most, frankly, are is all about growing.

**Moderator:** Assuming we can overcome the money issues, you also discussed some other administrative challenges that you face.

**Betty:** One of the biggest barriers is (long pause) (sigh) my dean having one vision, and me having another.

**David:** [This] is the idea of uh the challenge that I have of communicating to the college, and especially to my administrator superiors, what we do. Uh bringing it to their table, and making sure that they pay attention to it, and making sure that they know how we do what we do here, without being obnoxious about it, without being obtrusive about it. Uh, that's a real trick. That's a huge challenge, and sometimes I think I've not been very good at it. I feel like I've tried really hard, consistently over these years, to do that, but maybe not, maybe I'm, maybe I haven't tried hard enough and I certainly maybe haven't been very successful at it uh because it seems to me a lot of the decisions that are made above my level, having to do with my area or areas that are peripheral to it, or somewhat close in other words, the decision that I can see played out every day, they're so bad. They're so stupid and twisted that it tells me that they clearly must not know nearly enough about how we do this thing that we do. 'Cause if they did know, they couldn't possibly make that decision, I don't mean that to sound if it sounds bitter or something, I don't mean it to, it's.....I'm trying to be dis-passionate about it.

**Kristie:** We just had a new president take over a year ago October. And all these speeches he's been giving to the community about how he wants to increase distance learning. Many many times he's mentioned this. When budgets came out this year, once again I had no money, so I'm going "OK", once again – you're.....somebody's saying one thing, but doing another." And I just, I have a very difficult time with that. I mean I feel like, "tell me what you really want", and I can do that, but don't tell me one thing, and you know dangle a carrot and

think that I'm not smart enough to figure that out. What that did for me was that it colored my opinion or my view of my leadership.

**Moderator:** Well it is certainly difficult to overcome the barriers that we face within our distinctive positions and institutions. Brenda, you have been quiet, would you like to share a challenge that you face?

**Brenda:** Yeah (laugh), I umm I am struggling a little bit with having been there four years and online learning has is not the new kid on the block anymore. It's become pretty much the integral part of most schools. Of keeping up that same enthusiasm, and umm. What would I say? Just newness about it. You know I can see it in the people I am working with there is a sense of Umm placidness. Complacency. That's a good word for it. So really looking at ways to you know how to overcome that, and get things excited again.

**Ruth:** [I could see that] We're always lookin' I've got to find somethin' to do. I'm one of those people that if I don't have a new challenge, I'm bored. And I don't get bored easily, 'cause I'm always finding a new challenge, but other people are, "I like doing it the way that it's always been done; I'm comfortable, please don't make me be uncomfortable". And those are the ones that I think are the biggest challenge for me to work with, because I don't quite understand somebody who always wants things to always be the same way, and of course, they don't understand me.

Within these various barriers, the participants in this conversation were able to relate to each other in discussion budget and FTE struggles. They do have different budgeting amounts, however they all relate to FTE and how to continue to manage their programs. They also discussed how they relate to their own superiors in these areas. Here the reader can see that the barriers that administrators face such as traditional mindset, their position within the institution and budget are not unique to their institution. In the next section, we will explore how the participants act to overcome and attempt to conquer these struggles.

### **Actions**

Actions became a theme implying how the participants act as leaders in distance learning administration; five supporting themes emerged as I continued to analyze the

data. Actions involved (a) building trust and buy in, (b) communication, (c) embracing individuals, (d) leading change, and (e) the participant as a visionary. The first subtheme of building trust and buy in, deals with how each administrator works to gain the trust of various constituencies and how they have accomplished buy in, within these groups. In the second subtheme, the topic of communication was used in how the participant worked with not only their subordinates, but also with other constituencies within the college environment. Communication is also discussed as a challenge or barrier that the participants encountered. In the third supporting theme, embracing individuals, the participants talk about how when working with others, especially subordinates, it is important to understand individuals, and embrace that individuality that each person brings with them into situations and the decisions they make. The fourth theme, leading change, examines how the participants within this study discuss being change agents within their institutions, and the time it takes to initiate change and changing the culture within the institution to encourage this change. Finally, in the theme of participant as a visionary, participants discuss how important it is for them to be looking ahead and planning where they will be going with their program in relation to the institution. They also discuss how it was important to get feedback and encourage brainstorming with others in the institution to be effective. In this section, I will explore each supporting theme using the quotes of the participants in the virtual discussion.

### ***Building Trust and Buy in***

**Moderator:** When you think of the barriers you face within your institutions, one of the ways many of you discussed you tried to overcome them was through building trust and buy in from various constituencies. I would like to explore that idea with you now, could you share some of your thoughts and experiences in relating to getting others to buy into online learning?

**Brenda:** [When I first started] Umm, the things that stand out is recognizing that the most important thing was building relationships with the faculty, and that sometimes this position is well-received and sometimes it's not. So, knowing that that is, Umm, a crucial period in building those relationships. So I just kinda spent a lot of time just walking around faculty offices, talking to 'em, seeing what they were doing, Umm letting some of them take the lead and you know, in what was going on and what we could show to the faculty.

**Sharyn:** [Yep] it took a while to build up trust with the faculty to show them that, you know I wasn't scary; I wasn't gonna force them to get online – do their classes online. Umm, I think that I, I still sense that there's a big fear from faculty, although it's diminishing, that I'm going to make them do something that they don't want to do, and that they're not gonna be happy with the results and that this is all a passing phase! And, we've been making headway. Slow headway, but headway. I spent the last year, you know, fostering these relationships, really trying to work with the faculty, getting them....comfortable with me, and making it, you know, I'm not a bad person. I'm not "evil and mean" and making you do things.

**David:** Yes, I mean, the lesson there is: Lesson 1: Again, just simple decent human behavior. Show people respect. Show them you care. Give them their dignity. Never take that away from them. If you take that away from them, they'll never, ever trust you again. Once that deal is done, it's irreversible.

**Glen:** The biggest thing that helped me build those relationships is that, Umm, the year I came that they were bargaining their new contract, and so I got bargained in – that they'd get paid for developing online classes....That's all it took.

**Moderator:** So you got faculty buy in, because they got to develop it?

**Glen:** Exactly! They're the ones that developed it, I, I says, "hey, I'm here as a service, I work for you guys!" "Tell me what you need".....and once they had seen that, that I wasn't a threat, but I was someone that would work with them --- I can't keep 'em outta our office now.

**Sharyn:** [Right], I really believe in empowering people ... it's not my role to tell them what to do.

**Brenda:** Well I would say that I [also] try to empower the people that I over see. Umm, you know giving them the, um, the ability to move forward have their own ideas, take charge, of their projects.

Here, the reader sees that for these administrators it was important when they came into their positions that they were able to get buy in and trust from those that they

work with, whether those people were their subordinates or just people they interacted with frequently. They were able to do this by building relationships, allowing people to gain ownership of their projects and empowering others to make those decisions. They felt that this was very important for helping their area move forward in accordance with their vision.

### ***Communication***

**Moderator:** In our individual conversations you talked about many forms of communication. You discussed communication with your staff, members of the college, specific groups in the college and the challenges and barriers that communication has sometimes caused for you. Can you describe how you handle those communications?

**Ruth:** There's a lot of time spent in online administration and communication. More so than face-to-face. You can have a meeting, you can send out an e-mail, but boy the work of communicating all of this to online faculty. ... Keeping everything straight for them, and keeping communicating well, that – that consumes an enormous amount of our time and our energy.

**Sheri:** [Right and] when you're trying to communicate in a distance environment, you have to be far more careful about whether it...the message gets across. There you don't have the non-verbals.

**Ruth:** (chuckling) And just about the time we think we've written the most clearly written statement in the workplace.....and "what does that mean"? So, umm, yeah.....communications are huge, and ours gets complicated by the fact that the students aren't all our students. ... [So] we've all had to learn to communicate better in typing.

**David:** You can't do anything if you don't have clear communication with your folks---so most of your energy, in my experience, has to go into that. I have to make sure that person A and person B, and person C are all feeling really clear with me, so that they can tell me what's on their mind, and they can tell me what they want.

**Brenda:** Or if something is not going well, I want them to feel that they can talk to me about that they are not going to be judged or get into trouble or anything like that.

**Ruby:** Well, you know, I use a sort of combination of, Umm, you know, just person to person communication. ... I [also] try to not get involved in these sort of

egoic mind-games where it's like I have to be right all the time, and I, you know, have to be defensive all the time, so I want to be....I try to practice non-defensive communication skills. And I think, and that's not being passive, I think that means asking good questions, and Umm, being willing to adapt and be flexible.

**Ruth:** [Right and] I want to keep people informed uh.....Some of my past administration been like everything's a closely kept secret. People can do their jobs better if they have all the understanding they need to do their job better. So I'm pretty good at telling people what's going on. I would say that if nothing else, this educational reformation is teaching me to be a better, clearer, communicator of ideas.

Here, we see that the participants have developed skills for working with various constituents. They have found that they have to be very conscientious about what group they are communicating with to ensure they are using the right techniques depending on the group. They make sure that their communications are as clear as possible. They also found they need to ask a lot of questions and then be willing to adapt their thoughts based on the answers. And as Ruby said it takes "as much communication as possible" to be effective.

### ***Embracing Individuals***

**Moderator:** We all know that people bring with them their backgrounds, their values and belief systems. How do you work with such a wide variety of people?

**Brenda:** [When I first started, one of the things], I learned [was] how to be appreciative of other people's ideas and the synergy that can happen between two people. And now, it's been so long----it's been, Umm, well four years since I started. Now, that is my mode of operation.

**David:** I could just be really lazy about it and just dish it out to everybody the same way. And a lot of quote "management" is done that way. It's a lot of management that's been done to me in my career was done that way. Well, like I said, it's just lazy. It might work for some of 'em, but it clearly is not gonna work for everybody, 'cause everybody's different. If you're not dealing with individual differences as a manager, you should not be a manager! You got no business having that job. Because, the people do the job, the people do the work. I don't believe in processes very much. I believe that you work to make processes work, but you don't rely on them as the thing that gets the job done. That's a fundamental error. To think that if you set up the pro....if you work it over

enough, you'll finally get it to where it's streamlined enough, and you can plug anybody into it, and it will work just fine. That's a lie, in my opinion.

**Kristie:** That's an excellent trait of leadership is being able to recognize people's personal styles and adapting your leadership style to their personal style in order to get the best, uh the best work from them.

**Brenda:** I would say as a person, and you know a lot of things attribute to changes in life but umm, I would say a respect for differences. Differences of opinion, Umm so yeah, same with things at home, there was a time when I would used to be like there is only one way to fold clothes, or only one you know my way, and recognizing that difference just because something is different doesn't make it the right way or the wrong way it's just different. You know and how people bring all those differences to the table. So I would say as a person that is probably how I changed the most, is really, you know growing up in that way, in being able to honor differences in people. I know that they are there for a reason and to see how to best umm support those you know or bring them out.

**Sheri:** [Yep] everybody's individual and everybody's unique.

Within this subtheme, the reader can see that the participants feel it is important to accept the differences that people bring with them into situations. These leaders realize that they must treat each person with respect and dignity. They know that if they do not treat people properly then it will be more difficult to interact with them in the future. They must also work with each person as an individual and adapt their leadership style to each individual person, to meet the unique needs of others. They have learned to embrace those differences and help people build on those and make it a strength.

### ***Leading Change***

**Moderator:** We talked earlier about the barrier of the traditional mindset, how have you been able to lead that change within your institution. Can you discuss leading change and how you were able to get to here?

**Glen:** [I have found], I can influence and help things to change, but I can't just go in and say this is the way it's gonna be.

**Ruth:** [I agree], I mean, I can go in and say I think you ought to do A,B,C, and D, but I am such a change-agent that I have learned to just let people change. And so sometimes you push, but mostly, you know, you present a little and then

they go chew on it a while, and you come back and say, “did that work”? “Did it not”....and then you listen to what they really need, because they know they’re own processes better than I do.

**David:** That’s the main dynamic that I deal with; and most of the interesting stories I would have would be about that, try to kinda “dance” on that line between making the changes that we need to make, and still dealing with the people who would just give anything not to change.

**Sheri:** [I do it by] feeding them the information, you give them the guidelines--- and you start talking about it, and then you give them a structure, and then you start implementing it, and pretty soon you put it into place and they don’t even know what happened. ... A systematic indoctrination (laugh) is what I’m calling it.

**Ruth:** I am a change-agent. I am a visionary. I am willing to try whatever’s coming down the pike. That is either very exciting to people, or intimidating to people. And, I think though, that my enthusiasm for what I do is good. I can take sometimes the most curmudgeons of souls. In fact, I was having a conversation with a guy that two years ago when I told him that he was gonna have to submit grades electronically pitched a fit. He shuddered about it. He pitched a fit. And yesterday he said and he’s one of our technical instructors and he said, “You know, I think within a year, this is the campus where everybody needs to have a laptop when they come to school.” I about fainted, but—but, it is that constant enthusiasm for what I do that is good. I can explain things. And I’m, hopefully not to death. We’ve all met people who’ve been—explained things to death! But I think that I’m learning that you present ideas. You’re gonna have your early adopters, and they’re gonna come along onboard, and if you can get your early adopters to begin to sway your slow adopters, then it’s just not you against the group. So, if I’m an early adopter to whatever it is that needs to be done, whether its technology or not. That the person, who sees what needs to be done, get them to be your ally. Get them to work with the people who are slower pretty soon you have a whole team of people that are doing things that you can only dream of, or that you didn’t just expect to happen. We’ve been doing some training with our faculty, and the consortium is very dedicated to training faculty which is remarkable and good, but it had some of my faculty sharing together. They all get together and share what they’re doing online with each other. So here, we get this whole group of people together, and I come flying in late now because I have so many other meetings and they say, “OK we want to teach all the new faculty on campus everything we know.” I just looked at them and said, “Yes!” But, if I had said that two years ago, “You’re gonna go teach them” They would have said, “Well.....in time.” But now it’s their idea! Did it start with me? Yeah, it did.

**Kristie:** [I also use the early adopters in the faculty]. Sometimes what I do, and what I’ve been doing is getting the faculty onboard as my advocates. If they could, legally they’ve been rabbleroxing a lot. They’ve really been advocating,

you know, we need to do more about this, and this, and this. Because, as a customer, which they are, they're seeing, you know, more of them are seeing the benefit. More of them are using it. So now they're actually hitting up the administration saying, you know you guys need to support us on that. And so, uh, that's what I've been doing.

**Moderator:** Do you find it difficult to help people understand the direction you want to move with the distance learning programs at your institutions?

**Sheri:** [I have found], very few people in administration, regardless of the world you're in, uh understand distance learning.

**Ruby:** Right from the beginning, I started writing distance learning plans. Like every year, I'd write a new plan, and so that is an easy way to answer any questions, because I start the cycle in ... December, and I send out a draft to everybody and their dog, you know, and it's like, "Okay, this is what I'm gonna do next fiscal year, this is what I'm gonna do, and this is why, and this is where we're goin'." I send it out, I ask for, you know, input.

**Sharyn:** I think my experience in [the past was] enlightening to see that you could roll out a program without thinking about all the pieces. Umm, I'm a systems thinker ---I like to think systemically. And, kind of looking at what we had [there] was like a bunch of courses, and then nothing else. And so, my question I keep asking is: "How could you do this"? And then I came [here] and I found, well, "Really well." 'Cause a lot of places seem to do this. (Laugh) Umm, and I think that it's not as much of a shock now, and ah, I, think it honed my experience and my ability to interact with different parts of the system. 'Cause I can come in now, and I can look and I can see: "OK, we have this, but we're missing these other pieces." What I think are the other important pieces, and then I will work in my capacity to go and get those pieces and put them into place, and bring the people in that need to be brought in, and have this conversation, umm, to make it happen.

**David:** And I guess to summarize that in at least in my terms, it's what happens in the classroom every day, or in you know an online course any, any, sort of educational environment. When the teacher says something, or the information is put out there and the student isn't ready to hear it, quite often they literally won't hear it. It's as if it didn't happen at all. It just blows by them, and later they will deny that it happened. Well, I told you that on such and such a day and that was our lesson and I said these things, and the student will literally say, "well- no you didn't." "I didn't hear that." Or you know, if the mind isn't ready to apprehend the information, it just simply denies that it exists. Quite often that's the case. And it's the same feeling I get a lot of the time when I'm trying to tell my bosses or my colleagues what I do, how my department works, what things are happening in here, how does this thing work? Where is it headed, all those sorts of things, 'cause I know I tell these guys this stuff all the time, but, you know, at a

certain point we have a meeting about it 'er, whatever, if it's in my performance review, whatever the scenario. It comes out that they say to me "Well you never told me that," and I say, "I told you that three different times and I put it in a memo three different times too." If they're not ready to hear it, they just won't! (Laughing)

**Moderator:** It sounds like leading change in your institutions is difficult and takes a lot of your time.

Participants talked about how difficult it is to make changes, and move the organization forward. They each discussed the time it takes to make those changes and how difficult it is to get the message out to everyone, so that it is heard and understood. They discussed leveraging the early adopters to gain their input and support, so that they can help lead the change. They realize they need to work with the organization as a whole to create large change. They all have experienced similar struggles and how they handled and created solutions to those struggles depended upon their personal leadership styles and visions.

### ***Participant as a Visionary***

**Moderator:** In my earlier conversations with each of you, you discussed how important it is for you to be able to think down the road and plan ahead for your online programs. Could you share with me what that looks like for you or what you have learned along the way?

**Sharyn:** Definitely seeing where, seeing the big picture, I think was certainly something that I noticed that there was a lack of. So I think that says something to the topic of putting the courses out there without having the back end there. Umm, and I think a lot of people that were involved in the program, didn't think of it in a big picture view. And to me that became very important from my own leadership perspective. That you need to get a good handle on the big picture view, because that's what will really make a successful program.

**Brian:** I think leadership in a case, even by yourself, you have to be, Umm, looking at your vision of what you want that entity that you're in to be. And you have to create a clear image or vision of that so that you can express that to other people. I had an interview yesterday. This is crazy. Uh, a French student came in and part of their, things they do is interview faculty members. So she wanted to interview me, based on my marketing classes. So she asked me a simple

question. “How would you personally define marketing?” And I was stumped. I thought, “That’s dumb; I’m teachin’ the class,” I should. It kind of goes with the idea that somebody should say what is your vision for distance learning. I should be able to say that, I believe, as a leader you should be able to talk about your vision. And then following the vision, you’re looking at what is the actual thing you’re do in your mission, and then what are your goals and objectives, and things like that and follow through with that. But you gotta have a clear vision, and people have to know your vision. You gotta know what you’re doing.

**Moderator:** How do you do that in the position you’re in now? How do you communicate that vision, whether it’s to your upper administration, or to faculty members, to students?

**Brenda:** I think I tend to be a visionary. So one of the things I will say you know is “here is where we want to go, here’s what we want things to look like” and to help people see you know where we’re going.

**Ruth:** So, yeah, goal setting is important, and then remembering that you have a goal.

**Ruby:** [I use my distance learning plan, I mentioned earlier, I send it out, and I ask for input] Then I adapt. ... If I work with these people, and I can anticipate problems that might come up, and provide answers in a timely fashion, provide a vision, a strategy, and tactics in the plan. And so I think that’s been the most crucial piece for me.

Here the participants discuss how important it is for them to be looking ahead and planning where they will be going with their program in relation to the institution. By having the vision for their program they can better explain the goals of the program. This visioning and carrying out the program plans also helps build trust with others within the institution. Glen says it well “Yeah, umm, I see my job as, as, as at a 30,000 foot level, guiding the direction of all, the umm, e-learning initiatives of the college.” Ruby, also discussed how it was important to get feedback and encourage brainstorming with others in the institution to be effective.

## Observation of Leadership

In all walks of life we observe leaders in various aspects. Those we observe, whether we view them, as good, or poor leaders tend to help shape who we become and our own leadership style, as we learn to take the pieces we like, and discard those we do not. My participants also have had these experiences and below they share their views. These views will revolve around three main subthemes (a) influential people, (b) perceived good and perceived poor leadership characteristics, and (c) personal perceptions of leadership. First, I asked each participant to share with the group, who some of the influential people have been in their lives. In the second subtheme, my participants reflect on their experiences and think about the past leaders they have had, and what characteristics they feel have been examples of good and poor leadership. Finally, using these previous ideas, I asked my participants about their own personal perception of leadership.

### *Influential People*

**Moderator:** We often shape ourselves and our individual styles of leadership, simply by observation. We discussed those people who were influential in your life. Would you share some of those thoughts and people with the group here?

**Sharyn:** I think in terms of people who influenced me in leadership, I mean certainly my parents, umm, and my grandmother, uh, it actually turns out that my father is an, independent consultant in organizational development business, and when I was in High School, he would always talk about systems and systems theory and the psychology, and I'd be like, "blah, blah, blah" You know, I felt like I heard it in High School. And so now as an adult, you know, we get together and we talk about all sorts of, you know, "issues" and I can bounce ideas off of both him and my mother for umm, you know – I'm in this predicament, and I'm having this challenging situation with, ah, with the president, you know, what do you think about that? And they were very helpful ... because I was just getting into kind of a leadership role, and so I looked to both of them for some guidance 'cause they both had previous experience in, in leadership roles.

**David:** People that I've known personally, uh the people that have always impressed me are the, are the people who, uh good leaders cannot be good leaders, unless they're good people first of all. We know that, right? I mean we can talk about it all day long, but leadership doesn't occur in a vacuum either. A good person is, is at least got a chance to be a good leader. A person that most people around them would consider not to be a good person; [is] very unlikely to be a good leader. So, the main thing to me is to learn how to be a good human, a just a good person, and then apply 99 percent of that to whatever I'm supposedly doing to be a good leader. I hesitate to call myself that, but as a manager, as a supervisor, the same things that work in general human discourse certainly work in the organization. I've just never seen any exception to that. So the people that impress me are other managers, other bosses, other leaders that I've seen and worked with over the years that put that into play.

**Kristie:** [When I was preparing reports for court], I had a great chief. He was wonderful. And he would see me coming and go "Ahh not again." He's like "what do you want now?" "I just want to understand that." One day he came in and he said "Ok" and I said, "Ok what?" He goes, "We're gonna make you an Investigator." ... [Also,] the dean that hired me back to do the Emergency Management Program – she was excellent.

**Ruby:** I think that really my mentors have been... they are people, like me, in other community colleges, and some of them – you know, have been doing this. I would say the ones that I would consider my mentors have been doing it for longer than me. Not, they're not necessarily much older than me, but they've been doing it for longer than me.

**David:** There is one guy who jumps out at me, now that I think of it. He's a boss I had a few years ago; he was a very high level, uh; college administrator, and I had him as a direct report for a number of years. As it turned out, we ended up being good friends too, but regardless of that, I just loved him, and in fact, everybody loved him, and he was a wonderful leader based on the fact that he was a wonderful guy. He was just a gentle, kind, human being. He, if he had a flaw as an administrator, it was probably that he was so kind. He hated that he had to confront anybody on anything. ... So he was, he was the best boss I ever had, and the best leader I ever had, uh, although not perfect, because he could inspire a loyalty, and effective performance simply based on who he is... that's rare. That's just rare, in my experience. So, yeah, I mean – I was deeply influenced by him.

**Sheri:** I had a lot of very good education instructors who were my mentors, and they really trained me on a lot of things about education, and about classes and things like that, and I taught them about technology so it was a really good [partnership].

**Ruth:** Our learning platform company is eCollege, and our partnership with eCollege has been key to my development and my learning. And there have been some great mentors there. And, umm, I, I wouldn't be who I am today without them. It's, uh. Not just because they're good salesmen, they've just been great teachers in online learning and leadership---that kind of thing! I had a teacher in college that was extraordinary, and [he] taught me to think; to be a good student. And he's always been my (pause) ideal as a teacher. He would probably find this method of teaching---horrible! But, his ability to communicate and to teach and his passion for it was enormous. [Also], my dad's passion for teaching, he was a career Air Force guy, but he taught at the Air Force Academy. You know, he did research work at a west coast university, kinda hung around the academic fringes of the, of the Air Force. So Dad was a great teacher. To be like him; but he was also a great leader. And his leadership---I watched him, and in military terms: "command men".

**Moderator:** Glen and Brian you also discussed having a mentor in the military, could you discuss those people?

**Glen:** I was a Communications Officer when I was in the military, and my immediate supervisor was a, I was in the Navy was a Navy Captain, and he was, (pause) the way he treated his people that reported to him and his supervisors is how I think I've caught myself modeling that.

**Brian:** A previous supervisor of mine, when I went back on active duty in the military was kind of a mentor for me, and uh, he was really good about attention to detail, appearances, and not so much as far as black and white you know cross the 't's'....dot the 'i's' everything down to the letter in regulations but what was the intent of the regulations?

**Kristie:** [I also had a mentor in the military], my first General was a two-star, and umm, he probably influenced the way I look at leadership more than anybody else.

**Moderator:** So some of you have military mentors, and others have peers, parents, family members. Do you also have mentors within the education realm? Leaders you have watched and admired?

**Sharyn:** Not yet

**Ruby:** I can't really point to anybody among my supervisors.

**Glen:** It's not anybody in education.

**Kristie:** Unfortunately in the academic arena, I'm not seeing a lot of leadership where people are stepping up to the plate and taking responsibility for something.

Above the participants discussed those people who have served as mentors to them and how they were influenced by these people. They also briefly discussed how it is difficult to find mentors within the education realm. The fact that mentors in the educational realm are scarce is disturbing. It shows how important education in leadership not only in online learning is, but also within administration in general, and how much this field has to mature. Below, we will see what characteristics they perceive both good and bad, which they have learned from their mentors or those they didn't admire, as Betty said "I could say I have anti-mentors!" Then the participants will share how these experiences have led to the leadership characteristics they find themselves employing.

### ***Perceived Good and Perceived Poor Leadership Characteristics***

**Moderator:** After having experiences, with influential people in your various careers, you must have been able to learn about good and poor leadership characteristics. What are some of the admired traits of those that you have observed?

**Brenda:** One leader that I really admired ... was President while I was a teacher. What I admire about [her] is that, umm, I know, I know this sounds funny, but it's almost like her queenly presence. You know, no matter what's going on, she's, she's calm, Umm, she stays optimistic, you know, so I think that's probably a common thread is really keeping that, at least what I admire, is that even in even when things get tough or aren't going well, just that level head, you know, confidence that there is a solution and that we will find it, umm, assuredness.

**Kristie:** [Yeah] it's a sense of charisma that they get across to people so that you want to succeed for yourself, as well as for them.

**Brenda:** [Another dean I worked for], I would say, Umm, like one characteristic that comes, you know, when you say that, uh, watching her is just her positive attitude. And I know that's used often and probably too much, but in reality really just keeping your chin up and holding your head high, um even in times of crisis ... Umm, and the other thing that she would say, is that – you know when we were talking about this with strategizing, she'd says, "You know, take the high road." Rather than, you know, don't don't take, 'take the high road.' You know, stay with your values. You know, work with integrity. Take the high road. So

that's what the most that stands out. And that, that would have been almost direct.....that was direct mentoring versus observation.

**Moderator:** What about just characteristics in general? Are there other characteristics that you find within "good" leaders? Or that you try to use yourself?

**Kristie:** [We already mentioned it, but], I would say good communication skills are important. Umm, you don't necessarily have to be a great public speaker, I mean you don't have to get up and give speeches and things like that, but if you're talking to somebody in conversation can you get your point across?

**Brenda:** [Yes] and also caring about people.

**Kristie:** [Back to my first general], he probably influenced the way I look at leadership more than anybody else. ... And, uh, he was certainly a man that if he said this is what I'm going to do. He did it. Uh, he loved soldiers, and everything was for the soldiers and you know you could see it, you genuinely knew that he was interested in their welfare.

**Betty:** [My dean], genuinely, seems to care about the division, and about the people in this division. I just think she has a very difficult time showing it. A lot. Umm so that is something that I would like to take, is having a care for the division and the people in it.

**Moderator:** Brian, you talked about your supervisor in the military, what were some of the characteristics that he used every day that everybody around him got to see? What were some of the things that he showed other people of his characteristics of leadership that you admired about him?

**Brian:** I think he was, he was approachable, Uh, he would listen, umm if it had something to do with, umm, techno, technology, uh regulations, it was one of those things that it was a mutual research that, uh he wouldn't just pop an answer off. He'd take the time to do the research and sometimes required you to do the research, uh to understand why decisions were made.

**Sheri:** [My mentor had,] a sense of humor. Which we have a very similar sense of humor – it's kinda distorted, but it's similar. Um politeness – you know you always say things politely, I learned you know whenever you're addressing somebody you compliment, critique, compliment. You always sandwich criticism, constructive criticism, in between compliments, and you know, then the person starts out feeling ok, and ends up feeling ok, but maybe he's absorbed more of the criticism. You know, umm, his, let's see, (pause) – the way he words things – you know, he's subtle enough to where he's never offensive. And yet he gets his point across, uh, the way he asks questions, you know, rather than just saying, "Well, that won't work". You know, he'll ask questions to draw out the

flaws in a thought process and then interject some ideas – and the way he words things. You know, umm, by saying things like, “Well, this is just an idea, you can take it and dump it or you can work with it,” and you know – then he just leaves the door open and makes a person feel good. And I’ve learned that there are some people that really need those little strokes. So I think a lot of it is what abilities you give people strokes, while he’s getting his point across.

**Ruth:** My current boss – she’s just if I can learn to be as calm and deliberate and clear-thinking, and open minded and listening in transformational belief, then I will be thrilled. So I have some really good models at the college. I’ve had some really bad ones. Umm, there are a couple of people that—they’re my image of “what I do not want....”

**Moderator:** Thanks Ruth, because that is my next question. We learn a lot about leadership from observing others, sometimes, we learn as much about what not to do, by watching those whom we have felt were poor leaders. In other words we learn as much from poor leaders as we do from good leaders. What have you learned not to do?

**David:** You do. Yeah, I like your premise; I really do. And maybe I’ve learned almost everything I know from the bad examples. Who knows? It’s possible. I’ve had enough to work with. ... Well, there’s one very glaring example that occurs to me. It’s a boss I had several years ago, umm and, I, I, think this is probably pretty common she was so brutal; she could not deal with you in any sense for the smallest matter to the largest matter. There was no time that you would deal with this person that she wouldn’t first try to strip every bit of dignity and power away from you. She was, I always thought, “She’s a control freak,” and she’s a model to me and it could have been a guy, ‘cause I’ve known guys like this too, but this just happens to be the most recent example. She was a control freak to the extreme; and I kept thinking to myself as I dealt with her. I don’t think we give enough credence, enough value to that phrase “control freak”. You know, what is evil but control freakdom gone mad. I mean, ah at a certain level of performance we call it control freak, but if you move it over here, far enough---if it gets extreme enough, it’s sheer evil. All it is, the control freak wants to control everything right? And that includes you! Includes me. So when you’ve got a boss like that and they’re really extreme at it—almost to the mental illness level---you just can’t do anything right, you live in constant fear; constant stress. No matter what you do, you’re gonna be criticized for what you didn’t do, and that’s the way she was. You just couldn’t deal with her. It just never worked, because nothing you ever did was right. And, you know, if you asked for a vacation, she’d say, she’d say, “I don’t think so.” And then she’d keep you dangling for a day or two, and then if you’re lucky she’d come back and say, “Well, I guess you can have it.” I mean there was just nothing you could do that worked smoothly. ... And, she did that with everybody. I submit to you, almost everybody she ever worked with. So, I thought – well, there’s an easy lesson. I’m not gonna do that. I’ll never do that. I’ll, I’ll (pause), I’ll do all the work. I’ll

do this oddity, or this strange thing, or this irregularity; I'll do anything I have to do to avoid doing that to anyone who ever works for me. So you know, I think of that a lot.

**Glen:** In my current job, my, the vice-president and president that hired me are no longer here. And, the president was an example of how not to lead, and how not to manage. He was a very top-down leader. He wouldn't listen to you, it was his visions and he had to be in every single picture that was taken on campus, seriously, he had to be the "front" of everything, and [if] it was his idea, we'd do it, but it was his idea if it worked well. Didn't work well: it was your, it was your problem! And so he would, belittle people, he would, wouldn't treat them with respect, umm, if you, if you thought about calling him by his first name, you would be reprimanded, it was: "Doctor," or "President." And so, you're right, I learned. I remember from that, and that's why, on my business cards, or on my, on my door where my name is – It just says, Glen, it doesn't say, "Doctor." It doesn't say, "Director," and I firmly believe that that's – that helps build relationships, that helps, build confidence, it shows that. I think that, that shows that you're OK with yourself, and you're OK with your leadership style, and delegating and trusting. See, I learned a lot from that guy. A lot from that guy!

**Brian:** I had a gentleman that became the commander of our organization who everyone thought was wonderful. And he came on board and it's like everything he did was, "Why is he doing this?" It was like all he did was stir the pot; created issues of whatever. It was one of those things that you, you couldn't trust him. You didn't want to go to him. You wanted to avoid him and it was just (laughing). So the real thing is, is developing trust.

**Brenda:** [My current dean], instead of really uplifting people, he tends to drain people, and to take things away. And he, he tends to be one of these people that he's very supportive of an idea if it's his idea, but if it's somebody else's idea, he tends to not give it much credit. So you end up playing games where you have to make things look like they're his idea, so that you can get support for him. You know if you want to get something done. And he also tends to be a person who will umm, change gears, you know, all of a sudden like one day he's all for something, I mean this just happened recently which it's been forefront on my mind is umm, video within the online environment is up right now. We're all taking about it, and we had a vendor come in to talk to us about a video solution, and he, he sat there in the meeting with me and the vendor solution, er with the vendor, and we talked about it, and said "Let's take it to the next level, and let's get some feedback." So I was at a meeting with the other deans, and we brought it up and he's like, "Nah" (laughing) that would be a mistake. You know, and he goes into a long thing about, we don't need that and it's just like you know? You're not even the same person that was, you know. [Also] when I think back to the president that was in place when I came [here], it wasn't so much that I disliked him, it's just there was nothing that I thought was great about him. And I, and I think, Umm, where I would attribute that to is that is that he was too

passive. You know, he just kind of let things go you know, never really had any new ideas or visions, he didn't do anything negative either, he just seemed a little too, too passive, too quiet.

**Ruby:** Well, I, I, think, you know, I guess there's probably been some bad examples of administrators that I've worked with over the years, and Umm. ... The thing that I thought was bad about the way they worked was that they played a lot of these games you know, talking behind your backs, and you know, Umm, this whole game playing thing where some people are not good, and some people are good, and some people are. You know what I mean? This whole, like, disruptive thing, and I think that's really, you know, I've really had to think about that over the years, and I think – from my perspective – that's just Umm, I mean it's their ego needing drama and attention, and that sort of thing. So, I think people that engage in that kind of behavior, Umm, are [well that] is something I don't want to participate in.

**Ruth:** I have a whole list of things I never want to do.

**Moderator:** Like what?

**Ruth:** Umm, do all the talking. Never listen. Umm, where it is possible to let people make joint decisions, let 'em make the joint decisions. ...But, again, in the back of my mind when I walk in a meeting is "what not to do." And that is just tell them what I want them to do and not ever listen, and not ever take an idea as good if it's not mine, and helping people set priorities rather than just say, "No, that's a stupid idea; we can't do it now." Umm, say, "No, we probably can't do that now, but I bet in a year from now." You know, what are our priorities? If this is first and that's second, keep that on the note pad; because that's what we're gonna do next. So, it is very much a reaction to the old fly in, hand people stacks of paper, ramble on [and] leave.

**Sharyn:** Thinking about how you grow new leaders in an organization. A position had opened up, they'd created a new position for a Director of Academic Computing, and I would have been a very good person for that, considering my role in distance learning, considering I was chair of the department, umm. There was another faculty member in my department who also would have been very good in that position, who was also fairly young. Umm, and what the president said was, "We really need new blood in here; don't even post internally, you need to post it externally to get some new blood in there." And, to me that was just saying we don't want to grow the internal leaders. I don't look at anyone in this organization as having something that they can contribute above and beyond where they currently are, and so I thought, "Ok, I'm not gonna get anywhere, you know internally." So, even if a position had opened up, Umm, you know a vice-presidential position, or director of distance learning, I didn't feel supported, you know, by him, in terms of that. Umm, I also found in terms of his listening abilities, he had his own agenda. And I understand that you're very busy when

you're a president, but his ability to listen to the concerns of the institution were not there. We kept saying, you know, "We're not hearing from you. What's going on? You're not communicating, you're talking at us." And uh, he did not listen!

**Sheri:** One supervisor, I learned never to lean over her desk and scream at a person and call them a cancer in the department. You don't do things like that.

**Betty:** My dean is a very, Umm, emotional being, she has, Umm, snapped and yelled at me in a meeting with colleagues. She has, ah snapped at the person that works for me, umm, if a decision, you know needs to be made she just makes rash decisions. Umm, she does not have a good reputation around the campus, Umm, I, I, I could go on for hours with stories of, of, just crazy things. ... I know from that experience, that I will stay true to myself in the fact that, Umm, I believe being diplomatic is very important in the position as a leader. Umm, whereas, she will shoot off an e-mail, or say something, come, you know hell or high water! Or whatever, this is what I think. This is what I'm tellin' you and that's not the way to do it. ... Umm, I'm tellin' you being snapped at and being yelled at in a room full of deans and colleagues, when you ask a question about somethin' does a lot to your....

**Moderator:** Self esteem, I am sure. Given all these lessons about what to do and what not do, what about some traits that you try to use yourself? What types of things do see you yourself doing?

**Ruby:** Well, (pause) I try to, Umm, maintain equanimity and, you know, listen, and ask good non-defensive questions, and I try to be, try to give them as much information as possible, and, Umm, I think that is about it.

**Glen:** I love having informal meetings, and what I mean by informal meetings is, get a group together, either, you know, the big thing my administrative assistant has set up, put everybody's birthdays on a calendar ... and so, you know, then she sets up luncheons for all of our, you know, if it was our birthday as we have a luncheon, you know. And, and I think that helps build team, teamwork. I wasn't really big into that, because as a kid we weren't big into celebrating birthdays and all that stuff, and, and ah, I think it helps being part of that, being part of that celebration, it helps, helps my staff see that, that I care.

Umm, but more so on the informal side is just bringing people together and brainstorming ways to do something. If there's a task that I need done, I, I bring everybody together and say, "Hey, let's ... here's what, here's what I've been tasked with. How can you help me do this?" And they just keep giving ideas, brainstorming, and, and it gets to the point where I really think, Umm, they take ownership then of some of these tasks, the things that we have to do. So, I let them sort of guide the conversation and guide the discovery. And they take ownership and actually will let them produce it! And then give them that credit

when I present to the Board, “Well without [these two] this would not have happened.” And sometimes, I have them come in and present. They don’t like doin’ that but, you know, at least they’re an audience watching and know that they’re getting all the credit, and I don’t, and I’m at the point in my life that I’m not “climbing” I’m, I’m, retirement is right there! (Laughing) ... You see, the question, I um, a lot of times, besides putting them out in the front, ah, and leading the change, Umm, having them help me make decisions that will impact the college, and, and guiding them, showing them how to find resources, and to research that. And out of that, and come up with a decision, and then to stay, stick by that decision, ‘cause you’ve done all the research. ... I love sending them to professional development opportunities, conferences, or local meetings, or, have them chair some major committees out at the college, just sorta push ‘em into some of these leadership roles. While I am on vacation, or if I’m gone at a, ah, five-day conference or something like that I always pick someone in the office, a different person every time, to be in charge. ... I think that’s important to do. So, ah, I think that’s how I do just slowly put them into, into uncomfortable situations, let them get more comfortable with it, and help me not have to do a lot of work!

**Kristie:** [Yep]. As a good leader, or even a good mentor, you wanna, you kinda want to push people into their, maybe into a zone that might not be all that comfortable. ... I think good, good mentors are people who can recognize certain skills in people that they’re mentoring, and help develop those kind of by putting you in the right Umm, (pause) direction, I guess.

**Betty:** [For me its] tryin’ to make the best decisions for the greatest number of people. Umm, try to set an example in how I handle myself in a situation. ... Another thing I probably should have done from the beginning, is Umm, (pause) been an advocate more for the person that works for me through this dean, when the dean is snapping at this person, I should have gone in and said, “Hey, listen you really don’t need to be doin’ that.” But there was a fear in me that I was gonna get the snapping back.

**Moderator:** I can certainly see how that fear could hold you back. That same idea could affect your subordinates.

**Brenda:** [I agree], I would say that I try to empower the people that I over see. Um you know, giving them the um the ability to move forward have their own ideas, take charge, Umm of their projects. Umm but I also want them to know I am there for support. So, I feel like it is important for them to know that, they can ask me for anything. Or if something is not going well, I want them to feel that they can talk to me about that they are not going to be judged or get into trouble or anything like that. Umm I think I also have a collaborative working style, like I said, you know “let’s work together on this” and really honoring other people’s opinions. Lets see how else would I describe my leadership style? I I think I tend to be a visionary. So one of the things I will say you know is “here is where we

want to go, here's what we want things to look like" and to help people see you know where we're going.

**Kristie:** I think some of my, my best skills are being able to cut through the, the red tape and the, and the proverbial what I would call, BS to get at what's what's the real issue. Because so often what happens is people are, uh, I guess they're beating around the bush and nobody will come out and say, ok here's real, here's what's going on. And that's what I do. I'm, I'm real good at zeroing in on, ok this is all extraneous stuff, here's the real issue. And I think that in order to make things happen, you have to know what it is you're trying to make happen.

**David:** [I think its] very simple. Probably because I'm a simpleton. (Pause) But, do you see what I just did? And I wasn't thinking about it when I did it. (Pause) I just insulted myself, which can be over-bearing too---if you do that too much, to yourself that can be just as self-important as the other, as saying too much about yourself. But as a boss, as a supervisor, as a co-worker, I want to be a person that my co-workers perceive always as one who wants no power over them what so ever. And the best way to do that is constantly diminish your ego, not to the point of self-abasement, but just in a friendly, humorous way. Say, "I do not think of myself as some great shakes; ok, you know that, right? Here we are workin' together, and you know that I don't think I'm some hot shit." I just don't. So, having established that, on an on-going basis, not just once, but all the time, in a decent and not energy-consuming way, you establish that just because you're the boss; forget about that ok, I don't want any power over you. All I want is power over myself. With you, I just want you to function well, I want you to be happy working here, and I want us to do a good job. So that's the basic thing. I want them to know that I don't want power, and I'll use every opportunity that I can to give that power away. But ... I will not give away my responsibility. You can give away your power, and you should; but you should never as a supervisor, give away your responsibility. Look, I'm the guy here who's being paid as a supervisor, and I know that. I make more money than you, and I have the power in our relationship. Don't think I don't know that; just know that I don't intend to miss-use it. I intend to use it only to help us both get better in life. You can send those signals to people you work with in a million different ways, and the creative part of being a manager or being a leader is that, figuring out all those ways that you can do that; and then, do it all the time. Uh, and then, of course, you gotta know what you're doing. You gotta be confident. You have to understand the job, and not only that, to be really effective, like you should be at it, you have to be able to find new ways that the job has to work. You have to be able to move it along.

**Moderator:** Sharyn, what about you?

**Sharyn:** That's a good question, considering I'm in a leadership and change program. I should be able to answer this question. And I have an assignment I have to do on it! (Laughing) Reflective leadership essay! Umm (laughing)

Umm, I, I think in terms of a leader, I certainly don't micro-manage. Umm, I don't believe in (pause) command and control, certainly. I really believe in empowering people, and so if a new employee will come in, you know, someone that I'm working with, it's not my role to tell them what to do. It's really to extract the idea. That's why I really like working with faculty, 'cause I can sit down with all of them and say, "in order to have a successful course, you need to do this, this, and that." And that's true. I mean there's certain things that you do need to have in order to have a successful course. But, that will come out in the conversation and in the engagement. And I really want the faculty to want to come to me, Umm, to see me as someone who has some expertise, but not to have all the answers. And, I don't have all the answers, so that's a recognition on my part too, is to say, "I don't know, let me find someone who can, who can get that." Umm, I think part of my role as a leader is really to bring people together as well and that is so critical in distance learning. ... And so, I really need to have the ability to bring people together and have conversations, and when I hear, "No, we can't do that". [I ask] "Well, is there another way that we can come up with that?" And I find that, listening and kind of prodding as well and pushing people to think, you can get a solution done.

**Moderator:** We have talked a lot about characteristics of leadership, are there additional thoughts you might share with the group?

**Kristie:** there are some leaders that inspire people to do their best work, and it sometimes it's not a, a tangible thing that you can put your finger on and say, "That's what that person does that makes everybody else want to do better."

**Ruth:** I really appreciate people who like doing a really good job at what they do, and that inspires me to work harder. I like (pause) umm, people who are, I guess I like, commitment. I respond to people who are are committed to things. I respond to people who listen, probably better than I do, (said with a laugh) who take a real interest in the people who are around them. Umm, that was one of my dad's great gifts, I think, was to treat people with, an egalitarian spirit. Uh [the other mentor I mentioned], he respected his students and he respected his colleagues, and that was a really great thing from a man whose intellect was far superior to anybody's. So I appreciated that about him. I like people who think before they speak. Umm, which again, is not a gift that I have, but it's one that I'm trying to cultivate. So those would be, I think some of the major things that have moved me.

**David:** [When I talked about my mentor], he and I are alike in that we both come from a relatively [same] background, and we just share some traits, some personal traits, simply based on that. Those traits most, uh, clearly being ones like a kind of ah, shyness about our own egos. We don't, neither of us, in our personal ways really tries to put our ego forward very much. ... I love that quality in anybody. And I love the way that he is able to balance that trait, that personal characteristic, of his with his positions of leadership. ... Uh, but other qualities that he has as a

leader: He's a he's a great facilitator. He's a guide. He's the kind of leader that I like. He's the kind of person that leads because people want to follow him. He, uh, he doesn't exercise power over people and make them follow him. He leads by example, and people want to follow him. To me that, that pretty much defines what a true leader is, to me that's what a leader is. It's someone that you just, you want to be with and you want to do what they do. You want to follow them. Just because of what you see in them; it's not because they're forcing you to do it. It's, it's, it's not defined like that. It's more organic. Uh, and that's pretty much what he does. He brings people together. He guides people. He teaches people. He, uh, he, makes suggestions about possible courses of action, and then invites other people the people he's in a leadership position over to contribute their ideas about it, and then he works with people together in a genuine negotiation, to find the best path. And then when that path is defined, he takes that path. It's not all 'lip-service'; it's not his pretence; he actually means what he says. And people pick up on that from him very quickly and they come to trust him.

[The one thing about him] that [I] disagree with, [is] I try not to avoid confrontation or conflict, when it seems like what's called for. I certainly don't seek it out and I don't like it, but if it's a necessary thing to do, I try very hard to uh do it to my best ability. I don't try to avoid it. Sometimes when, you know you just have a basic policy disagreement with somebody whether in your department or in another department, uh disagree about the best way to do something, it's really important to make sure that you're clear that you, that you express your view on it very clearly. It's the conscientious thing to do if you're convinced that the path you'd like to take is the best path for the institution to take. Ahh, really gotta say that. You've really got to make the case for it. It's, uh, it's usually it just a kind of fundamental thing you, you, ... as a manager, certainly, as a leader of any sort you're not really managing or leading very well if you don't behave that way. So, that is something that I like to try to do. I don't know how successful I am at it. But it can lead to conflict sometimes and uh, that's just again something you have to take the risk of doing. Uh, don't want to go overboard with that, don't want to do it too often, because then you'll just been seen as a 'problem' type person, a troublemaker type. And nobody wants to be considered that way. So you have to be judicious about that, but it is part of leadership definitely to take on tough problems, and when you have a strong viewpoint about something, to make that viewpoint known, so that a proper dialog can be held about it. ... So that it's public and everybody knows the various viewpoints and then an informed decision can come to by as many people as possible.

I [also] try to be really clear and candid with the people that I supervise at all times. I think I may have told you that before too. I don't like there to be any hidden agendas. I don't want anybody, I don't want there to be any secrets if we can avoid that, and when you're in the position of leadership, or in the position of power I guess, the supervisory position, you really have to set the example for that. You can't expect people you supervise to be fully-forth-coming and candid

with you, if you're not being that way with them. I'm I'm way over the end of the continuum, when it comes to disclosure with the people I supervise. I don't make some artificial distinction between who they are as the people I work with, versus just you know fully-realized human beings, away from work. They're just people. And they happen to be people that are in the same orbit as I am, and they have the right to be treated with full-respect and full disclosure whenever possible.

**Sheri:** I believe in something of the servant leadership type approach, my job as a supervisor is to make it possible for them to do their work. 'Cause when they do their work well, it looks good on me [and] we're far more productive. So my job is to take the barriers outta the way and give them support wherever possible. Umm, I found that that builds a lot of loyalty, and uhh, the best employees.

**Ruth:** [I agree], I'm their servant. I'm here to make things work for them. Uh, I'm sorta the go between, between the money, and (laugh) the bureaucracy above, and if I can just give them what they need so they can go do it and hire good people to go do it, (pause) we can just be so busy "educating" we wouldn't know what to do with ourselves

**Sheri:** Yeah, they want to be in your department when you're doing that. With that, ah, you can have an influence on them. You know you become more, sometimes a counselor, and a coach and when you have the good listening ear, then they'll come to you with even personal issues and things like that, and you can have an influence on them, and help them, and they help you, that's reverse – really, so it's a mutual exchange!

In this section, the participants discussed their observations of leadership and both the good and poor leadership characteristics that they have had the opportunity to observe. They talked about how they admired various traits such as, confidence, positive attitude, good communication skills, having a sense of humor, being open minded and being transformational. They also discussed those traits that they observed in leaders that they felt were poor leadership skills such as, control issues, micromanaging, not respecting or trusting others, not listening and not growing others. Finally, the participants shared their thoughts on the skills they feel they are using such as, bring people together, giving others credit, setting an example, being honest, and listening to others. Sheri talked about being a servant leader. Ruth and Kristie also talked about

wanting to be able to inspire others. In the next section, the reader will see how these items have helped develop, each participants own personal perception of leadership.

### ***Personal Perception of Leadership***

**Moderator:** We have talked about how you create a vision for your online learning programs, and how you help others with that change in culture. How do you see those activities reflected in your leadership style? Given this conversation, how would you describe your personal perception or philosophy of leadership?

**David:** I can summarize this in one sentence. We had a search going on for a vice-president at our college, a few months ago. And they were all in a dither about it---they couldn't.....they just kept interviewing people, and nobody was right, nobody was right, and finally they brought in some big high-powered consultant-type guy, and he went around meeting with various departments and all the staff people and all the instructors. And we'd have these big pow-wows, and...."Oh, God this is so grim and serious; this is really important stuff people. You've got to tell me what kind of a leader you want; who does this person have to be?" And I kept hearing all this stuff and finally in one of these meetings one day, I said, "You know, I don't understand why you guys are having such a tough time with this. To me, it just seems so simple. Forgive me for this, but they have to be a decent person, and they have to know what they're doing." Tell me what else any leader at any level in any job, has to be beyond that. Be a decent human being, and know what you're doing! I mean, there's a million little things that have been raised that shoot off those things, but basically that's what it comes down to. We make such a big deal about this stuff, but to me we rarely emphasize the, the stuff about it that should be the big deal. So that's my philosophy. (Laughing)

**Kristie:** Leadership, in my view, sets the pace on how the institution as a whole is going to operate.

**Brian:** You have to play the role of the leader. It's not just a natural position that people accept, it's a role you have to develop and grow into. And it's almost like an actor. You have to be a.....you have to act as a leader. ... If you try to be a leader just off the cuff, you can make a lot of mistakes. You have to plan what you're trying to do.....what your trying to do.

**Kristie:** Now that you mention it, another aspect of good leadership is that the people under you have to feel 100% comfortable with being able to approach you with just about any issue that's going on in their workspace. And sometimes that even involves personal issues, and if they don't feel comfortable in being able to come to you as a leader, then you're not a leader. You're not, you know, you're their boss, but you're not a leader. A leader is a person that can galvanize people

to work through adversity. I mean when you talk about World War II and some of those guys and General Patton, the guys would have walked, some of those guys walked without shoes many, many miles to fight in those conditions and they only would have done it for him, and not for somebody else. And that's a leader; I mean that's a leader, when you get some people to do that kind of stuff. And so, you know, if you're not, and that doesn't mean that your door's open all the time. ...But you're there in a mental sense and that when a person has to talk to you about something you make the time. ... If it's a truly important issue for that person. It may be petty to you, but it's important to them. You take the time necessary to work with them and do what you can. ... But you have to be, your people have to feel like you're approachable ... Make sure they have to have that feeling about you, and they also have to feel that they can trust you with whatever they have to tell you, and there's just a number of things, but that just kinda rang a bell in my mind because Umm I think we, we don't necessarily make ourselves available the way we should to our folks you know?

**Moderator:** What about management versus leadership? Do you see a difference between the two?

**Ruth:** I think a leader is someone who enables people to make, to transform the lives that they lead and the lives of others. I don't think that a manager has vision. I don't know that a manager is good at seeing the possibilities of a new idea. Managers just tend to just want to keep the status-quo, where I think leaders take a look at the vista and see where maybe we should be going, and then provide opportunities and the right environment for people to move towards the future. .... I, I guess a good manager would balance the books and get all the paperwork in on time. A good leader, well we all have to be good managers, but a good leader is gonna find opportunities for people to grow.

**Sharyn:** [Yes] managing is very different from administrating, is very different from leading. ... [My Master's degree was important as it taught] me more about what does it mean to be a good manager, administrator, leader, kind of what's the difference. Umm, making me more mindful of what is important.

**Brenda:** I can really see that there is a difference between managing people and leading people. And, um I guess for myself I'm still kinda differentiating those differences its like when I see it I know it um you know I can observe it and go "you know she really needs to step out of that manager role and into more of a leadership role." And um... I suppose it has a lot to do with how much you dictate what people do rather than letting them chose for themselves what they do. Um, if I had to put it into one sentence but really making sure that ah, and every position needs both qualities given one at time or another it really just depends on where you spend most of your time.

Here the participants discussed their basic philosophies of leadership, how it is important to be a good person, treat others with respect to effectively lead their institutions. The participants realize that by treating others with respect, positive relationships can be cultivated. They also discussed how they view the leadership of people, different than the managing of people. In the next section, I discuss how the participants work with various contingency groups within and outside their institutions.

### **Working with Groups**

The theme working with groups evolved as I read and re-read each transcript and I realized that my participants were discussing how they interacted with various constituents both within the institution and within the community. Below the reader will see how three subthemes of (a) working with faculty, (b) working with groups inside and outside the institution, and (c) working with subordinates, have shaped how the participants interact with the various constituents. First, working with faculty, the participants discuss the fear from faculty over adapting to online learning. They also discuss the importance of faculty to the institution. In the subtheme working with groups inside and outside the institution, the participants discuss all the various people that impact distance learning in their institutions. Finally, when working with their subordinates the participants talk about how important it is to help those people grow professionally.

#### ***Working with Faculty***

**Moderator:** In our individual discussions, some of you talked about faculty, and the various ways you work with faculty. Could you share here with the group what you do to work with faculty, and any strategies you use to make this successful, and help them learn new techniques?

**David:** I referred earlier to some instructors who do it and still don't want to see it and that's the really interesting part to me. The pioneers you know, the people--the early adopter types that get right on it. I love them, and they're our best instructors too, frankly; almost without exception. They're great, but they're not the most interesting part. The most interesting part are the instructors who do it, but still don't want, but they just, they just feel the need to. I mean, they're, they're not stupid people; they're college instructors for crying out loud. They can see the popularity of these sections – these online sections; they always make at least for us, where as the face-to-face sections don't. So, if you're a teacher, and you're gonna get a choice between an online section and a face-to-face one, you've always done, mmm, well, uh, maybe I'll take that online one this time. So they do it; but they don't want to, and they resist it; some of them, you know.

**Kristie:** (I also work with instructors), all the time! You know, with questions about: How do I do this? And what do you think about that? And does this meet the criteria? You know, this type, the usual instructor type questions on. Also, how do I use Blackboard in my classroom? We have an awful lot of users who are not actually online per se.

**Sharyn:** I'm dealing with faculty on a daily basis that are teaching [using] distance learning, but that are also using it as supplemental. And I think it's really important for me to interact with those faculty, because those are the ones that will make the jump eventually into hybrids----or make the jump into 100% online. So for me to only limit my interactions with, you know, only those that are teaching in a distance learning format, then we are missing out on this whole other cadre. And that's where I'm getting my new faculty to teach online from.

**Glen:** I actually work with faculty; I get their input, their ideas, and have them sort of doing the heavy lifting as it were. My boss, I report directly to The Vice-President of Instruction he's several times told me that, you know, you need to, ah, be the person making good decisions. It's just that, you know, if I do that – then nothing's gonna get done! We gotta get buy in from the faculty.

**Kristie:** Exactly. I mean it's like well – we wouldn't be much of a college without our faculty. ... I still tend to side with the faculty more than the admin, I still feel more, I guess comradely with those folks than I do with, with administration.

The reader can see that the role of faculty at the various institutions is very important. These participants each work with faculty and have been able to realize the importance that faculty play in online learning. They discussed that by working with the faculty, to help them grow and understand online learning, the growth of the program can

be accomplished. They talked about how important it is for online learning to be seen as a partner and a service in the education of the students rather than a competition.

However, faculties are not the only important group in order to make online learning success at institutions. Below the participants discuss various groups they work with both within and outside their institutions.

### ***Working with Groups Inside and Outside the Institution***

**Moderator:** So you must work with a lot of different groups within your institutions or other institutions, or even various community groups how do you manage working with all the various people? I can imagine it is difficult sometimes to balance all the needs of the groups. Let's start first with groups within your institution.

**David:** The barrier of customer service or barriers are a really big part of my daily experience and by that I mean the way the whole institution responds to a situation, not just me or my department, not just the people I supervise. It, uh, so often is the case I mean every day – and I'm sure it's true of you or anybody else you can't solve it yourself, you have to rely on other entities in the college or the organization to, to step in there and do their thing too. And, uh, and so a barrier for me and a challenge for me is to find out the most efficient ways, congenial, yet efficient ways to deal with other departments with my colleagues in other areas of the college. And to make sure that that communication flows just as clear and efficient as it can be. And trusting, we have to, we have to know each other well, and we have trust each other. And that is just really hard. I think it's just tremendously hard in any organization of any size. It's something you have to work on constantly, and it seems to be the last thing that people have time or energy to do, which what I'm saying is to work inter-departmentally. Uh, you know, so that I know enough about all the other departments in the college so that I know who does what, and I know who to refer people. And I can trust that those people will do the job when I refer a client to them.

**Sheri:** [I agree], the biggest challenge is just permeating the departments, and getting their trust, and helping them understand the value of it.

**Sharyn:** I'm not considered a Dean. ... And yet for me, I'm out there kinda waving the flag around saying, "You know you really should invite me to these things, I'm not just here to schedule classes, but anything that you're doing at the college at this point, because our enrollments are growing enormously, and we are really the driving factor in enrollments right now, I need to be more involved in the process." I go to student services and I talk to some of the advisors; but you know, I only talk to some of the advisors – not talk to all of the advisors, 'cause

they don't want to come to the meetings. So it's, you know part of it is, I don't have, I don't have the deanship authority like to say, "You have to come to this meeting; we're scheduling it, and everyone has to be there." And I guess part of that's the command and control model, but it also in some cases, you need everyone at the table; and I really need your commitment in order to be there, to be able to move this forward.

**Moderator:** Are there groups that you find you must work with frequently and successfully to help move things forward? Obviously, faculty, and we have talked about that. What about other groups?

**Brian:** I partner with our IT folks.

**Kristie:** I [also] interact with my IT person who manages my server.

**Ruth:** And we have a great IT staff [at my institution] Umm, the IT Director is right across the hall. So we've become really good collaborators.

**Sharyn:** [Same here] he's not considered part of my staff---Officially, he's part of IT and he is my Server Administrator, and he is, I couldn't do what I do without him. ... He's the only one, Umm that really knows the system inside and out.

**Ruby:** [Yeah] I interact with IT on a daily basis.

**Moderator:** IT, is very important, are there others you work with? Committees?

**Betty:** We do have a distance learning committee.

**Glen:** I have an e-learning committee. Umm, it's a, it's a steering committee that consists of its college-wide. I, I, um, faculty on it. I have people from the bookstore on it, people from advising registration, admissions, counseling, Umm, a, a dean, 2 from IT of course, Umm, a couple people from IT so, so a wide range of people, so I get pictures from all over the college on how, programs or decisions are gonna affect different parts of the college. So um, when the president of the Board come to me, he said, "Glen, you know, we're lookin' at uh at uh international, online international program." Well, I can take that to my, my committee and say, "Here's, here's where we're goin'. What are your thoughts?" So, they're like my, sorta like my cabinet. And then they brief me on well, now that's gonna be a large impact on the IT infrastructure you know, the bookstore we gotta get up to speed on, on, on e-books. You know that type of thing. And so I get, I pull all that information together, and then my staff is on this committee as well. And so all that just guides my decision-making as well. So, it took me a long time to get that, that committee together to help, help guide and focus that.

**Moderator:** Ruby, do you have a distance learning committee also?

**Ruby:** You know, I don't. Umm, I, I tend to go to; ah my strategy currently is to go to other peoples meetings. So, I go to the department chair's meeting, the instructional staff meetings, IT meetings, and, uh, you know, we're forming like the curriculum committee and stuff like that, so we'll kinda, I'll be building more meetings in the future, I'm sure, but a, so I try to go their meetings.

**Moderator:** What about outside your institution? Who do you interact with outside your own institutions?

**Brenda:** [Other institutions in the state system] I will say that, that this group of people that have come together in this you know one person pretty much from every community college has really become an extraordinary example of people working together to get things done. So I actually feel very fortunate to be a part of it. And I always say it is because we had to go through the crucible. ... I mean some of the meetings we sat through were just, you know, horrible. ... And we were very fortunate that we are a very tight group and in many ways I feel like they are, you know it would be very hard to leave that group. And we have even been recognized by the Vice President of the system as a a model group of how the colleges can work together and get things done.

**David:** I interact with my fellow---my colleagues in the consortium everyday as well. .. Because my college would have never have gotten much done in Distance Learning....in Online Education, specifically without, uh, having gotten involved in the [State] community college online consortium.

**Ruth:** [I agree, for me the state group], is the best group I've ever worked with in my life bar none. If we have a problem, we sit down and say, "Ok, let's go fix it." [I also] have to build relationships with our high school guidance counselors.

**Glen:** [I work with government officials also, for example,] our state Senator, umm, she is head of the, umm, educational committee for the state now, and holds the purse strings for it. She's come to ah [our college] twice now, and talked with e-learning, 'cause we're the biggest e-learning program in the state right now. [And] I'm meeting with the, um, the mayor of 'cause they want to do ah, they want to partner with [us] and do some of their online, of the city online training.

The above conversation allows us to see how distance learning really integrates into many areas of the institution and communities. IT is very involved, but as Glen and Ruby pointed out, the distance learning administrators also must interact with many constituencies around the institution besides the faculty teaching the courses such as,

bookstore, advising, curriculum, and government officials as well as other institutions that may be involved in a state consortium.

### ***Working with Subordinates***

**Moderator:** Ok, so IT is an important group of people for distance learning, as are many of the committees and outside groups that you work with. Many of you also have a staff of people you work with. Can you tell me about working with your subordinates?

**Glen:** I have an administrative assistant, and ... along with my administrative assistant, I have Secretary Senior, Instructional Technologist, Curriculum Designer, Instructional, ... and then I have a Web Designer as well.

**Kristie:** [Wow] I have an assistant eight hours a week.

**Sheri:** I have gotten staff recently, 'cause I took on co-directorship of a Title 5 Grant that had a lot of technology in it, so I'm the technical part of it, and then my co-director does all the student you know, advising and that sort of stuff. Umm, so I actually got a half a secretary (laughing).

**Moderator:** (Laughing). David, I believe you have a staff right?

**David:** I have a staff of four who work for me. I have a very key person on my staff who is a full-time instructional designer. ... I have a half-time secretary, uh, whom I am trying desperately to get to be full-time, because it's about six years overdue that she be, so she's only half-time for me now. And I have another full-time person who is my [state] coordinator. ... And then I have, finally, another half-time person who I use as a resource person, she actually works in the Library, but she also does research for me. That's it.

**Moderator:** Betty what about you?

**Betty:** I have two people that report to me, Umm, one is a full-time distance learning specialist, and the other is a part-time 20-hr. a week distance learning technician.

**Moderator:** Earlier we talked about growing others. In what ways do you help your subordinates?

**Brenda:** Well I think in many ways, I mean one I would say that I am umm I think I would always put the person before the position. And I think if, if ever somebody felt like they needed to move on, or if there was something that would be better for them, I would always be totally supportive of that. Rather than being, looking out for our own interest in trying to keep them there even though that

wasn't better for them. So I think one way is to really support them as a person first and then an employee. And so that if they umm if they needed help in umm improving their skill set or whatever it was, for them to reach their dreams, I would be totally supportive of that. And even making moves if it benefited them.

**Betty:** On a more formal level, ... we have, of course, professional development funds, and Umm, most of the conferences I go to, [my full time person will] go to with me. Umm, so—she'll go to conferences with me, umm, we also have a tuition reimbursement policy ... and I've we also get (pause) five hours a wee – wait, is it five hrs or three hrs a week, during our work hour that we can take a class here at the school or somewhere else. Umm, she wanted to take an art class – graphic arts class, and she worked. You know, I've always encouraged that. Umm, the half-time person that started working for us, the, the, the benefits aren't quite the same for part-time, we're hoping to get her full-time, and at that point. I really want to encourage her to go on and finish her Bachelor's. They both have Associates, and I talked to the person, the full-time person, and a she was really interested at one point in getting her Bachelor's. I think, Umm, with the other lady, while she's still married with children, she's a little bit younger I think as she becomes full-time, I'll be able to encourage her sayin', you know, "Go back and let's get your Bachelor's and let's get you movin up in the system." And, I've always been very supportive of takin' classes and sending them to Umm, workshops and things like that.

**Sharyn:** [One of my staff is a student], I have her as part-time, and I want to make her full-time. She has one more year before she graduates; this is her last semester. ... Part of my plan is going to be that we need to retain [her]. And that as an institution, I don't care if we put her into that new full-time position now that has just vacated, or if we want to create another full-time position, for her, specifically for her, but we need to her into a full-time position, because she's wonderful. And I know at the end of next semester, she's thinking of going on for her Bachelor's, potentially. But we can retain her; we can retain the talent if we can offer her something. Umm, and that's my hope, is to retain that talent, also to identify. I, I really as we're looking to build up our staff, I really rely on other people to give suggestions as well. ... I really, I guess I really looking at my own experience, I really want to utilize internal staff, people that I see as, a, you know shining lights in an organization and really mentor them and assist in their own growth. And I'll be very, you know, honest with [my staff] if we can't get her a full-time position and I'll say, "You know you really need to find a four-year institution, another institution, that will you know pay for you to go to college and will, you know, take you on." ... Umm, and that would really be beneficial for her; so I'm not gonna say no, I'm gonna chain you to my desk; you can never leave. But, you know, providing her with professional development opportunities, going to conferences, going to umm—going to meetings. I always say, I give her a little list of things that we're, you know, we can do, and tell her go find, if there's anything you want to go to, let me know . I'll pay for you to do that. And, to the best of my knowledge the previous directors did not do that with

the staff, so – she said, “Oh, I can do that?” I said, “Of course you can! Whatever you want to go to. We have a budget, that’s why you want to go.” So I think it’s really important to recognize their accomplishments, and recognize them publicly as well, to really acknowledge them. Umm, and then, whatever you can do institutionally to try to keep them I think is really important. I know that can be really challenging, because of the state regulations and the different steps ... I don’t care! We need to retain these people, you know, whatever it’s gonna take. You need to, ... you figure it out!

**Moderator:** What if you have an employee who is not doing the job they should be doing? In other words not “up to par” maybe is a way to say that. How do you help them recognize that within themselves and be able to move forward and grow in that nature?

**Brenda:** That is a tough one as you know. Umm and we have someone like that on our team. And she is probably an extreme example of it. I mean she she is a stereotypical state employee who just comes to work and does as little as she can, because she’s it’s a classified position. ... I mean the way we work with her, um you know she’s, two levels down. So I help her supervisor work with her. Is just pretty much document it and continue to encourage her and to look for things that you know, she is interested in to help her, um kinda make the best of that position then and he is actually doing a great job of pushing her a little bit more that the previous person in that position did. So I don’t have a good answer for that. Cause I really had the one and it is such and extreme case we’re just kinda of doing the best we can with a bad situation.

**David:** Depends on the person ... there’s a person that I work with now that that is true of. And the way it works with her, at least, is to do it just as gently, and circumspectly as possible. My reading of her personality, is that I really don’t want to say it out loud to her very much, ‘cause she’s a very shy person very diffident. Just really doesn’t like to have it all out on the table in front of you know, in between us very much. I can just see that it kinda makes her uncomfortable. So with her, I just kinda go around the edges of it.

**Moderator:** Have you had somebody that some strategy like that didn’t work?

**David:** Yep.

**Moderator:** And how did you handle that?

**David:** Not very well. See, this is, I, I, I, uh, I claim no perfection at any of this stuff. I’ve had another person that I worked with for years, where that’s absolutely not true! She’s just not receptive to subtlety. She doesn’t respond to that wavelength at all. You’ve got to be really clear and direct, and repetitive with her to get any kind of new behavior out of her at all. She’s really concrete. She’s a great person. And when you get her on a task, and a task that she’s

comfortable with, she's hugely productive. But changing course, or adding tasks or doing stuff that's new [is difficult] .... So, it's really just the opposite of the previous case.

**Moderator:** Ruth what about you?

**Ruth:** You know I'm finding it very interesting. You think that when you go to all these trainings that you go to, that you can have just a simple strategy and take that and so much is dependent upon the condition and the personalities involved. Umm, (pause) But I think the main thing is to try and get people together; sit down and talk about it. Get people to take their ownership. Usually, there's two sides to it. And both people need to say, "Whoops! I goofed!" Let them find their way to make it better, because personalities are so important. Umm, and we have a little of that yet to do in this one situation that I'm working thru....but that's basically I get people together, sit down and talk, and take ownership. Not make it personal.

Here we see that participants have developed skills for working with their subordinates and how important it is to the participants to help their subordinates grow. They have found that they have to be very conscientious about the type of people they are communicating with to make sure they are using the right techniques depending on individuals. The reader was able to see how these administrators feel that no one way of working with people will work for all. Therefore, they have to change their style based on who they are working with.

### **Current Position**

Each participant works within their current position to handle the day to day operations of online education. To do this they must be prepared in five areas (a) personal professional development, (b) quality issues, (c) student/program needs, (d) job specifics, and (e) development of faculty, students and staff. The participants will discuss what they do for their own personal professional development and how they try to stay current in their fields. Second, they will discuss how they have dealt with the idea of quality within their own distance learning programs. In the subtheme of student/program

needs, the participants discuss what the needs are and how they attempt to meet them. The subtheme, job specifics, allows the participants to discuss various other day to day operations that they must also continually work with. Finally, they discuss the importance of developing faculty, students and staff and some ways that they try to do so.

### ***Personal Professional Development***

**Moderator:** In any position, I think it is difficult to stay current and continue to grow personally. In our conversations, you each discussed how you do this. Can you share with the group some of the ways you seek out professional development?

**Brenda:** I like going to conferences, I like talking to vendors, I like doing research and reading about what's up and coming and staying current.

**Ruby:** If you work with people that are in that field, and then, you know, statewide and nationally, then they, you know, there's always gonna be somebody that's sort of a little bit ahead of you in some little edge. ... If I didn't participate into the state group, and I go to the E-Learning Conference. ... I've gone to a couple of other ones, but I – I've kinda decided I really like this one ... If I didn't participate in those things, I wouldn't be able to stay ahead.

**Sharyn:** How I keep up with stuff right now, that's happening in Distance Learning? I'm on a variety of Distance Learning mailing lists. From the technical side, I'm on a WebCT Users group mailing list that comes through like every day. ... The instructional piece, Umm, I read a lot of magazines as well. We have what is called, [State] Colleges Online where we get together about four times a year, and it's community colleges – normally it's Director of Distance Learning or Dean or whatever you happen to be, umm, and then we share ideas about what's working and what's not. And a lot of it's just kind of, you know, going to a site and talking to them and, "show me what you're doing." ... So I think that's really where, you know, I keep abreast of things, and, you know I hear something or someone will say something, and I'll look it up and see what's out there, and, and a, and umm, I'm doing a lot of leadership reading for my program, so I'm kind of keeping abreast.

The participants discussed the need to stay current not only in issues around distance learning, but also with technology. They do this by continually trying to grow professionally by attending conferences, reading various publications, and meeting with and learning from other online learning administrators. As with all occupations,

professional growth is seen by these participants as a key action for the role of the online learning administrator.

### *Quality Issues*

**Moderator:** Another area, which seems to come up a lot, is quality in distance learning programs. What kind of conversations have your institutions had around quality?

**David:** My College's administrations, as most, frankly, are all about growing. Uh, and not necessarily just fully involved in the quality issue. But I have to be involved in that. We have to try to make our courses better, as well as getting more students in them.

**Sheri:** That's right boost it up, so you get the funds, and the bottom lines the dollar. I don't care where that dollar comes from, that's the bottom line! So they see it as a money maker, a necessary evil, things like that. And then when they say, "It must be good, our students are actually learning things." They have no concept of what it takes to get it to be good – the quality in a distance program. I mean it's easy to throw out a distance program, and it can be, and you can cover and say, "Gee, yeah – you know, it's an education." But unless you bring in the quality, you know, of the interaction, and the quality assessments, and the quality of evaluation, you're not getting the same education so, when people say it's bad, sometimes they're right. It can be.

**Ruth:** I think maybe in part because everybody's challenged whether or not what we're doing is good.....to be better than anybody else is. And I think at the end of the day, we're gonna drive the quality ship. We're not gonna be tagging along saying, "Oh yeah, we're good too." We're gonna be saying, "Here's the standard; we set it. Do you want to join us?" ... Another thing that argues for our quality [is] how many instructors wing it? "Where am I today? Oh yeah, I'm here, this is what I'll talk about." My lectures have to be developed and they have to be online. They're there ahead of time. You know, my goal is everything's gotta be done ahead of time. So that's been a good argument with administration especially. And I take the administrators in and say, "Look, here's my course. Here's everything that I've done, here's a permanent record of everything that we have done."

**Moderator:** What then about standards? Do you have standards in place for your online courses or programs?

**Ruby:** I'm trying to imbed that Quality Matters process in, ah, the faculty evaluation project, process, and the strategic planning, and the accreditation documents, and our new governance.

**Sheri:** The instructors, I've found, that were the best in our money were the, shall I say, "Anal-retentive ones." They were, they're very, ah, perfectionist types, very difficult to work with in other areas, and but when you get into Distance Learning they are very careful about quality, they're very, when you're setting up standards, and trying to structure things, they are your best resource.

**David:** You've got to maintain some type of academic rigor. I will not my job as a Distance Learning Director, is not to let the quality level suffer period. I just can't do that. We've got to continually raise it. ... I work very closely with the division chairs in trying to make sure that the quality we need in these courses is there.

From its inception, online learning has faced quality questions. Here the participants discussed how far online learning has come in this regard. They discussed how important quality is to a successful program, and various ways they work to maintain quality at their institution. They discussed the transparency of online courses, and how this openness actually makes it easier to see what is happening in the classroom. They also talked about how they use these ideas to help their programs and build support at their institutions.

### ***Student/Program Needs***

**Moderator:** So we need to be concerned about quality. Do you also find you need to be concerned about meeting student and or program needs? How do you make sure you are fulfilling that area?

**David:** The, uh, challenge as far as the students are concerned ongoing daily challenges, X number of students, a fairly significant proportion of students at any given time, automatically assume that because the course is online it's going to be easier. It's gonna be something they don't have to pay as much attention to. So, uh, that, and that's probably a bigger challenge than the one I mentioned earlier, because it just comes up constantly. Uh, people always are fond of saying that, this attitude with our students in this way is a reflection of this new generation and this somehow more distended feeling of entitlement that young people seem to have. They just want everything handed to them, and their attention spans are shorter, and they learn differently, and we're not even reaching them in the learning modes that they're used to using. I mean, we're. Where's the last time that you had a course set up as a video game? We should set 'em up all that way up, probably; but, I mean you hear all these excuses for why students react this way. I'm not sure how much of that stuff is true. I don't know if people have

changed that much or not; I just don't know. It's possible, but I don't know. But I do know that it's our job, as the people putting those courses out there, to find a way, to keep trying to find a way, anyway, to reach everybody, not just X number of them that we consider to be the good students.

**Brian:** Well, we do not have a separate DL program, distance learning program. It's just a choice. When a student uh enrolls, there's a choice of taking this section, this section happens to be face-to-face, this section happens to be ITV televised, or this section happens to be online. And they take the section they want. ... We think of online as strictly an alternative for our students.

**Moderator:** What about students? How do you meet their needs?

**Ruby:** Our faculty are "digital-immigrants" Our students... they're certainly, "digital-natives" ... I mean there's a lot of students coming through that are really very comfortable with online classes and actually help their professors.

**Ruth:** Online students are gonna go online. I mean, in the beginning it was, ok....I'll take 'em because I have to, and now we're at about 70, 60-70% that if it's not online, I'm not taking it.

**Sharyn:** But, we have a lot of students that still need the little box, and that I think is part of the conversation is that this isn't for everybody, you know, this isn't the correct modality of learning or teaching for everyone. And there have to be options, and that we just can't say we're going completely this way. I'm not good 100% online learner – that's my little secret I tell students when they come in, and they say, "I'm struggling with this online class." And I said, "Oh, I don't take online courses." 'cause I said, "I'm not a very good 100% online learner. I'm a really good hybrid learner." and that's what my Master's program was hybrid, and my graduate degree is hybrid. "Really?" And so you really, I said, "yeah, you really need to figure out what works well for you." And I think in a lot of cases, we're just rushing head-first into...ohhhh, what about distance learning, everyone's doing distance learning, and you know we're barreling along without a lot without a lot of thought about what are the implications, what are the pieces that are needed. ... I really want the students to have a good experience. I want them to be successful; I want them to recommend the program to someone else.

**Moderator:** David, I think you mentioned something interesting when we visited. You have some online resources available to your students right?

**David:** [Yes] we've got online tutoring available to our students. We've got a combined data base with all the seven college's libraries now, so that any student at any college can just click on one icon and they can go to the complete online resources of the entire seven colleges.

These administrators discussed how important it is to recognize the different learning needs of students. They discussed how important it is for the institution to have things in place to aid students in their courses. They also mentioned that with the growth of online learning, their institutions need to be conscience of the various learning styles of students and making sure that they have various types of courses, such as hybrids, to meet those needs. The participants realized that the institution needed to have items in place to make sure that students are ready for online education. Just implementing online courses, does not automatically mean students will succeed, and all aspects of the student needs should be taken into consideration.

### ***Job Specifics***

**Moderator:** Sometimes, it seems like everyone gets bogged down in the minutia of their everyday jobs. For you all, it seemed like that revolved around growing the program, so that you don't do as Betty said earlier, halt the FTE machine. You also seemed to have to deal with issues regarding various job duties. Let's talk first about your role in as distance learning administrators and some of the everyday requirements you have. Glen and Sharyn, you both have a wide variety of expectations; can you share that with this group?

**Glen:** Yeah, so this is just all online stuff, and that's a good point. With not just online learning, I am responsible for weekend college, college in the high school, extended learning, continuing education, you know, there's five major programs. I also, we have hybrid classes, blended classes, and then just the classroom classes that use Blackboard, just the discussion areas so, yeah, I have to support all those instructors. So I have over 1400 instructors I support. We're tech support for faculty and students, so I'm on-call 24 hrs a day, seven days a week, even on vacation, I'm tech support because I don't have anybody that can work overtime – I'm the only exempt person in my office, the rest are classified employees. And so, being a (pause) distance education or e-learning administrator that it's not all what it's cracked up!

**Sharyn:** Being Director of Distance Learning, I'm also the head of the Center for Instructional Technology Expertise. ... We have a definition for what distance learning is, and that is 100% online course, a hybrid course, and we also ... have what is called a Student Option Enrollment Course. ... Umm, we also have interactive television, which we're phasing out because it's just, not, working. But, that's defined as "distance" learning. And so in my role as Director of

Distance Learning, I'm supposed to deal with that piece. Umm, as overseer of the Center for Instructional Technology over here, we're supporting faculty in their use of the WebCT 6 Teaching Platform, and any use of technology in the classroom, or distance-wise. So, we're supporting more than just the distance learning piece, we're supporting kinda the whole college over here.

**Moderator:** Is that true for others of you as well?

**Betty, Ruth, Brenda:** [Yes]

**Moderator:** So what about growing the program?

**Betty:** Our department started in '99 with one person. Umm, and five internet classes, and by the time I took the position in March of 2004, Umm, there was myself and one other part-time person, she eventually became full-time. And in March of 2004, we had 20 internet sections. Umm, here we are ---Fall, 2007 -- there's the three of us, and we have 140 online sections, and another 40-something on hybrid sections, so we've grown quite a bit.

**Ruth:** [We have grown] 30% a year you know, in seven years we've gone from 273 students to 10,500, and that doesn't include our hybrid programs that are running.

**Kristie:** [As I said about budget] we're gonna fall on our face because we've got close to 900 users on our Blackboard right now.

**Brian:** We're not going out and advertising, saying there's a great program out there, but the growth is there. And the number of students has been growing steady too. Like I said, it's a nice little growth. And we're not doing anything, except for providing the classes.

**Brenda:** [Yeah, as I said, a challenge is] keeping up that same enthusiasm.

These administrators talk about the breadth of what distance learning means within their institutions. Glen and Sharyn talked about the scope of their jobs, and how distance learning really reaches out to many areas of their institutions. This was acknowledged by others as well. The participants also shared with each other the amount of growth and the short time frame for that growth within their institutions, and the growing pains they encountered based on the growth. Brenda reiterated what she said

earlier, about how it is important to keep the same enthusiasm for online education throughout the institution as when online courses first began.

### ***Development of Faculty, Students and Staff***

**Moderator:** You all work with faculty, students and staff. I imagine one of the most time consuming parts of your job is helping each of these groups of people grow. Lets start first with student, how do you prepare them for the online environment?

**Ruth:** [First we have to overcome the fact that] students think that this is going to be easier because they don't have to go to class.

**Sheri:** You know, they need to have those expectations set up front, and they need to have the right information given to them. It's really easy to BS it or put a student off and say, "Oh, here's an online class that will fit your schedule, online's easier go." And the student is just blown away. So working on that front end is really important. ... I've put together an orientation that's in a blackboard classroom, and it takes 'em thru all those steps.

**Sharyn:** I implemented, it was called the Online Student Letter. We e-mailed it out to all the students; we also mailed it out to all the students.

**Moderator:** What about your staff? What kind of development do you find you are doing with them to help them in their positions and to help them continue to grow professionally?

**Ruth:** We have an antiquated system of staff development that I would like to see us revise, but every year apart from all the paperwork what are the three things that you did last year that you're most proud of? What do you want to do next year? What are your goals? And so, getting especially these young women that work at the college, and young men, to set goals for themselves is good –it's important! And it's a joy, because I truly believe in life-long learning. And so, yeah, you know, if you can get them up to staff development and you can bring staff development opportunities on campus, that's always good. But I always if there's something happening on campus and they would be a good "fit" to move in and take leadership let 'em go. Think about who they are and bring 'em in and let 'em go.

**David:** [I agree] I want them to have every chance possible to learn and grow---to do new things. And not get stuck in the same rut doing the same things every day, if they don't want to.

**Kristie:** [If I could] I would definitely get my assistant a couple of more hours, so that she could do more course design. ... But I don't have the opportunity to

utilize her; because I don't have enough time, nor do we; we don't even have the software at our location. We have to go beg off of Web Design to get it and all of that. And she would like to do more of that. But she is not really interested in; she doesn't even want to take over the position or anything like that. It's like "No. I'm happy where I'm at." And you know, she just does not want to do it and that's , that's fine. I told her I'm fine with that too. I said if you want to progress and you want to do more, let me know. I'll certainly make it happen.

**Moderator:** So if opportunities arose that she was interested in, you would help her pursue them?

**Kristie:** Exactly. And that's why I told her. And I said, and I've always told her, I said, "Umm, if you find, ah a position somewhere else or ah that will let you do more of what you want to do," I said, "Not a problem." I said, "Don't ever think that you can't leave this job and go somewhere else if it's what you want to do." I'm not, I'm never gonna tell somebody they can't go somewhere, or try to keep them down. That's not what I'm about. It's like, I'm all about what's what works best for you. (pause) 'Cause I don't view it as a, I mean even if I thought that she wanted my job, I'd never view it as a threat. I'm like to me it's a compliment. Somebody wants to move into my position. You know obviously they must like what I'm doing.

**Brenda:** Yeah, you know I would be encouraging. I would say you know go to the conferences, meet with people, I can give you a letter of recommendation, um, help them find, uh, resources that they need to achieve what they want.

**Moderator:** That is really great that you would want to help people grow. What about faculty? I imagine you spend a lot of time with faculty development in many different ways; can you speak to the faculty aspect?

**Sharyn:** I think my previous experience as a faculty member certainly helps in interacting with them. Umm, I wonder if I would have had as much success if I didn't have that background, if I just came from, you know, corporate.

**Sheri:** [That's right] I've done a lot of teaching and so I understand the faculty perspective and getting the faculty well trained, and I don't mean just: "This is how you work in Blackboard," I mean, "This is how you do assessments. This is how you can, you know, manage a class." This is these are the regulations for FERPA and ADA. You know, taking it way beyond and so we've ah we work very hard with that. And we have very comprehensive faculty development program. So I work with them quite a bit.

**Ruth:** Well, there are a number of things that we do to encourage faculty to use the tools. We have a lot of trainings, we have two conferences a year, we have mentor-trainers and colleagues and other mentors that work with faculty to use the tools. ... So a lot of mentoring, a lot of mentoring, and a lot of working to find

easy ways to implement technology, rather than making it cumbersome and difficult.

**Glen:** Oh,....definitely just work with them, mentor them, you know.

In my conversations with these administrators, it became apparent that they spent an enormous amount of time working with students, staff and faculty. Much of that work is in mentoring and training, helping them understand the various components of online learning. With students, it is important to help them understand the expectations of learning in the online environment. For staff, it is helping them grow professionally not only for their current jobs, but for career moves as well. For faculty, much of their work is in training them to be successful in online teaching pedagogies, and incorporating the various technologies that help students be successful. Getting people appropriately trained allows them to be comfortable and more productive. This also leads to better student, faculty, and institution relationships.

### **The Journey**

At the end of each interview, I was curious as to what would come next for each participant. I wanted to know about their journey and where they see themselves going within their current position and careers. In this section, I took each participant in the order of their first interview and using their words as much as possible, answer my interview question: What comes next for you? Will you continue in this position within online learning?

#### ***Sherri***

Oh – yeah. Yeah. Umm, there’s a lot of work to be done in this college – just getting the online programs where they should be, and getting the mindsets where they should be.... they know they have to change, but boy, it’s hard. You know, when you’ve raised in the little town, and everything’s been the same all your life, and then all of a sudden, BOOM! But, ah, yeah, I’ll be staying in distance

learning, because I'm very content with this college. As goofy as it is! But every place has been goofy!

***Glen***

I've been offered another job with another university, and it's a virtual remote job I can work from home, and ah, doin' the same type of thing. [I will be staying in distance learning though] until I retire.

***Ruby***

You know, I sort of toy with that occasionally. But, and so I'm not sure. Sometimes I think about going back into professional technical ed., you know, but I'm uh actually very happy in distance learning – in online learning, because ah, it's innovative. So, in a way, I think I, I'm not sure – I may stick with it. I would say I would probably have about a 70 percent chance of sticking with it.

***Betty***

That's a very interesting question...I had always thought that, you know, whatever I'm doin' – I'll be climbing the ladder, right? It's my entire life I've been a very goal oriented person. I set a goal; I accomplish that, ok – what's next? What's the next goal? Where I am currently in the next goal is the dean's position. ... But the more I look at my life, my personal life; I really don't know if that's what I want. I'm pretty happy with what I do...I've sat here for a while, and talked about the bad things – the anti-mentorism, this, that but overall: I love what I do! I love workin' with faculty, I love workin' with students...I love that. ... [My boyfriend] and I've been talkin' about kids, and a vice-presidency type position do I really want right now in my life? Or do I want to spend more time with friends and kids and husband and things like that?

So, where I'm goin' next, I don't know. My dean retires in two years, even with her retiring, there's no guarantee that I would get the position. But my question now is: "Will I even apply for it?" ... The people who work for me, around me, with me, are just, they all assume that that's what, that's what I'll do. I mean especially since I am working on the doctorate you know you are gonna take this next step And, I don't know! I really don't know. I wanta see where my life goes. I've spent, I don't know how many years of my life in school, (laugh) I have, you know, moved the ladder here, there to get where I am, and I might just want to stay here for a bit 'n let things plan off and, and enjoy life.

***Sharyn***

Yeah, it's, I'm really enjoying it. I mean I look at this as kind of the second program that I'm building, in a much, it was in a much better state than when I found it. ... I have to say that I think my skills; I have a very good skill set for

this. And I enjoy doing it, kind of taking the piec....looking, identifying what the pieces are, bringing people together, you know, building up a program, and again I'd have to think that if my experiences at two colleges is anything like the rest of the country, that these skills would be in fairly good demand. Although, I'm not sure, you know, where other programs stand. So I could see myself as a, you know, coming in and helping you build your distance learning program, and putting the pieces together to make it something, to make it successful. So, that's something I guess I could look at doing, in terms of my own, my own abilities if I had wanted to do that. I think about that, I don't know if I want to stay directly involved with distance learning, or if I want to go into more of a senior academic role where I can take what I've learned from all the modalities and the experiences, and really start to shift the mind-set of these institutions ... and really start to shift it from a more senior administrative level. So, that's where I think I'm probably gonna be headed, but I don't know how, how far I'll, how far it'll take me to get there and the path I'll travel.

*David*

I tell you, I don't know. I hope so. 'Cause I really like my college. I like what we do. I like the students we serve. I like the potential we have to grow and change. But as an institution, I don't know that we're gonna do that. I don't know if the leadership is there to make that happen. I don't, forget the leadership. I just don't know if it's gonna turn out that way. So that's an iffy thing. My job? Certainly, in the position I'm in, I feel like it's open-ended and there's any number of new things to learn, and new ways to grow, and new directions to take it; new people to work with, new connections. To me the most exciting part of it is constantly the prospect for making connections with new people, anywhere. You know. It is what it is. It's online. It's the internet; it's the whole world connected, and we're all talkin' to each other. So, obviously, there's no end of possibilities there. So I really hope that what I do continues, because I like it. I'm not ever gonna be a college president, or a vice-president. I'm not even gonna be on that track, ever! I knew that a long time ago, which, in a way, made it easier for me 'cause I always feel like I'm this kind of advanced scout person who's always gonna be out here away from where most of my colleagues are. They're on these channels you know, they're gonna move up through the ranks.

I'm never gonna be that. I'm just gonna be this person out here that's always lookin' to do things on my own and try to, to develop, you know, new stuff. And so I hope that I get to keep doing that. I don't know if it'll be in my current position or not. It's a day-to-day thing. ... But if I can't do it there, I hope I can do it somewhere. I like my job. It's a very challenging, constantly new and developing area, and I really enjoy it; and I hope I get to continue.

***Ruth***

I think so. Unfortunately, at colleges if you want to make more money, you become administration. ... I will probably stay in this or something related to this. Yes. While I never thought about being an administrator, I dare to think about it, I really do like, I like the interaction with other administrators. Meetings can be tedious, but leadership is a concept and leadership is something to transform institutions and make lives better for somebody. I don't know if I ever thought about that. Here, I come from the Air Force, and as a little girl I knew lots of bird colonels who seemed to bark a lot. Yeah, I didn't see that as leadership. And so to get into an environment where I am with people who are sometimes extraordinary in their ability to make things better for people. I find that fun. Yeah. So, yeah. I will. And I will probably stay in the online area for the rest of my career or whatever it is, 'er whatever the next evolvement is in distance learning.

***Kristie***

Well, let me put it this way. I have three more years to go on my law program. I actually started in April. I'll finish my first year in May. And then I'll start my second, and all that. So, I theoretically, I could stay in my same job for the next four years because it's hard enough to be going to school and working, and so a known quantity certainly beats an unknown quantity. So, I would be willing to stay under certain conditions. I mean, I told my boss, I said, "Don't be asking me for new stuff." I said, for two and one-half years we've, and I said, we're dry now, we're on the drought. I said we're hanging with Atlanta now, so don't be asking us for new stuff. We're dried up. We're done. And all of that, we'll manage what's going on, but no new stuff period.

***Brian***

Right now, I have no idea. With the change in a president, I have no idea what her philosophy is in distance learning, distance education, so until I find out what the school vision ideal is, I don't know what my vision will be. My dream would be a full-time faculty member, but, not administration, not. But I will continue in the role as long as it, if it gets too technical, where I have to start handling things like enrolling people, and training people, and Blackboard and things like that, I would probably step down.

***Brenda***

I think that ... as I say something I'll be doing the opposite, but I would probably say that moving up the ranks within the community college so next would be like an associate dean or a dean position and well you know probably staying within the, within the system. And I'd stay within higher ed. I'd think that if an attractive offer came from you know [a large university]. ... So I've seen both,

the community college and the University. And you know I'm very comfortable in both of them so I would say higher ed. Well and you know I love [my community college], I could see staying there a long time. ... I definitely like being an administrator. ... I think that is what attracted, why I would stay in it. But I'm also very picky about the position I move forward into. I won't just take anything to move up. It's gonna have to be something that works for me.

### **Conclusion**

Here the reader can see that online learning and administration for most of these participants is truly where they see themselves. We saw at the beginning of this chapter, that most of the participants did not even start in the educational arena. Even with that, Sheri, Glen, David, and Ruth see themselves in this online realm for quite some time. Glen even said "I love what I do!"

While, Betty, Sharyn and Brenda, want to stay in administrative, leadership type positions they may see themselves continuing to "climb the ladder" to other leadership roles in their institutions. Betty and Sharyn are even pursuing advanced degrees to help with this venture. While they want to stay in administration and possibly other leadership roles in institutions, they still enjoy working with faculty, students and staff. Betty said "Overall: umm, I love what I do! I love workin' with faculty, I love workin' with students. ... I love that." This was echoed by many of the participants as they expressed a deep level of job satisfaction. Ruth said it best when she said, "It's been a great journey. I love higher education! Who knew?"

In the next chapter, I will explore how the themes in this chapter, helped develop the essence of the participants' experiences. I will also demonstrate how the main themes are related to the literature.

## CHAPTER 6 - DISCUSSION

To conclude this study of the experiences of these participants of community college online learning administrators, I will first discuss the essence in relation to the phenomenon within this study. Second, I will discuss my conclusions in relation to the connections to the literature, the themes and my research questions. Third, I will discuss recommendations for further study. Finally, I will share my thoughts about how the study ended, and my personal feelings about the entire experience.

### **The Essence**

Throughout this study, there was one overarching phenomenon that came out through all the main themes and subthemes. This essence of, *People Matter*, came from the integration of the five main themes, (a) Barriers, (b) Actions, (c) Observation of Leadership, (d) Working with Groups, and (e) Current Position. This essence emerged through the data analysis process as well as in the fictional conversation that the participants shared in chapter five.

The participants expressed how people matter within the theme of barriers. They shared how they led people from the traditional mindset into an innovative mindset that would benefit both the individuals as well as the institution. They recognized that doing so could be threatening to some people and they needed to be sensitive to those they are leading away from the traditional mindset. The participants also realized how and where distance learning fit into their organization was important, and they needed to work within the confines that were set up by the institution. However, they also realized that

regardless of where distance learning was in their institution, people within other areas, may have a territory or world that they have built, and they needed to be mindful of everyone's personal space. The participants shared that they need to help others feel comfortable with the impact that distance learning has in various areas of the institution. Finally, within the theme of barriers, the participants shared how they must handle working with their upper administration in regards to areas such as budget, visions, and keeping distance learning new and exciting. The participants realized that people matter and it does not matter the level of the people they are working with, they still felt they needed to be cognizant of other's ideas and feelings.

Within the theme of actions, the essence, people matter, came through in various ways. First, the participants realized that they must build trust and buy in from various constituents within their institutions. This means they must meet people where they are, and help them see the value of distance learning. The participants said this was often accomplished by treating people with respect, and being mindful of others' emotions, values and ethics. They also discussed the need to empower others and nurturing them to change. Second, the participants realized much can be accomplished by communicating openly. They talked about being transparent to others, so that people felt comfortable coming to them with any issue they may have. The participants also said they needed to have a strong and well communicated vision for distance learning and much could be accomplished by clearly articulating that vision to others. Also, within the idea of communication, the participants shared that they often needed to be aware of who they were communicating with so that they used the best techniques for that person or group.

Thirdly, within the theme of actions, the essence, people matter, emerged in the subtheme of embracing individuals. I often heard from the participants how they felt they needed to be mindful of other people's ideas, when working with others. The participants voiced how they felt they needed to be able to recognize individuals' personal styles and then adapt their leadership style to meet the needs of the individual to obtain the greatest productivity. The participants also talked about how they needed to respect the difference found in others, and honor those differences. Fourth, the participants knew in order to do some of these previous items they needed to be the seed for leading change. While they saw themselves as a main change agent, for distance learning in their institutions, they also realized they needed to be systematic about bringing about the change. They realized this could be intimidating to some people they work with. This meant, people matter, and by considering the needs of the people, the participants could help others grow at a comfortable pace, and listening to their ideas, help them grow and overcome their fears. Finally, in order to bring about and lead change the participants shared that they needed to be a visionary to guide the institution and bring distance learning forward. The participants said that they needed to see the big picture and not only understand distance learning, but also various other areas in the institution that would be affected by distance learning. To do this, again people matter, in the needs of the people were considered by listening to others, creating a clear vision and being able to explain that to others, to help them see where distance learning is going.

The theme of observation of leadership showed how the essence, people matter, evolved with their relationships to past people. What the participants perceived to be good and poor leadership characteristics and their own personal perceptions of

leadership. First, each person described those who have been influential to them in their journey. Through the conversation, each participant shared that those they most admired were good people. They would treat others with respect, stick to their own values, but also value other people's ideals and ethics. Second, when describing what they felt were the good and poor leadership characteristics, the participants expressed that it was important to never use your power for personal gain. It was important to the participants that you have a true care for your area and the people in it, you need to be open minded, calm and careful in decision making. The participants felt strongly that poor leadership did not do these things and did not take the idea of people matter into practice. For example, a poor leader would not empower others, would not be people oriented, and would not treat people with respect. Additionally, poor leaders would strip people of their dignity, would not trust others, would drain people, would not listen, and would micromanage. In other words, people would not matter to a poor leader.

The participants took this conversation and then discussed themselves and how they see themselves leading in their areas. The essence, people matter, came through very clear when the participants discussed that they did not criticize others for having a different view than themselves, instead they helped others grow by mentoring them. They did try to have a collaborative working style with others; they kept their own ego out of the equation, listened to others, and asked questions before making decisions. Inspiring those around them to do the best work possible was important to these participants. They wanted to lead by example, by recognizing the people they work with are people both at work and away from work, and they deserve to be treated with full respect at all times.

Within the idea of the participants' own perception of leadership, again they expressed the essence, people matter. They recognized how leadership set the pace on how the institution would move forward. Management versus leadership distinctions were made that showed for these participants, leaders needed to not only have a vision for how the institution would move forward, but they needed to provide opportunities and the right environment for people to move forward in the future. They felt it is important for a leader to help and let people choose for themselves rather than dictating the future.

In the main theme of working with groups, people matter was again very clear. The three subthemes were (a) working with faculty, (b) working with groups inside and outside the institution, and (c) working with subordinates. The idea of working with others in any context implies that the people you are working with do matter. The participants knew faculty play an important role in distance learning and the success of the distance learning program. They felt it was important to interact with the members of the faculty to listen to their needs and help them continue to grow in various ways around distance learning. The participants also realized there are many groups both in and out of the institution. Community colleges, in general, often work with many community constituents, and the area of distance learning was not any different. They felt that it was important for them to find the most efficient ways to work with these groups, and build up a trust and help them understand the value of distance learning. Finally, the participants realized their subordinates were very important to the success of their distance learning programs. They talked about how vital these people were and how much they value them. They knew they needed to be people who focused on these individuals to grow them professionally and personally.

The last main theme, current position, had five areas that the participants discussed within their day-to-day operations of distance learning and their individual positions. The five areas were (a) personal professional development, (b) quality issues, (c) student/program needs, (d) job specifics, and (e) development of faculty, students and staff. This last theme was not any different than the other main themes, as the essence, people matter, once again materialized. In the five sub themes, the participants again talked about how important the people were to their success as a distance learning program. It was important they continue to grow professionally so that they are current in issues around distance learning. They needed to work with the various communities of distance learning so they could ease concerns about quality issues. It was obvious to these participants they needed to help grow and develop faculty, students, and staff so that these groups could be more successful in learning about and meeting the needs of students. The participants also realized distance learning really reaches out to many areas of the institution and they needed to be aware of all the people that are impacted by their programs.

In summary, the essence of people matter was a conscious decision by the participants. They were very purposeful in practicing meeting the needs of individuals with whom they interact. Being aware of other people's ideas and mind-sets is important to take care of others and the participants practiced this. It is imperative to respect others' emotions and values and in return value what others may bring to distance learning. Each participant spoke of how people matter and it was important to be a good person, first and foremost. Finally, it is important to treat each person as an individual. The participants tailored their leadership style to meet the needs of individuals, and help

them grow and learn about the vision of the distance-learning program. The participants showed us people do matter. While the research did not use this phrase, people matter, some of the ideals the participants valued are characterized in the literature as well.

### **Connections to the Literature and Research Questions**

Within the literature, I found that while the distance education leader has many similarities to other forms of leadership, new characteristics and skills must also be developed. In this section, I will discuss the connections to the literature within the essence of people matter as well as the five main themes of (a) Barriers, (b) Actions, (c) Observation of Leadership, (d) Working with Groups, and (e) Current Position. Combined in this discussion, I will relate my findings to my research questions.

The primary research question for my phenomenology research study was what is the essence of the life and professional experiences that influenced these administrators in their work? The sub-questions were: What were their experiences that brought them here? What were their experiences with different leadership styles? What leadership styles do they see themselves using? What are their leadership philosophies, experiences, and beliefs? What central themes emerge? What specific interaction and conditions have been influential for these people? What are the resulting strategies and outcomes they currently use in their positions? In the histories of each participant, in chapter four, we learned what their experiences were that brought them to their current positions. In chapter five we learned about the participants' experiences with different leadership styles and what styles they see themselves using as well as their own leadership philosophies. We also learned through the five main themes what interactions and people

were important to them even before they began this journey as an online learning administrator.

### *The Essence – People Matter*

The primary research question for my phenomenology research study was what is the essence of the life and professional experiences that influenced these administrators in their work? The essence as we have seen is people matter. Within online learning the idea of people matter may be more important than any single type of leadership style. The term people matter is not directly discussed in the literature but is implied in many areas. For example, in situational leadership the basic premise is that each person possesses different skills and a leader should tailor their approach to these different skills and for each task. Blanchard et al. (1985), described the situational leader as someone who can change his style of leadership to meet the ability and needs of the employee, helping them make specific goals that were measurable and attainable, and help the employee grow from one developmental area to another. Northouse (2004) agreed with Blanchard et al. as well as they believed that the situational leader's job is to help their subordinate reach their potential.

The essence, people matter, is also addressed in the idea of transformational leadership, specifically in the fourth factor of transformational leadership, individual consideration. The name, individual consideration, itself implies that people matter. This factor of transformational leadership as Bass and Steidlmeier (1999), described it is, where the leader considers each subordinate as an individual to provide coaching and growth prospects for them. The transformational leader is a mentor to help their subordinates grow. Additionally, Burns (2003) stated the three core factors to

transformational leadership are virtue, ethics and values. These factors, as discussed by the participants have a strong tie to the essence of people matter.

### ***Barriers***

Within the theme of barriers, we heard from the participants that they needed to help others having difficulty overcoming the traditional mindset of the organization, and to understand how online learning fits into their institution. Northouse (2004) stated, “Transformational leaders also act as change agents who initiate and implement new directions within organizations” (p. 182). The participants talked about how it was important to them to educate the people they work with so that their coworkers would be able to understand the clear emerging changes within the institution.

While the literature does not specifically discuss the barrier of understanding the position within the institution, Beaudoin (2003), did briefly mention it. Beaudoin talked about the traits and skills needed for the distance learning leader, and one of those skills is “function with ambiguity, complexity and decentralization.” It was clear here with these participants that they had some ambiguity as to where online learning fits within their organizations. A challenge for them was to work within the restrictions and limitations imposed by their organization. The participants discussed the history of their institutions in regards to how online learning emerged. We heard from Betty, Sharyn, and David that the online program at their institution was initially created in a piecemeal fashion where there were a few courses and then gradually as online learning grew they realized that online learning was affecting many areas of the institution. This then created an opportunity for the institution to develop and build support for the program.

Once the institutions realized how much online learning impacted other areas in the institution, the participants discussed the idea of territory and how online learning altered the landscape. It was as Sheri said, “Unfortunately, distance learning encroaches on everybody. It gets into everybody’s little pockets and they feel uncomfortable with that.” The participants shared these stories, and some were in various stages of working through this barrier. However, it did not appear that they had an “answer” for overcoming this barrier themselves and it was a continuous struggle.

### ***Actions***

The actions that people demonstrate in their current position, and how they lead with their own vision is important to online learning administration. This helped to address the research questions: What leadership styles do they see themselves using, and what are their leadership philosophies, experiences, and beliefs? Successful, higher education, distance education leaders lead not by direct control, but by inspiring those around them with their vision. In this study, participants discussed the importance of developing a vision and being able to successfully implement that vision. This is very similar to transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999), and the process that Kotter (1996) described in *Leading Change*.

While the participants did not mention eight stages to lead change as Kotter detailed, while discussing the participant’s methods of leadership and really listening to them, it was evident that they knew there was a sequence of events that they did follow to bring about change at their institutions. They talked about finding stakeholders in their institutions and building trust with others. They also discussed being able to clearly communicate their vision to the constituencies in the institution while remaining open to

the ideas and thoughts of others. The difficulties of accomplishing this affected many of them. In fact, David talked about institutions being “being set in stone. It just does not want to change.” This resistance to change was mirrored in the article by Beaudoin (2003), where he said institutions “can no longer afford the luxury of adopting new ways of teaching and learning in an incremental fashion to which academics are so accustomed and comfortable doing.” Institutions are finding themselves needing to spend time and resources to properly develop these online learning programs and to accomplish it rapidly.

Vaughan (2000) warned of the private sector institutions advancing at a greater pace than the community college and thus possibly affecting the attendance at our community colleges. This issue affected the participants in this study. They understood their students had a need for, a desire for and were demanding online education. The participants knew if they did not develop programs to address the needs, desires, and demands someone else would. They also understood that the structure of the program also needed to be built. The lack of borders within online learning often blurs the lines of service areas, and institutions must reach out to students to help them reach their goals. The participants acknowledged they that they needed to be aware of the stakeholders for online learning at their institution so that they could best work with them to help develop, build, and grow a program.

Several participants talked extensively about being a situational leader in how they saw each individual situation as different and many times those different situations required a different method of leadership or type of leadership. While they didn't use the

words “Situational Leadership” this idea was evident in their examples of working with individuals. Kristie talked about observing NFL coaches and said

I think, it was just that they were able to recognize people’s personal styles. I mean they were trying to relate to them on a one-to-one basis, and people that can do that are almost always very successful at whatever it is they do. Because, they can.....I guess they can look at their their folks whoever they’re working with and they can kind of mirror and bring out the best in each person, and they’re able to switch their.....their personal style I guess based on that personality with the person they’re dealing with.

Finally, they also discussed how important it is to inspire and help their subordinates, which is the second element of transformational leadership; inspirational motivation (Northouse, 2004). By inspiring the people around them, they were able to better communicate the vision of the distance learning program.

### ***Observation of Leadership***

We have all observed leaders. These experiences help shape how we view leadership and what we feel are important traits. This was no different for my participants. By asking them about the influential people they have seen, and leaders they have observed, helped me to answer my research questions: What were their experiences with different leadership styles, and what specific interaction and conditions have been influential for these people?

While no strong connections to the literature, the experiences people had with the influential people in their lives, and their own perceived good and bad leadership characteristics shaped who they are. The actions they then show every day is seen in the actions theme and subthemes and ties to the literature above.

We saw that the people that were most influential to the participants and those they believed were good role models of leadership were people who created opportunities

for them to grow as discussed in transformational leadership. We saw this with Kristie as she described a previous employer who helped her grow and learn new skills to be an investigator. We heard David talk about how a good leader and those most influential to him, were those who he was able to trust and respect, and who avoided power for personal gain.

When the participants talked about their perceived good and bad characteristics it was often in relation to these influential people. We learned sometimes the most influential people were not perceived to be good leaders themselves. This helped shape the participants' own leadership style. The participants valued ethics, and the ability to articulate and communicate their vision and ideals, as well as serving as a mentor to their subordinates. All of these characteristics are discussed in the literature for transformational leadership (Northouse, 2004; Avolio, 1994; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

We also observed many forms of situational leadership. Sharyn talked about how she believes "in empowering people". Sheri discussed how she understood she had influence over others but it was important to "have a good listening ear" so that you can become a "coach." David really brought home some ideas about a combination of situational and transformational leadership. He stated that "good leaders cannot be good leaders, unless they're good people first of all." The participants also discussed the need to change their leadership style given the situation and individual. This was discussed by Northouse (2004), when he stated "the basic premise of the theory is that different situations demand different kinds of leadership" (p. 87). Finally, we saw that these participants made a distinction between leadership and management as Hersey (1984),

also described. He described management as working to meet organizational goals, where leadership is influencing the behavior of others.

### ***Working with Groups***

Within the theme of working with groups, the participants discussed how they must work with various constituencies inside and outside their institutions. This was another trait that Beaudoin (2003) had indicated was important. He said someone in the position of distance education leadership needed to “demonstrate the value of the educational organization to multiple constituencies.” This does not mean they must be an expert in every area; instead, they must understand who, within their institution and within their community, has the understanding and can assist in moving the institution forward.

To help move the institution forward, the participants found they must work within the institutional constituencies. We saw how the participants discussed the need to be able to “build a bridge” between technology and the instructional staff. For example, many of the participants talked about working with the information technology departments at their institutions. They found that the IT people were able to understand the needs of online learning and also were able to help teach and promote the usage of the various technologies. The faculty is the group that the participants talked about most when discussing with whom they worked. They discussed the challenges of working with faculty and helping them to grow to be successful in the institution’s online classrooms.

Working inside the institution was not the only place the participants were active, working with various groups outside the institution remained equally important. Glen

and Ruby discussed working with community members and groups to make sure that their program met the needs of the community. Glen also worked with many state level government officials to make sure that the needs of their institution and the needs of distance learning statewide were also being met. This area of the literature for leadership for community college online learning leaders was not fully developed, but still was very important to the participants. This could certainly be worked into leadership programs to help those people who are learning in order to move forward in their institutions. This is also an area that many community colleges should be aware of, so that the leadership can work in these areas to help the online learning programs grow and succeed.

### ***Current Position***

As each participant moved into their current position, they had to reflect on their past experiences, education and background to determine how they will fill their role as an online learning administrator. This helped address the research question: What are the resulting strategies and outcomes they currently use in their positions? One of the issues the participants raised in their discussions is the idea of quality in online learning and how it is addressed in their respective programs. The participants discussed the importance of quality in their own online program. This was also discussed in the literature by Husmann and Miller (2001). In their study, one of the main findings was that the quality of a program was based tremendously on the performance of faculty.

The participants in my study also discussed the importance of faculty and they spent a large amount of time devoted to working with faculty and helping faculty grow and develop as well, even though in many cases they were not direct supervisors of the faculty, they understood the importance faculty play in the success of the online program.

Ruby specifically discussed the idea that she is “seeing a lot of this sort of ‘digital-divide’ thing.” Meaning that many faculty are digital immigrants while many students are digital natives. The participants felt it was important to educate the faculty not only about online learning but also about the technologies available to them to help them become better online learning educators and in some cases provide them with newer technologies that may also be of use in their traditional classrooms.

Helping others to grow is addressed in the literature on transformational leadership, in that the transformational leader acts as a role model and helps their subordinates to grow. Ruth talked about encouraging others to learn and grow and she felt her institution was helpful in that regard. She said

the college that I’m a part of is really excellent and encourage people to finish degrees or go get an advance degree. And they will pay for you to get your advance degree. So I always encourage them to do that!

This was acknowledged by the other participants as well. They felt it was important for them to give their subordinates new opportunities that would help them grow and if the subordinate desired help them to move up into the institution. Glen said “I’m not in the climbing stage, I’m in the helping others build their careers.” These participants felt it was a compliment to train someone who could take their job and if someone wanted to advance to their position that was also seen as a compliment to the work the participant was doing.

The literature did not address the importance of personal growth of the online learning administrator. This however, was something the participants did feel was important to them. They tried to stay current with changes in technologies and distance learning, and many felt it was an important item associated with their jobs. Community

colleges should address this need for their online learning administrators to be lifelong learners and encourage and support them in gaining more education, whether that is pursuing degrees or attending conferences and workshops. This should be nurtured among all members of the community college.

### ***Summary***

The literature showed many in administration have not had the opportunity to receive leadership training within the field of distance education. This appears to be primarily because many have not thought of it as necessary training. In addition, the research for how to be an effective distance-learning administrative leader is still maturing. There is also a strong need for the distance-learning leader to understand the relationship between technology and teaching. The new distance learning leader has to be actively involved in the growth and development of the program and its fit into the institution.

Distance learning has often been thought of as the “if you build it, they will come” environment. However, this is not the case: students have high expectations of their learning, faculty have high expectations of the quality of their courses, and these together must be taken into account. Change is difficult for many people to overcome and understand the importance and need for distance learning, so today’s distance learning administrator must be proactive in leading this change. This type of administrator must understand how technology can enhance the learning experience for the both the student and the instructor. Again this was discussed by participants; while none have had formal training in online learning administration they have had an extensive history with technology and education.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Research of distance learning leadership is not as complete as other topics in administrative issues. In order for institutions to have effective distance-learning leaders in the future this topic needs to be more thoroughly addressed in future research. While many believe that faculty plays a significant role in the success of the program as stated in the research and acknowledged by my participants, my participants also discussed the role that others in the institution play, such as support staff and trainers. This may lead to more studies around the connections from administrative actions to student success and what role these people may play.

Additionally, while we saw that there are links to both transformational leadership and situational leadership to the styles used by these participants, a grounded theory study to determine a possible leadership style specifically focusing on the essence of people matter and online learning may help grow this area for future leaders. Finally, this study and further research may help community colleges in selecting the best candidates with the paramount skills for these types of positions for online learning.

### **The End of the Study**

I did learn a lot about each person and who they are and believe themselves to be in how they lead others. I am glad to have had this experience and I am greatly indebted to my participants who were more than willing to serve in this capacity for this project as well as being very patient with my sometimes stammering questions. During this study I also found myself reflecting on my own leadership style, and learning from my participants. I learned much about myself, as they described their experiences.

I learned that, like them, I believe that people matter and I find myself often reflecting on their words and my own actions as I try to make sure I serve as a good role model and leader for those whom I supervise. I often try to make sure I am living up to their ideals that they spoke about in those they admired, such as Brenda said, “take the high road.” Like Kristie and Betty said caring about others. In addition, as Ruth said “calm and deliberate and clear thinking and open minded.” As Brian said, be “approachable,” and as Ruby said keeping my ego out of the issue. Sheri said, “have a good listening ear”, as Glen and Sharyn said, letting others take ownership and helping them to grow, and finally as David said “the main thing to me is to learn how to be a good human, just a good person, and then apply 99% of that to whatever I’m supposedly doing to be a good leader.”

As I discussed throughout the findings of this research, who we are and how we get there is often shaped by our experiences and by those we encounter in our journey. I can truly say this study has been instrumental in shaping me and helping me grow along my own journey.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A - Face-to-face interview protocol

1. Tell me your history and how you became involved in:
  - a. Education
  - b. Online learning
  - c. Administration
2. Tell me about some of the people you interact with daily?
3. Can you describe your experiences as an online learning administrator?  
Examples? What dimensions, incidents and people intimately connected with the experience stand out for you?
4. Tell me stories about one of your first experiences being an online learning administrator...
  - a. How did the experience affect you?
  - b. How did you change as a result of this experience?
  - c. Did it go as you thought it would?
  - d. Or didn't?
5. Have there been any significant people in your life that have influenced you regarding administration and leadership?
  - d. Are there any now?
  - e. If you have had special mentors, what have you gotten from this experiences that has impacted your leadership journey?
6. What have you admired of other leaders who you have worked with?
  - a. Disliked?
  - b. Can you give me some examples?
7. What are some of the characteristics/skills of leadership that you use?
  - a. Can you give me an example?
  - b. How do you work with subordinates?
8. In what ways have you changed as a person and/or administrator since you have been in this position?

9. What have been your greatest barriers and challenges? How have you overcome those barriers and challenges?
  
10. How do you feel you have affected the careers of your subordinates? Can you tell me about a specific situation?
  
11. Do you depend on your subordinates to understand technology and software so that you can focus on other aspects? If yes, what are those aspects?
  
12. What comes next for you? Will you continue in this position within online learning? (Journey metaphor)

## Appendix B - Consent to Participate

### Consent to Participate in a Research Study Colorado State University

**TITLE OF STUDY:** Community College Online Learning Administrators: A Phenomenological Study Of How They Make Sense of Their Journey

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Clifford P. Harbour, J.D., Ed.D., Associate Professor, School of Education, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO, 80523 Tel: 970.491.5425 E-Mail: [cliff.harbour@colostate.edu](mailto:cliff.harbour@colostate.edu)

**CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Jodene DeKorte, 303.485.0651 E-Mail: [jodydekorte@hotmail.com](mailto:jodydekorte@hotmail.com)

**WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?** We are asking you to participate in this study because you have been identified as a community college online learning administrator. If you agree to participate in the study, we will ask you about your perspective in two private confidential interviews. The first interview will be in person and may last up to one and a half hours. You will be asked a series of open-ended and focused questions about online learning administration. The second interview may be in person or via telephone or e-mail and may last up to one hour. The second interview will provide you with an opportunity to review the transcript from the first interview. Also, we will follow up on issues and questions raised in the first interview.

**WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?** This study is being conducted by Jody DeKorte. Jody is a doctoral student at Colorado State University and is conducting this research as a part of her doctoral dissertation. Jody is the Co-Principal Investigator in this study. Cliff Harbour is an Associate Professor in the School of Education at Colorado State University. Cliff is Jody's dissertation advisor and is the Principal Investigator in this study.

**WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?** The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how community college online learning administrators make sense of their journey. Participants will be interviewed to understand how their journey has influenced their current leadership role. Private, individual, face-to-face interviews will be conducted, and transcript data will be analyzed to identify emergent themes reflected in the participant's stories. The interviews will be open-ended and in-depth to discover the unique, layered experiences and allow the participants to discuss relevant and perhaps unanticipated topics related to online learning administration. A qualitative analysis and interpretation of the data will be applied.

Page 1 of 3. Participant's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?** The study will take place at a location arranged by both the participant and the researcher. The study is scheduled to run from May 1, 2007 to December 31, 2007.

**WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?** This study will collect data through an analysis and interpretation of interview transcripts. If you agree to participate in the study we will interview you in private at a date, time, and location that we both agree upon. You will be asked to participate in a follow-up interview. Your identity and the identity of your institution will remain confidential.

**ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?** There are no known reasons why you should not take place in this study.

**WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?** There are no known risks or discomforts to you if you participate 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.

**WILL I BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?** There are no known benefits to you if you decide to participate in this study.

**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.

**WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE?** The only cost to you for participating in the study will be the time needed to conduct your interviews. We estimate the first interview will take approximately one and half hours and the second interview approximately one hour.

**WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE?** The information that you give will be seen by the Principal Investigator, Co-Principal Investigator, and perhaps a professional transcriber. Selected excerpts from your interviews may be reviewed by the members of my dissertation committee. They may also be included in my dissertation or incorporated into journal articles or conference presentations. In all such cases, pseudonyms would be used to identify you and your institution.

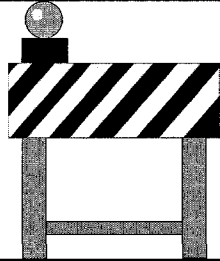
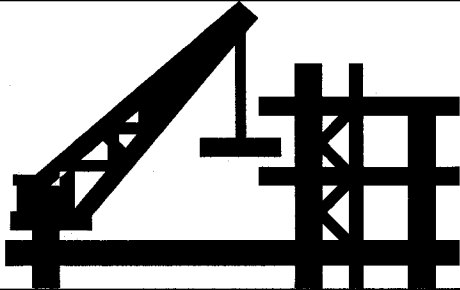

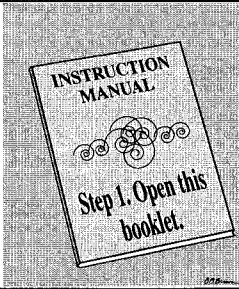
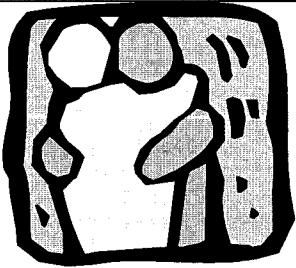
**CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?** We are unaware of any reason why your participation in the study would be ended once your interview begins.


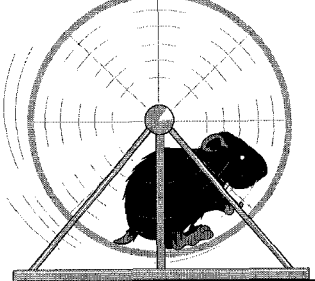


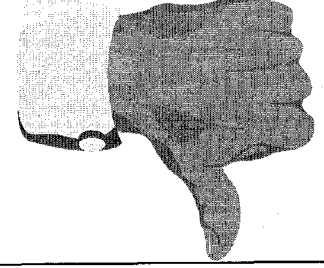
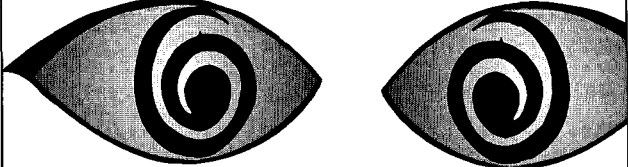
**WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?** No, you will not receive any compensation for taking part in this study.




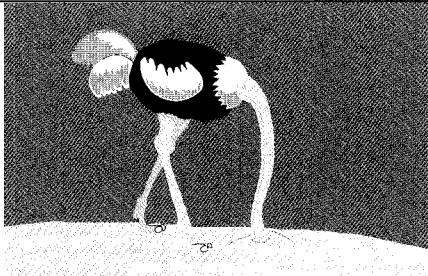
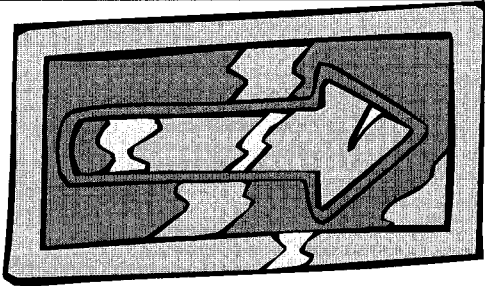
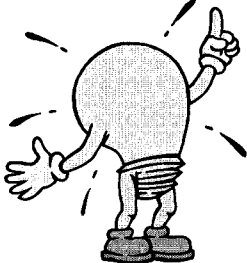
Page 2 of 3. Participant's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_


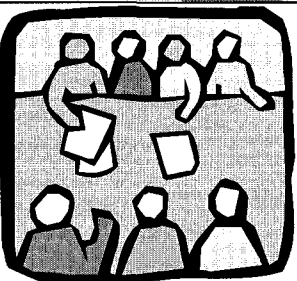
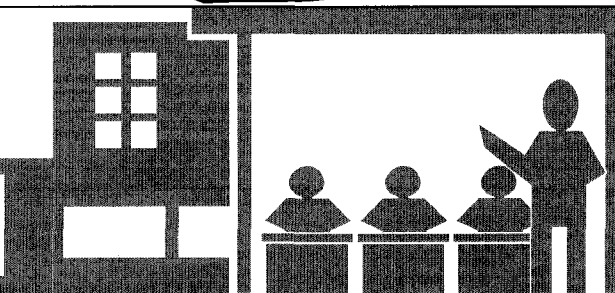
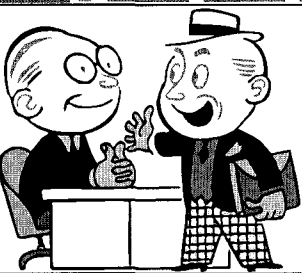


## **Appendix C - Participant Profiles Key**

| Master Theme and Cluster Image Key |  |  |                      |
|------------------------------------|--|--|----------------------|
| Master Theme                       | Cluster                                    | Image  | Participant #        |
| Barriers                           | Barriers                                   |    | 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9    |
| Implementing Leadership            | Building Trust and Buy-in                  |    | 1,2,4,5,6,7,8,10     |
| Implementing Leadership            | Communication                              |   | 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10   |
| Current Position                   | Development of Faculty, students and Staff |  | 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10 |
| Implementing Leadership            | Embracing Individuals                      |  | 1,4,5,6,7,8,10       |

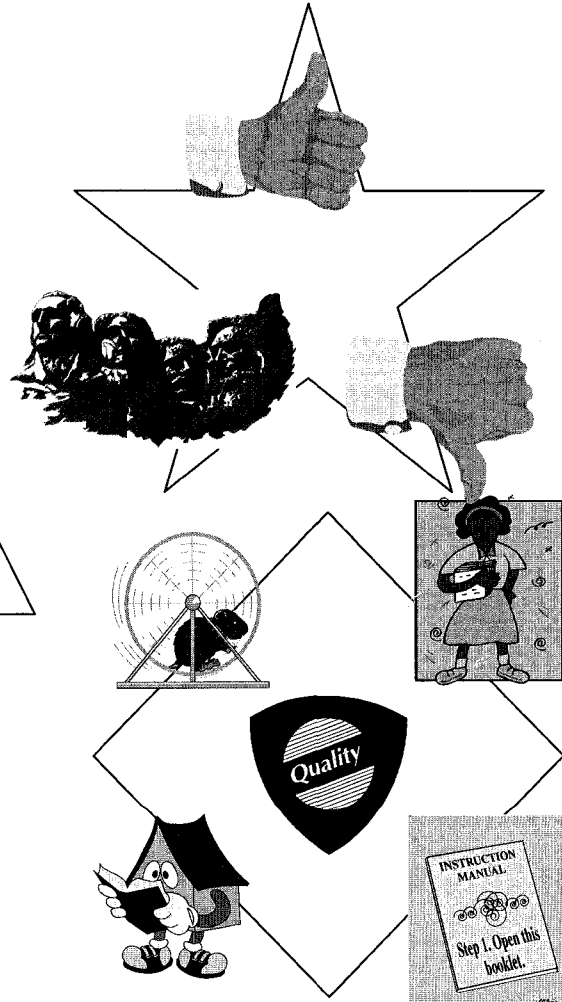
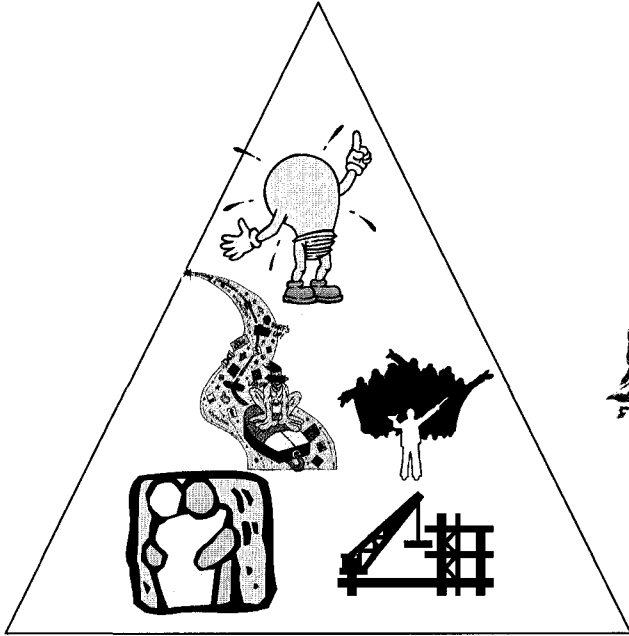
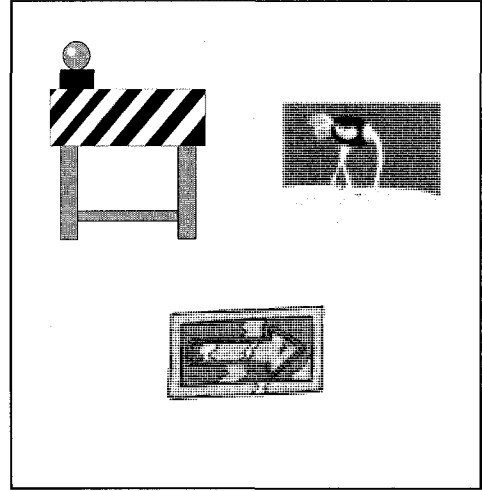
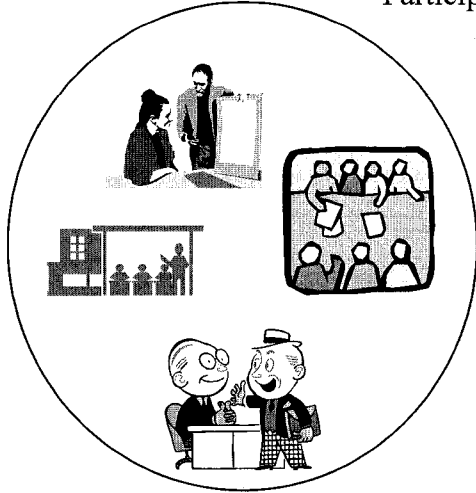
|                           |   |  |                      |
|---------------------------|---|--|----------------------|
| Observation of Leadership | Influential People                        |    | 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10 |
| Current Position          | Job Specifics                             |    | 1,2,4,5,6,7,8,9,10   |
| Implementing Leadership   | Leading Change                            |   | 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9    |
| Observation of Leadership | Perceived Good Leadership Characteristics |  | 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10 |
| Observation of Leadership | Perceived Poor Leadership Characteristics |  | 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10   |
| Observation of Leadership | Personal Perception of Leadership         |  | 2,4,5,6,7,8,9,10     |

|                         |   |  |                      |
|-------------------------|---|--|----------------------|
| Current Position        | Personal Professional Development         |    | 1,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10   |
| Current Position        | Quality Issues                            |    | 1,3,5,6,7,8          |
| Current Position        | Student/Program Needs                     |    | 1,2,3,5,6,7          |
| Barriers                | Traditional mindset                       |   | 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8      |
| Barriers                | Understanding Position within institution |  | 1,3,4,5,7,8,9,10     |
| Implementing Leadership | Visioning                                 |  | 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10 |

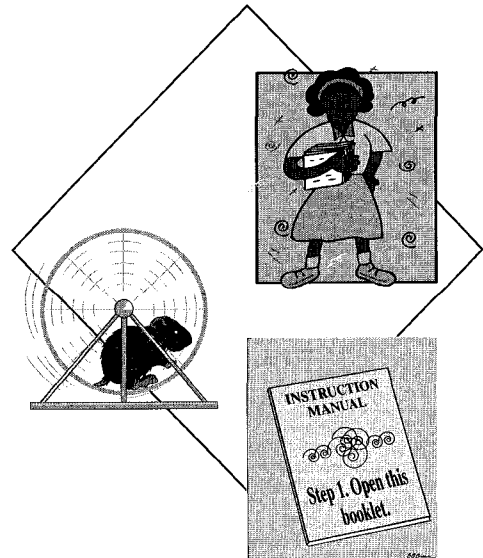
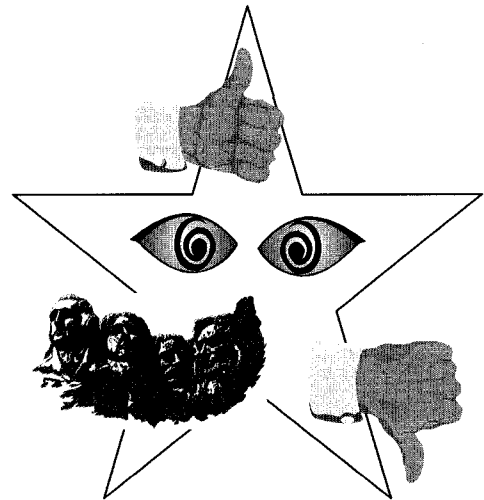
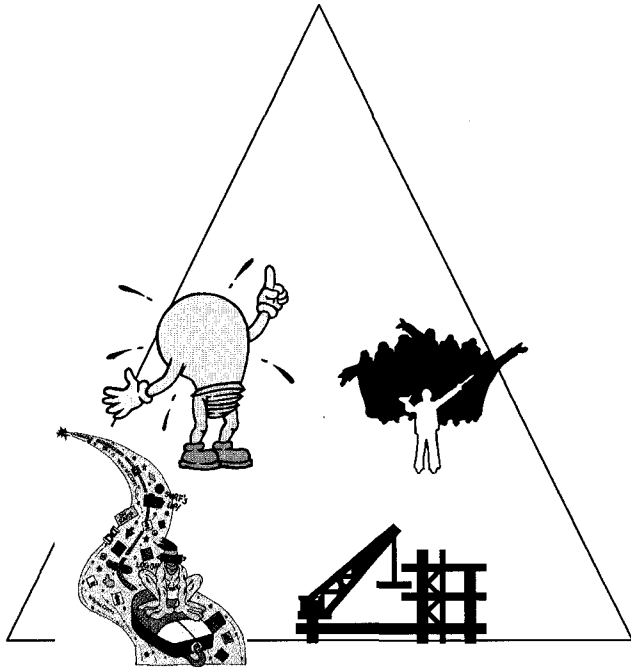
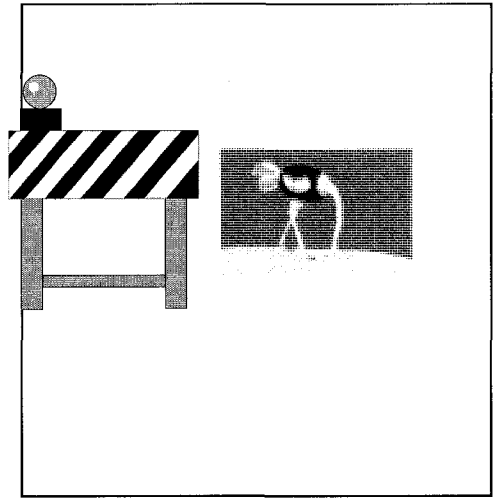
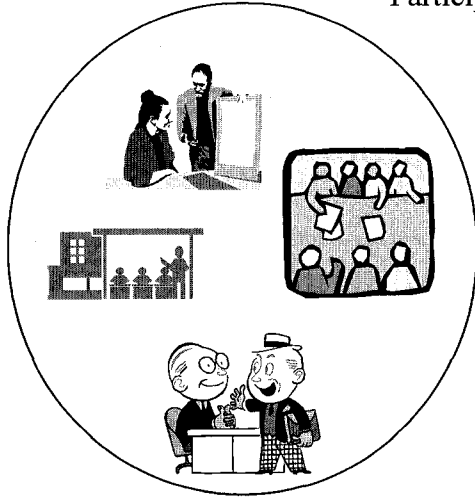
|                     |   |  |                      |
|---------------------|---|--|----------------------|
| Working with Groups | Working with faculty                        |    | 1,2,3,5,6,7,8,9,10   |
| Working with Groups | Working with Groups outside the institution |    | 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10 |
| Working with Groups | Working with groups within institution      |   | 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10 |
| Working with Groups | Working with Subordinates                   |  | 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10   |

## **Appendix D - Participant Profiles**

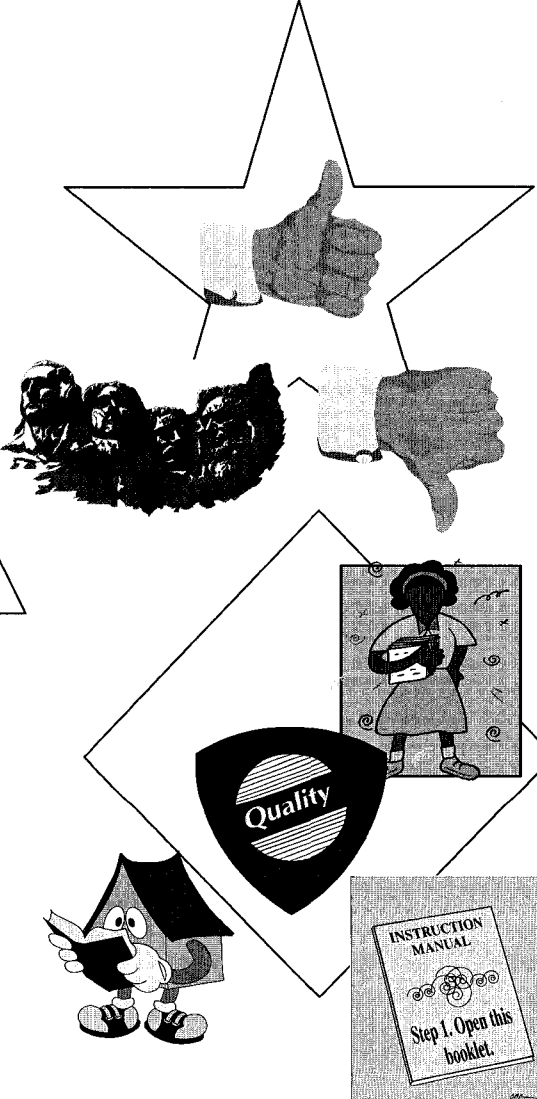
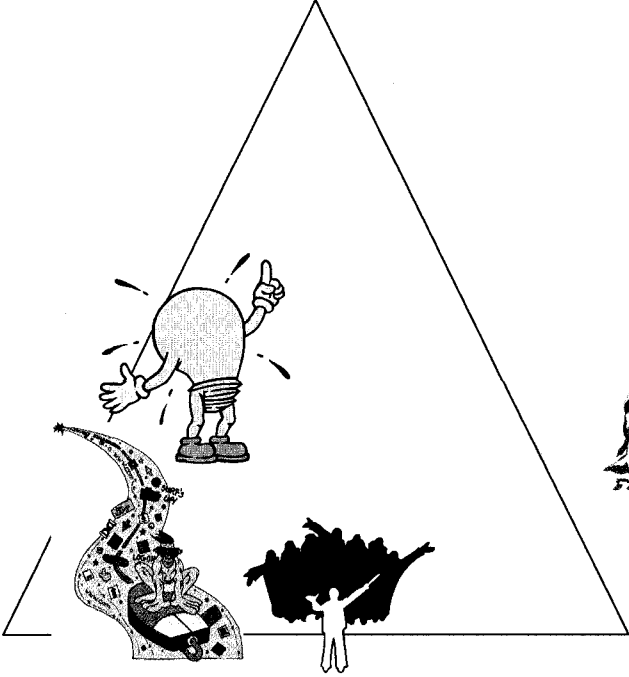
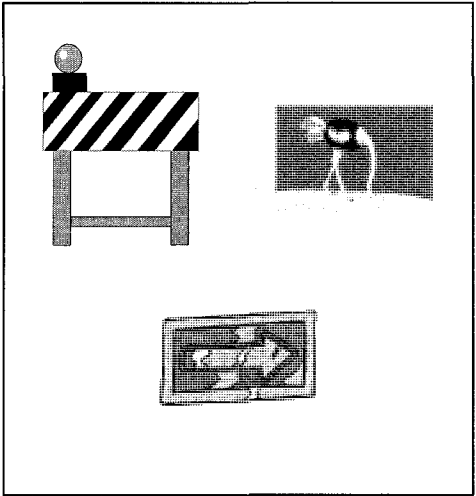
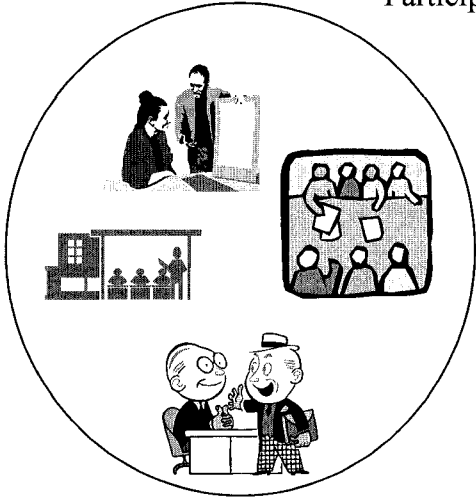
Participant 1 Sherri



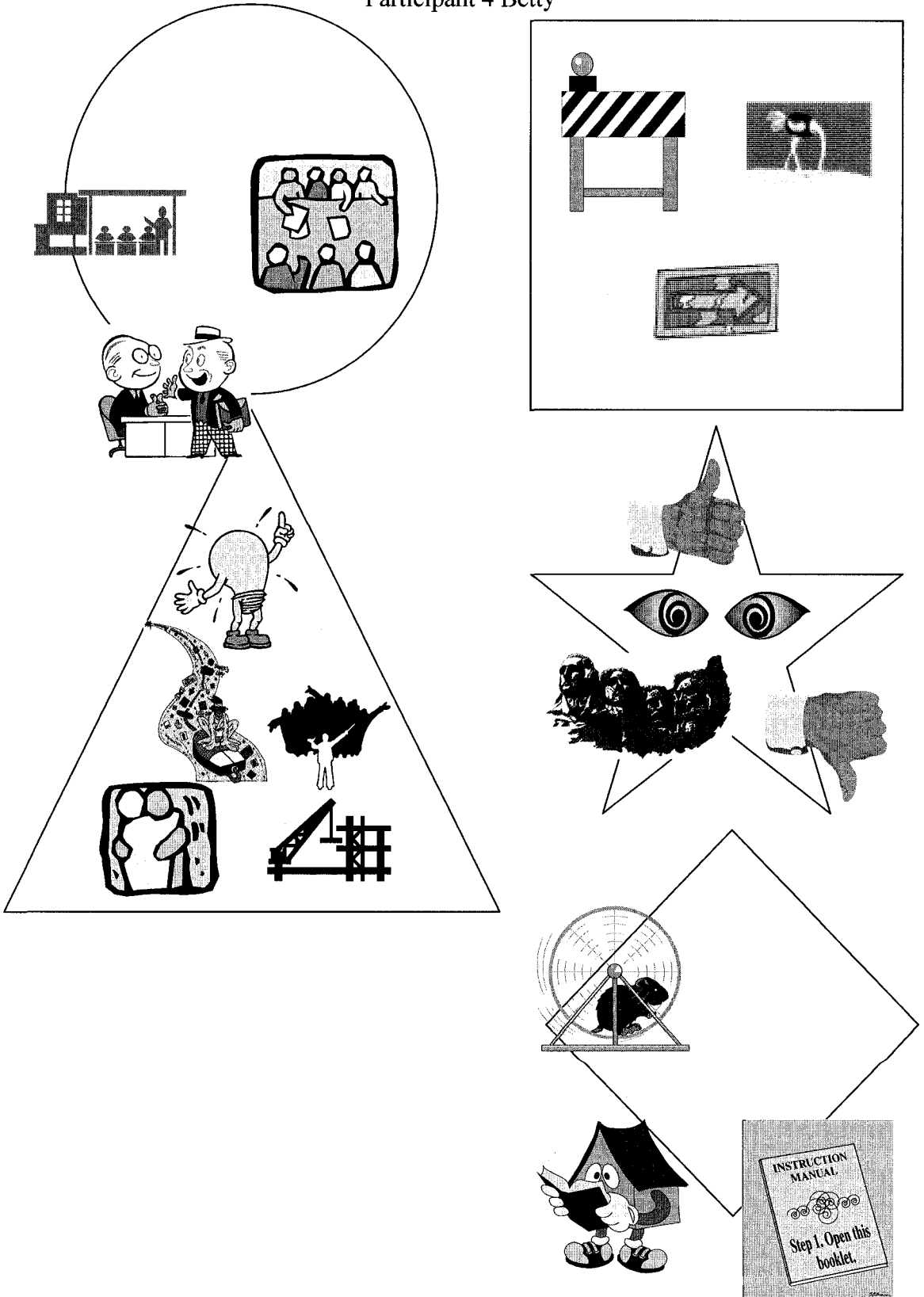
Participant 2 Glen



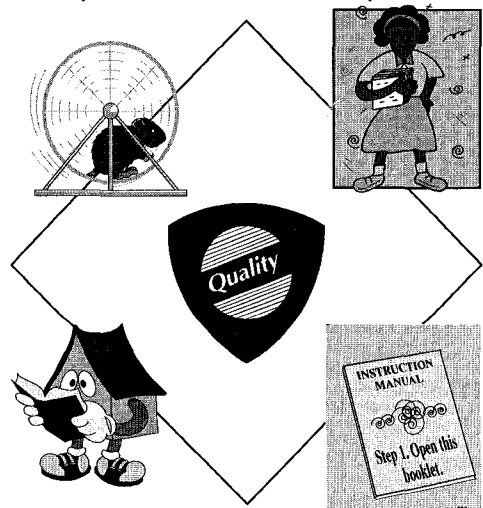
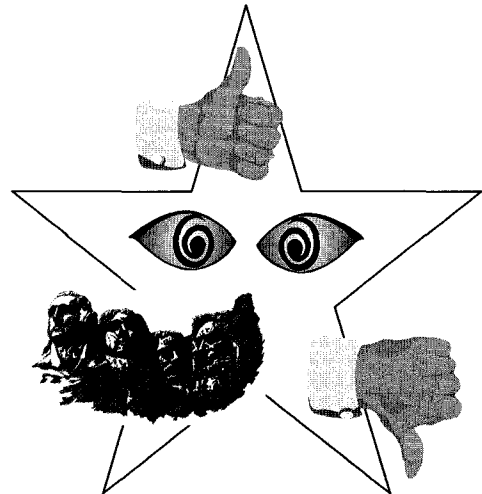
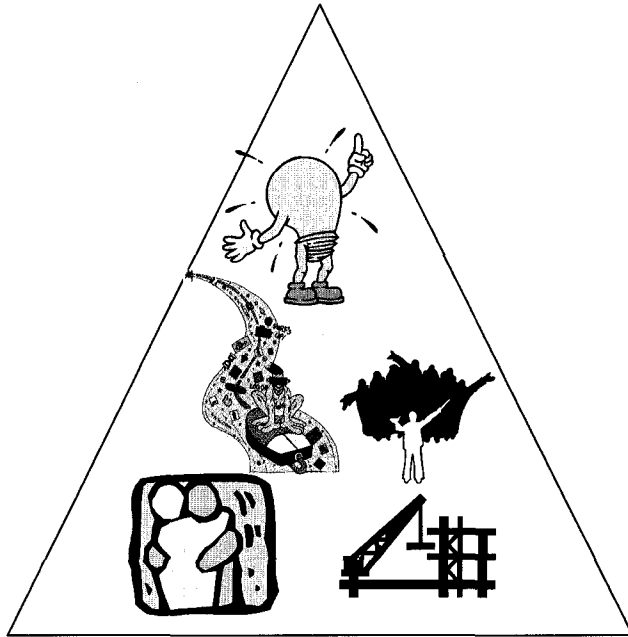
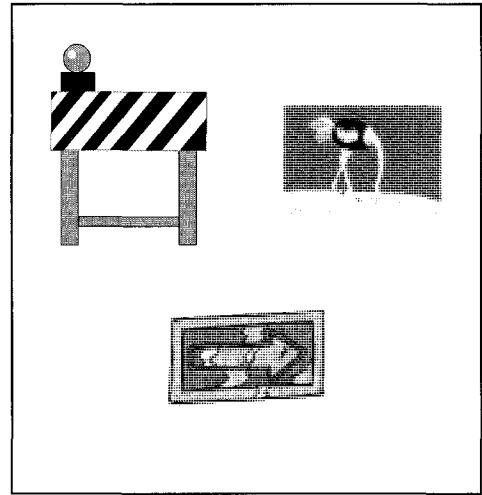
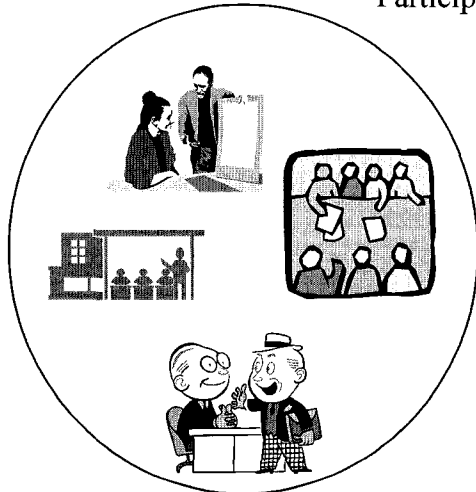
Participant 3 Ruby



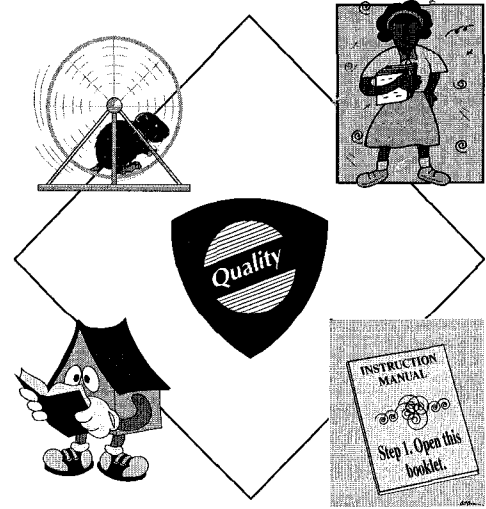
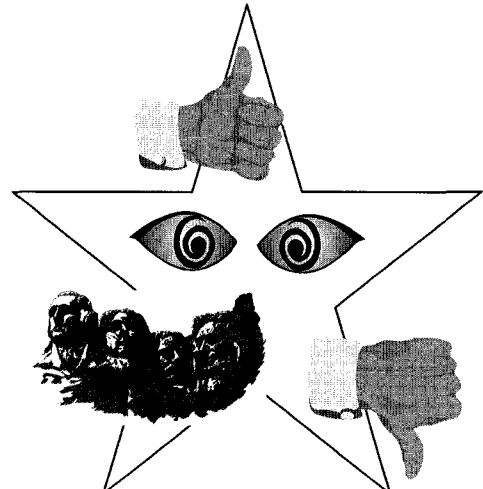
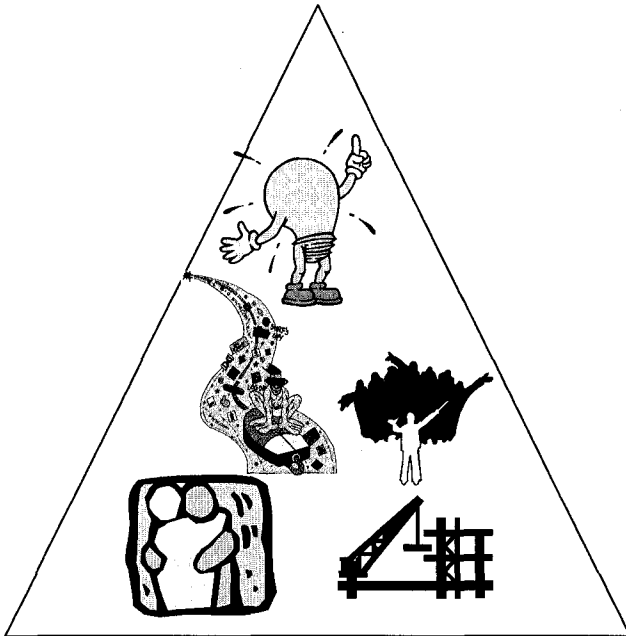
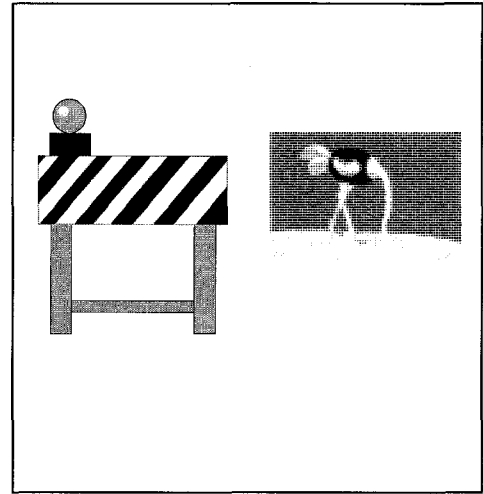
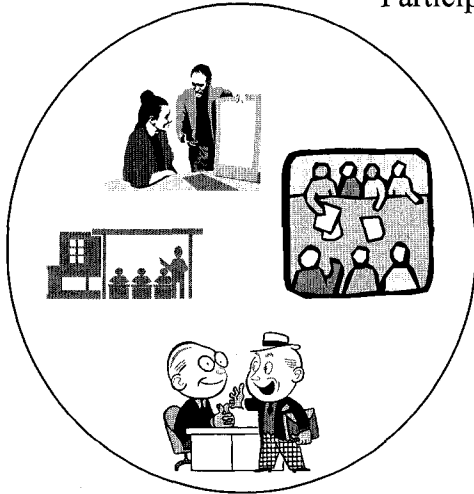
Participant 4 Betty



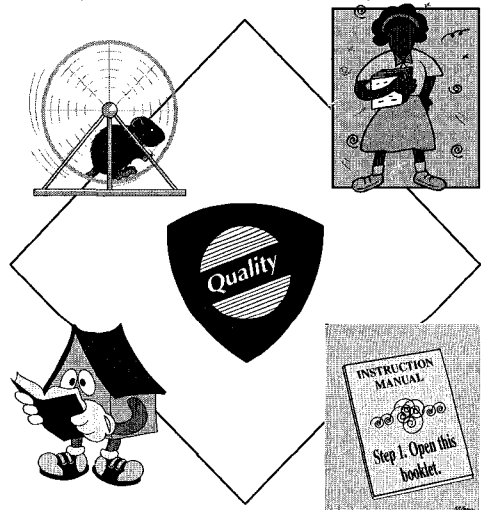
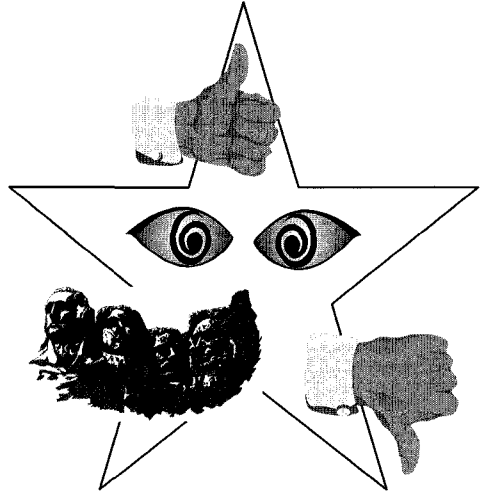
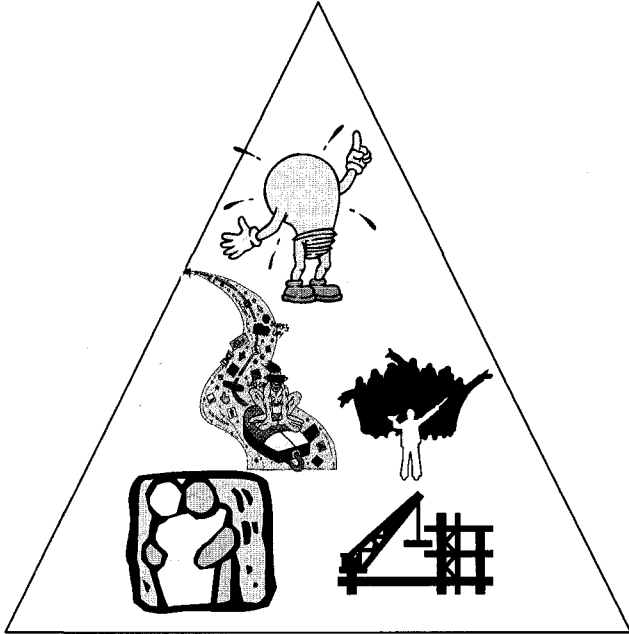
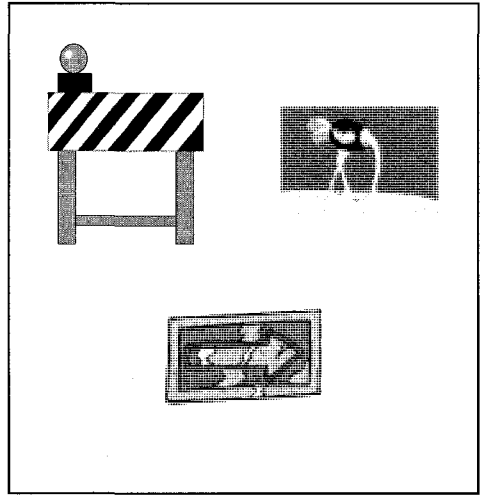
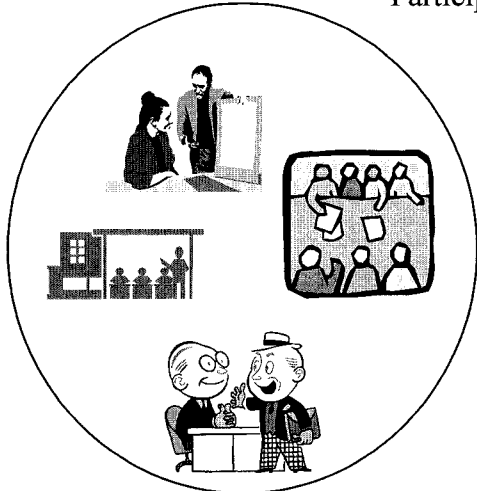
Participant 5 Sharyn



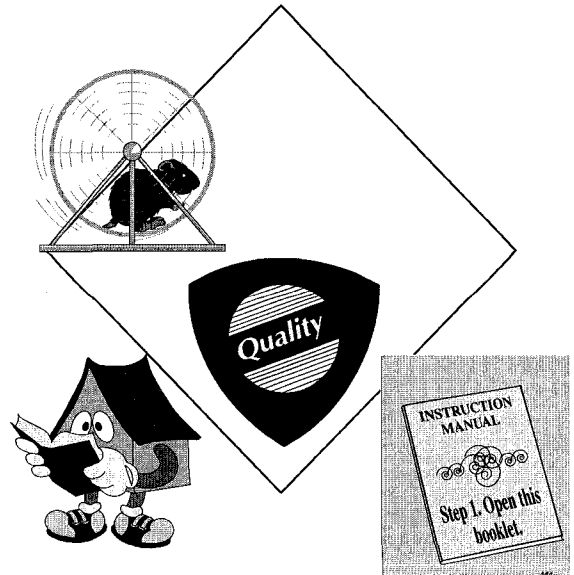
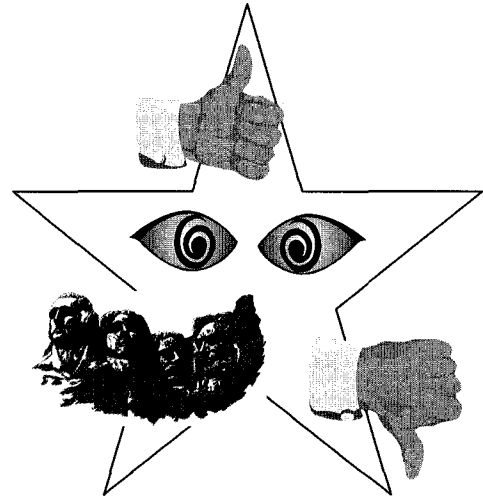
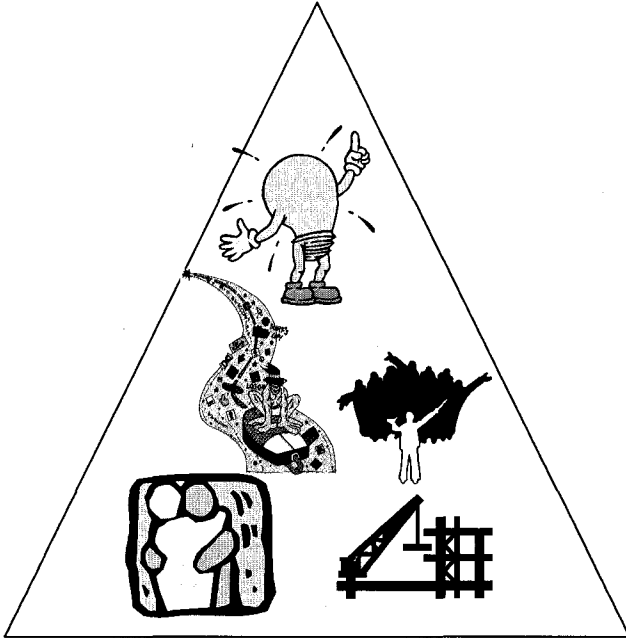
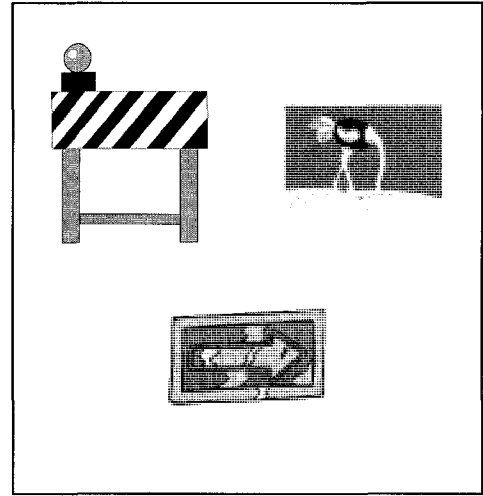
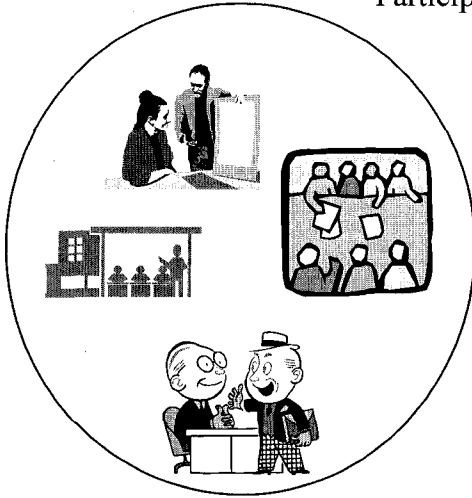
Participant 6 David



Participant 7 Ruth



Participant 8 Kristie



Participant 9 Brian

