MID-LEVEL COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERS AND COMPETENCIES FOR SUCCESS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Mid-level leaders are caught in the middle of their organizational hierarchy, reporting to senior administrators while also leading or managing entry-level staff (Bodine Al-Sharif, García, & McNaughtan, 2021). They are often asked to collaborate, build relationships, and share information with college and community stakeholders and in the community (Baber, 2020). However, midlevel leaders are often overlooked with regards to professional development (McPhail & McPhail, 2020). There is also a severe lack of research specific to this group's needs and experiences, although it is the largest nonacademic professional grouping in community colleges (Eddy, VanDerLinden, & Hartman, 2023).

To address the gap in knowledge on mid-level leaders, I conducted a qualitative study of emerging staff leaders at a larger Midwestern community college. This study adds to existing literature on competencies for community college leadership, with a primary goal of assessing the experiences of mid-level managers and leadership skills for success through a qualitative study. A goal for this study was to gather takeaways for future leadership development. The valuable information gleaned from this study can inform objectives for leadership development trainings to ensure that they are truly pertinent to leaders at the middle level of community colleges. Participants identified several training priorities, such as conflict management, communication styles, diversity, and clarification of institutional policy. The findings support those of other studies on mid-level leaders which characterized this group as champions of communication and collaboration within the college (Amey, Garza Mitchell, Rosales, & Giardello, 2020).

Keywords: Community college, competencies, mid-level leader, collaboration

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband Jorge and my parents Scott and Debbie Hammaker.
We did it!

Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank God who is my savior. Thanks and admiration go also to my parents Scott and Debbie Hammaker, who sacrificed their own needs every day for my benefit. I am a success story today because I stand on my parents' shoulders. Eternal thanks go to my husband Jorge Gonzalez for being my ever-faithful midnight IT support, style expert, and eternal optimist. You taught me that everything I needed to achieve my goals was inside me from the very first day! Thank you to my twin sister Kristen Hammaker whose constant moral support gave me the confidence to achieve my lifelong dream of being the first in any generation of our family to complete a Doctoral Degree. Hopefully through my future work, I will be able to inspire others to overcome their barriers and achieve their dreams.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

For community colleges, developing the next generation of leaders may be a matter of survival (Asera, 2019). In 2001, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) sounded the alarm on a community college leadership crisis (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017). Soon after, the AACC conducted a Leadership Survey of community college CEOs which found that half of presidents expected to retire within six years (ibid). The AACC completed an updated study 15 years later and found that the situation has arguably gotten worse: 80% of college chief executive officers plan to retire within 10 years (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017). Top-level leaders in community colleges are not only aging, with the average CEO 61 years of age, but they are also retiring in waves, with an average tenure of five to seven years (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2016).

This leadership crisis coincides with a nationwide shift in community colleges' funding frameworks which could drastically reduce income while publicly showcasing suffering college completion rates (Hillman, Hicklin Fryar, & Crespín-Trujillo, 2018). Historically, state dollars have been awarded based on college enrollment (ibid). In the past decade, however, most states adopted a Performance-Based Funding policy where state funds instead depend upon degrees or credentials completed (ibid). This is an issue because less than 40% of community college students complete their degree within six years of starting their program (Monoghan, Kolbe, & Goldrick-Rab, 2018). As a result, community colleges are highly impacted by America's low completion rate because it affects funding levels directly (ibid). In fact, state and local funding represent 41% of overall funding for community colleges (Titus, Vamosiu, Buenaflor, & Lukszo,

2021). Fluctuations in funding normally necessitate increases in tuition costs for postsecondary education institutions, but the scope of tuition hikes for community colleges is severely curtailed by law (Yuen, 2020).

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) is the main community college advocacy organization in the United States, with member institutions representing half of undergraduates in the country (2021). In summer 2003, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation awarded a grant to the AACC to address the national need for community college leaders (Ottenritter, 2012). In response, the AACC used a mix of research methodologies to develop a competencies list compiling the top skills for effectiveness to guide future leaders (Ottenritter, 2012). Competency documents are unique because they are based on the premise that most leadership characteristics can be learned through intentional development (AACC, 2020). A total of four AACC competencies lists exist, having been published from 2005 to 2022 (AACC, 2005; AACC, 2022). The most recent 2018 and 2022 iterations of the AACC's competencies were expanded to include competencies lists for mid-level leaders, which suggests that the AACC recognizes that leaders are found throughout the college, regardless of position title (Amey, Garza Mitchell, Rosales, & Giardello, 2020).

Mid-level leaders are a prime place to cultivate the next generation of senior leadership because they implement institutional strategic plans and day-to-day operations and tend to have longer tenures than their top-level counterparts (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2016). One way to empower mid-level leaders is to ask for their expert opinion and give them a voice in changing their situation (ibid). By involving middle leaders in college administration, leaders may feel more confident in their own strength (Amey, et al., 2020). This stability and expertise that mid-

level professionals provide could support the necessary innovation for community colleges to adapt to an uncertain future (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2016).

In response to this, and as a way to address the lack of research specific to mid-level leaders, I conducted a qualitative study of leaders at the middle level of the community college hierarchy. This focus on mid-level leaders can be crucial to staff retention, and employee development can increase leaders' sense of empowerment (ibid). This study adds to existing literature on competencies for community college leadership, with the goal of assessing the experiences of mid-level managers and the leadership competencies through a qualitative study. The results of the survey should provide a richer understanding of how the competencies manifest for current mid-level managers. The findings of the study assess differences in leadership priorities among emerging staff leaders. The valuable information gleaned from this study can inform objectives for leadership development trainings to ensure that they are truly pertinent to leaders at the middle level of community colleges.

Statement of the Problem

Especially in community colleges, leadership research has historically focused on professionals with formal authority, such as presidents and vice presidents (Amey, Garza Mitchell, Rosales, & Giardello, 2020). However, by zeroing in on executives, scholars can miss the perspectives of leaders who are not at the top of the organizational hierarchy but may actually be in the best position to affect transformational change (ibid). These individuals often left out of research are mid-level leaders, who motivate frontline workers and make day-to-day decisions to keep the college running smoothly (ibid). Mid-level leaders are caught in the middle of their organizational hierarchy, reporting to senior administrators while also leading or managing entry-level staff (Bodine Al-Sharif, García, & McNaughtan, 2021). These leaders collaborate,

build relationships, and share information with both college and community stakeholders (Baber, 2020). These leaders are responsible for implementing and monitoring college processes but seldom have the authority to change or provide suggestions for improvement (ibid). Unfortunately, mid-level leaders are often overlooked with regards to professional development opportunities (McPhail & McPhail, 2020).

The many challenges facing community college leaders have created a "perfect storm" (Eddy, VanDerLinden, & Hartman, 2023) affecting community colleges, which represent 27% of all undergraduate students enrolled (US Census Bureau, 2022). National attention has turned a spotlight on community colleges, with the public calling for financial accountability at a time when budgets are tight and colleges face multiple compounding difficulties (Eddy et al., 2023). Community colleges are experiencing their lowest enrollment in over 20 years (US Census Bureau, 2022). When budget cuts are made due to lower enrollment, the terminated positions tend to be staff members at the middle level of the college (Amey, et al., 2020; Reed, 2020). For the past 20 years, community colleges have been experiencing high turnover rates in senior-level leadership positions due to retirements (Eddy et al., 2023). Meeting the needs of mid-level leaders is therefore crucial to effectively serve students (ibid).

Background on Community Colleges

Community colleges are often characterized by their mission of open access, accepting all students in need of an education (Eddy et al., 2020). Traditionally, community colleges use a top-down approach to make decisions, with high-level administrators directing staff and faculty, who in turn direct and share information with stakeholders such as donors, students, the community, and policy makers (Ye He & Oxendine, 2019). The bureaucratic nature of community colleges makes them less flexible, creating difficulties for leaders trying to shift

policies to respond to the needs of their community and increase completion rates (ibid). Indeed, leaders are expected to make strides in student success, while also meeting community needs and the demands of area employers (ibid). Colleges trying to respond to the complex demands have begun to shift management processes from concentrated top-down organizational structures to hierarchies with expanded middle sections, which distributes decision-making power but can create conflict due to competing demands in the organization (Baber, 2020). A critical part of innovation in the future will be to move past reliance on hierarchical position and towards more creative and collaborative leadership styles which can better respond to the complexity of today's community college paradigm (Eddy et al., 2023).

Because of new factors facing the ever-evolving field of higher education, community colleges are under more pressure than ever to address low rates of program completion among their students. One strategy to confront the problem of low completion rates is to leverage the college's organizational culture and its valuable human resources. In a recent 2023 study by Eddy et al., researchers found that 51% of mid-level leaders reported being promoted for their first leadership position within the same college at which they currently work. This means that staff development is crucially important for mid-level leaders to ensure that they are prepared for future innovative leadership positions (ibid). Mid-level leaders can be considered invisible leaders, and the lack of autonomy they experience can cause them to feel discouraged or lack empowerment (Eddy et al., 2023). Mid-level leaders can find themselves struggling to balance internal and external power structures, maintaining compliance with policies and procedures, and unrealistic workload expectations from upper administration when compared to often scant available resources (ibid).

Defining the Mid-Level Leader

One of the factors that contribute to a leader's success is a strong sense of identity (Beckley, 2020). However, due to the traditional hierarchical structure of community colleges many mid-level leaders may not perceive themselves as leaders even though they enact profound chance within their organization (ibid). They find themselves below the top senior level but above the lower levels of the college, meaning that they are uniquely positioned to work across departments and develop mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders throughout the organization (ibid). They find themselves among the largest administrative group in post-secondary institutions: non-instructional professional staff (Amey, et al., 2020). Mid-level staff have non-academic duties which may include student life, community engagement, student outreach, program leadership, student services, and supervising frontline professionals (Márquez & Hernández, 2020). They often lead diverse groups without close oversight from supervisors, and may carry titles such as Director, Coordinator, Advisor, Counselor, or Manager (ibid). They are the relationship builders, program planners, and jugglers of many stakeholders (Amey et al., 2020).

Some scholars define these administrators' role as more managerial in nature, characterized by transactional duties and maintaining the status quo (Beckley, 2020). However, the daily reality of these staff members is dynamic, and the trusting partner relationships which they forge with colleagues afford them more influence at times than senior-level leaders who are more limited by their sphere of control (ibid). Because they are in charge of implementing the college's mission by serving various external and internal stakeholders, meeting the needs of students, all while using ever more complex technology on diminishing budgets, change management is at the heart of a mid-level leader's workday (ibid). Unfortunately, they often feel that they lack power and the ability to influence institutional policy formation (Boggs &

McPhail, 2020). If their leadership abilities are not affirmed and encouraged through positive feedback, mid-level staff members can cease to define themselves as leaders and lose their sense of purpose (ibid). Because of their importance to the functioning of the organization, it is important for senior level leaders to engage middle leaders in college processes and ask for their expert input (Amey, et al., 2020). Developing their leadership skills is a helpful way for mid-level leaders to identify and manage issues, adding their unique perspective to change the college (Boggs & McPhail, 2020). Their leadership identity is developed over time, after many relationships and successful initiatives, so it must be constantly nurtured through training, experience, and self-reflection (Boggs & McPhail, 2020).

Even as high-level leaders struggle to use the community college's relatively rigid hierarchical structure to address on social justice needs in the community, middle leaders are increasingly employing a more collaborative and participatory leadership style which allows them to take action quickly (Eddy et al., 2023). Midlevel leaders engage in relationship building, motivating varied stakeholders to work together and serving as information and communication channels both within the college and in the community (Amey et al., 2020). Because they are entrenched in the day-to-day operations of the college, they live directly with the consequences of any failed or inefficient processes, which motivates them to team up with others for feedback and help (ibid). In addition to leadership development trainings, informal peer professional learning communities can help leaders learn from each other, develop their leader identity, and enjoy mutual support by leveraging mid-level leaders' relationship aptitude (Beckley, 2020).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore mid-level community college leaders' perspectives on leadership and identify priorities for future leadership development trainings.

Takeaways from this study could be used to develop a framework to guide community college leaders at the middle level of their organization. Learning how emerging leaders develop may be a step towards identifying causal and practically relevant knowledge that could inform institutional policy in the future (Day, Riggio, Tan, & Conger, 2021). If mid-level leaders are not supported, they may leave the education field before they climb the organizational hierarchy. Not only would organizations lose valuable prospective leaders, there may not be enough trained staff to replace the executives that are stepping down. A qualitative study on mid-level professionals at a community college may help to validate existing literature and develop training goals that are specific to emerging leaders.

Most literature on college leadership centers on data from the university sector, but organizational needs at community colleges differ significantly from those of four-year universities (Eddy & Khwaja, 2019). Therefore, community colleges across the country could use the findings from this study to assess their professional development opportunities and possibly implement their own research. In addition to philanthropic organizations and higher education administrators, the results of this study will be of interest to policymakers and researchers, as supporting college affordability continues to be of high importance at state and federal levels (Nguyen, Kramer, Evans, & CEPA, 2018).

Research Questions

This study aimed to better understand the perspectives of mid-level leaders, and so I employed a qualitative, open-ended survey to better capture the experiences of the largest population possible (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Both contingency theory and the AACC competency frameworks informed the research and survey questions for this study. This is

because competency frameworks help leaders identify specific behaviors and characteristics that may be used to design and assess leadership development trainings (Conger & Ready, 2004).

The research questions that guided this study were:

Research Question 1: What are the top competencies for career success as identified by mid-level leaders at a midwestern community college?

Research Question 2: According to mid-level leaders, what are the most commonly identified training objectives for leadership development at a Midwestern community college?

Contingency theory provided the theoretical framework for this study. As defined in the next section, contingency theory is a theoretical basis for competency theory in the workplace (Boyatzis, 2008). Contingency theory aims to predict and explain effectiveness by pinpointing the most effective actions needed from leaders in varying situations (Fiedler, 1981).

Competencies and Mid-Level Leadership Development

The upcoming chapters will introduce the key leadership theories and prevailing community college frameworks which together can inform and guide leadership development. The AACC competencies were developed for aspiring higher education leaders who wish to hone the key leadership skills identified by the AACC's research (2022). The competencies lists are considered among the leadership frameworks most commonly used by community college administrators to inform their practice (2022). Competency frameworks draw heavily from foundational theory (Tarker, 2019), and a history of leadership theory will be presented in the upcoming second chapter of this dissertation. Competency theory especially draws from (1) skills theory, which contends that workers can strengthen key abilities to become more effective (Katz, 1955); and (2) contingency theory, which theorizes that workers achieve their best

performance when their abilities are consistent with the job skills needed to fit their organizational environment (Boyatzis, 2008).

Competencies lists can be helpful ways for individual leaders to identify priorities for developing their own abilities (AACC, 2022). However, especially in community colleges, skilled leaders must interact with other people, working in tandem with prevailing social systems and in the context of the college's mission and goals (Brungardt, 1996). Since leadership is a social process which involves everyone in the institution (Barker 1997; Drath & Palus, 1994; Wenger & Snyder, 2000), leadership theorist Bass recommended that effective training include both experience-based learning and structured behavioral monitoring by experienced leaders (1990). Another leadership theorist, Conger, suggested that trainings focus on teaching pertinent conceptual theory, building key skills, a feedback session to assess how training participants interpreted those skills, and personal growth experiences to help participants connect with the training and identify behaviors to avoid (1992). Similarly to how the AACC uses its competencies lists as a framework for developing its leadership development curriculum and organizational practices (Wallin, 2012; AACC, 2022), so too might community colleges and policymakers use research on mid-level leaders to design pertinent trainings to empower mid-level college administrators.

Definitions:

AACC: Ohio Association of Community Colleges

Community College: Institutions which offer curricula tailored to the civic and vocational needs of their community, with instruction appropriate to high school graduates which shows the same level of thoroughness as courses at a four-year college (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014).

Competency: A skill needed for effectiveness (AACC, 2005; AACC, 2013; AACC, 2018; AACC, 2022)

Competency Theory: The idea that mastery of key skills in the work environment allows leaders to reach their level of maximum performance, which is demonstrated by outstanding behavioral habits and observable by others (Boyatzis, 2008).

Contingency Theory: A theory which posits that a leader's effectiveness depends on two intertwined factors: (1) the leader's personality, especially the degree to which the leader is either motivated to complete necessary work tasks or more energized by developing interpersonal relationships with followers, and (2) the extent to which a given work situation allows the leader power, control, and influence over the outcome (Fiedler, 1958).

Leader: A professional who develops a vision for the future and motivates other teammates towards a common goal (Wang, 2016), often guiding roles and processes in their organization (McCauley, Moxley, & Van Velsor, 2004).

Leader Development: Activities which aim to improve an individual leader's skills or abilities (Day, 2000).

Leadership: A process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2007).

Leadership Development: Activities which aim to increase the overall ability for employees as a social system to participate effectively in leadership roles and work processes (McCauley, et al., 2004).

Manager: A professional with direct reports whose job responsibilities focus on maintaining order and efficiency (Wang, 2016), as well as using verified solutions to resolving known problems (Lathan & Seijts, 1998; Mailick, Stumpf, Grant, Kfir & Watson, 1998).

Mid-Level Leader: Professionals with leadership responsibilities who are positioned between the senior-level and entry level of the organizational hierarchy (Ayers & Gonzales, 2020).

Skills Theory: Rather than assuming that all leaders are born with all necessary leadership qualities, Skills Theory hypothesizes that leaders can improve by developing certain skills and behaviors which increase effectiveness (Katz, 1955).

Significance of Study and Broader Impacts

Research shows that mid-level leaders report little formal training in leadership and supervision (ibid), instead learning through mainly on-the-job trial and error experiences and to a certain extent developmental relationships (Liu, Venkatesh, Murphy, & Riggio, 2021). In fact, many professionals report being promoted to middle leadership by happenstance to fill a suddenly vacant position, rather than intentionally pursuing the role (McNair & Perry, 2020). As a result, administrators find themselves in mid-level leadership positions with little formal training and little knowledge of the skills needed for success (ibid). Fortunately, more of a focus is being made recently on leaders at the middle section of the community college hierarchy, with the AACC developing competencies lists specifically to guide mid-level leaders (ibid). The most recent AACC competencies list for mid-level leaders was published in 2022 and was the impetus for this study and many other studies focusing on this segment of staff members.

Community colleges have become increasingly complex over time, with expanding student success programs and added services to serve a variety of community needs (Márquez &

Hernández, 2020). Unlike faculty, staff are responsible for non-academic responsibilities including student life, community engagement, and outreach to students (ibid). Therefore, more development is needed for the mid-level leaders who maintain these important programs. Staff members serve an important role in engaging students both inside and outside the classroom, helping to promote a sense of belonging for students and guiding them to completion (ibid). Staff also encourage civic engagement, diversity, and inclusion on college campuses by supporting and collaborating with academic and student affairs divisions (ibid).

Identifying customized skills for success specific to mid-level leaders at community colleges has many clear and far-reaching benefits. Key skills for leaders can be used by higher-level administrators when making hiring decisions and defining staff member roles and responsibilities (McNair & Perry, 2020). Studying mid-level leader needs, preferences, and goals can help in the development of trainings to ensure that staff is equipped for the ever more complex community college environment (ibid). Policymakers who are aware of the unique needs of mid-level leaders will be able to better identify how new initiatives will affect community colleges (ibid). Research on rising mid-level leaders could help scholars better understand how emerging leaders develop, which could contribute to identifying factors which promote leader growth (Day, Riggio, Tan, & Conger, 2021). If enough studies are completed on mid-level leaders and the results are validated through consistent findings, then takeaways from the research could be used to develop a new theoretical framework which better describes the reality of mid-level leaders.

Summary

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. In the first chapter is an overview of the study, background, purpose of the research, and an overview of key terms. Chapter two presents

a review of pertinent literature related to community college history, issues facing college administrators today, foundational leadership theory culminating in contingency theory, the AACC competencies frameworks which represent the main prevailing competency framework for practice in community colleges, and leadership development theory to help guide future trainings for mid-level leaders. Chapter three comprises the methodology of the study, including the conceptual framework, procedures, limitations and trustworthiness. Chapter four analyzes the findings from this qualitative research study of 88 mid-level leaders at a larger Midwestern community college. Chapter five is the culmination of this dissertation, where the results of the study will be evaluated in the context of other recent studies involving mid-level leaders. Evaluating the findings from similar studies, along with viewing this study's results from a lens of leadership development theory, may be the first step towards expanding knowledge in the field for mid-level community college leaders, either by developing a framework to guide professionals or gaining clearer insight into the experiences of college administrators.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter represents the rationale for researching leadership development to improve the effectiveness of mid-level leaders in community colleges. An extensive review of pertinent literature was conducted in preparation for this study, focusing on published scholarly peer-reviewed articles. These literature sources were identified by searching various databases, including books, EBSCOhost, ERIC, Google Scholar, Sage Education, and ProQuest. Keywords and phrases were used to identify relevant journal articles concerning community college history, community college leadership, foundational leadership theory, and leadership development. Also, websites and newsletters of professional organizations in the field of community college leadership were consulted, such as https://www.aacc.nche.edu (American Association of Community Colleges or AACC), https://ohiocommunitycolleges.org (Ohio Association of Community Colleges), and https://highered.aspeninstitute.org/ (Aspen Institute). National databases such as the U.S. Census Bureau, National Center for Education Statistics, and National Survey of Student Engagement were also used as resources. Because community college leadership encompasses interdisciplinary themes, I did not limit my research to just one field, per the recommendations of Webster and Watson (2002).

The literature review is from the lens of the community college mid-level leader. To orient the reader, the first section will provide an overview of community college history and defining characteristics unique to community colleges. Next follows a chart of the community college organizational structure, including a definition of mid-level leaders. A subsequent section will introduce key theories pertinent to the community college mid-level leader, beginning with leader-centered theories, continuing on to theories that explore the leader versus follower relationship. Next will follow theories about how leader styles can vary based on situational

factors and the external environment, culminating with contingency theory. The Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream's *Crisis and Opportunity Report* will be introduced, along with the evolution of the AACC's four editions of competency documents. These frameworks are used as a guide for leaders and draw heavy theoretical support from foundational theory (Tarker, 2019) especially exemplifying contingency theory which is a basis for competency theory (Boyatzis, 2008; Zaccaro, Green, Dubrow, & Kolze, 2018). A main goal of the AACC's competency lists, and the research completed for this dissertation, is to inform leadership development trainings (AACC 2005, 2013, 2018, 2022; Tarker, 2019), and so the final segment of this literature review highlights key leadership development theory and takeaways for trainings.

Purpose of Literature Review and Methods

A purpose of this systematic review of the literature is to explore leadership theory and frameworks which demonstrate the importance of leadership development at the mid-level of the community college organizational hierarchy. Another goal is to introduce themes and takeaways for leadership development trainings, especially once they are paired with research-based perspectives from mid-level community college leaders in upcoming chapters of this dissertation. A predominance of literature reviewed for this chapter was restricted to the period of 2005 to 2022 as it was during this period that many of the main community college competency frameworks were developed by advocacy organizations. To understand the context behind the creation of these frameworks, the literature scope was expanded to include the history of community colleges and organizational leadership which required the inclusion of literature from the mid-20th century in order to incorporate seminal leadership theories and the growth of the community college. Therefore, this literature review focuses on the time period of the 1950s when community colleges took prominence to the year 2022.

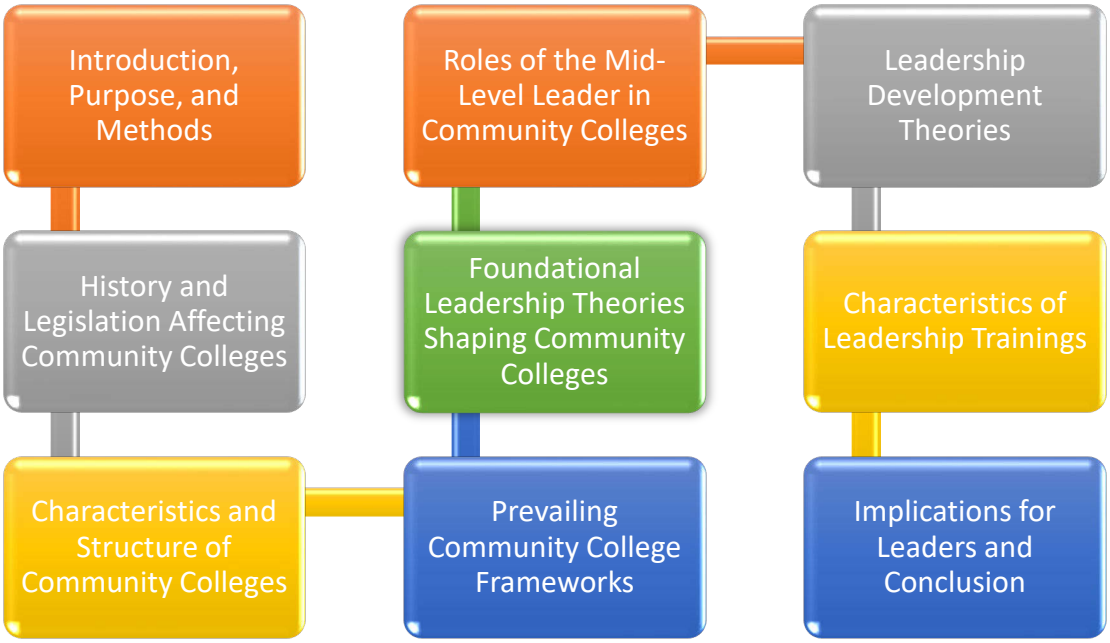
The AACC's Competencies for Community College Leaders was a starting point for research on the skills, traits, and training that community college leaders might require in the 21st century. The AACC's competencies were selected because they are a main prevailing framework for community college leaders of today (Tarker, 2019). The AACC is the main advocacy organization in the U.S. for community colleges and is considered a leader for community colleges all over the country (AACC, 2023). Leadership development is a core value of its mission statement, and the AACC competencies provide a concise guide for leaders to follow, regardless of their experience (AACC, 2023).

To identify sources, I followed the recommendations of Webster and Watson (2002), focusing on research published in leading journals, examining work from a variety of academic disciplines, and using citations from one source to lead to another list of sources. This method is described by Ridley (2012) as the snowball method of research for literature reviews. To ensure that my investigative review was extensive, I used an iterative process of slowly refining my searches as the research evolved, starting with general search terms like "leadership" and "community college leader." After completing the snowball approach to study these topics, I used a Boolean approach (an exploratory method to detect deterministic dependencies between items) to search for "community college" AND "leadership," as well as "leader" and "development." To ensure that I had reached a point where I had reviewed the prevailing literature, I reviewed the references list of similar dissertations (Amato, 2021; Conrad, 2021; Johnson, 2019; Kelley, 2017; Porter, 2017; Reed, 2019; Wagner, 2017), as well as other systematic reviews of community college and leadership literature (Bolden, Gosling, Marturano, & Dennison, 2003; Brungardt, 1996; Day, 2000; Chemers, 2000; Chow, Salleh, & Ismail, 2017; Forthun & Freeman, 2017; Tarker, 2019; Vogel, Reichard, Batisti, & Cerne, 2021), to verify that

my snowball methodology incorporated all works cited by my contemporaries who recently completed similar literature review projects.

Figure 1

Literature Review Structure



A History of Community Colleges

This section traces the rationale and societal context for why community colleges were formed. Illuminating the past allows the reader to understand how community colleges operate, as well as provide lessons to help address present and future challenges (Grubbs, 2020). Understanding the historical context of community colleges is crucial to understand the mission of community colleges (Meier, 2018). This mission is contingent upon social processes which evolved over the past two centuries due to the ever-changing needs of local communities, student demand, and national initiatives for economic and workforce development (Gleazer, 1994; Meier, 2018; Ratcliff, 1994). The concept of community colleges was shaped by multiple social

movements and laws, especially a focus on education equity and job training after World War II (Meier, 2018).

Cohen et al. (2014) cite three main social changes that contributed to the creation of community colleges: (1) a need for trained workers to fuel America's rapidly growing industrial sector, (2) a call for greater social equity and access to higher education, and (3) the invention of adolescence in the minds of American families, which meant youths were required to be under parental care through the age of 16 rather than age 14 (Hall, 1904). Broadly defined, community colleges are higher education institutions largely supported by the public which offer two-year associate degrees and occupational certificates to their students, as well as a variety of other services to their local community (Cohen et al., 2014).

Through the late 1800s, apprenticeships predominated over classroom training as a way for seasoned professionals to provide on-the-job training for aspiring new hires (Cohen et al., 2014). However, as high school graduation rates increased, secondary schools began to design specialized curriculum that later became the building blocks for technical workforce training offered at modern community colleges (ibid). Much of these societal developments were shaped by legislation which defined goals and roles for burgeoning community colleges (Blocker, Plummer, & Richardson, 1965). Higher education practitioners have stated for decades that change and flexibility are part of the mission of community colleges because they are expected to respond to the needs of their community, which are themselves shaped by societal trends (Blocker et al., 1965; Meier, 2018).

The expansion of educational opportunities through federal legislation can be traced back to the Morrill Act of 1862 which was passed by President Abraham Lincoln (Blocker et al., 1965). This law granted federal lands and funds to each state to establish public universities

(National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, 1995). The act's mission was to provide a practical and liberal education by teaching agriculture, military strategy, the mechanical arts, and classical studies to the working classes (National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, 1995). In practice, the Morrill Act was a first step towards making affordable education available to the masses (Cohen et al., 2014). For the first time, these public universities provided a lower-cost alternative to private colleges (Cohen et al., 2014). Over time, these new institutions expanded their programs to address the needs of the workforce in their community (ibid). These shifting curricula reflected changing priorities for education in the U.S. and expanding access to local citizens would later become a key role of community colleges (ibid).

The rise of community colleges in the U.S. began in the early years of the 20th century (Blocker et al., 1965). Junior colleges were originally affiliated with the local secondary school and administered by the principal or an appointee responsible to the principal (Cohen et al., 2014). "Junior college" was the common term for institutions which focused on grades 13 and 14 after high school graduation (Cohen et al., 2014). The local school board handled the day-to-day administration of junior colleges (ibid). Later, as junior colleges separated themselves from school districts, boards of trustees were established to administer colleges. These new boards of trustees were responsible for setting the budget and selecting a president to take care of the daily running of the college (ibid).

In 1907, the State of California passed the California Upward Extension Act, created in response to the end of the Civil War and concerns about educating and training the growing population (Boggs & Galizio, 2022). This was the first state law in the country to authorize the establishment of junior colleges (ibid). In the 1920s and 30s, Eells (1931) argued that it was

beneficial for youths to continue their education until at least their sophomore year of college so that they could safely transition developmentally into adulthood (Cohen et al., 2014). The changing perception of adolescence in society meant that youths increasingly sought to continue their education into their twenties (ibid). Between 1910 and 1960, secondary school enrollment of 18-year-olds increased considerably from five percent to 45 percent (ibid). As a result, early two-year colleges developed to provide further training to prepare community members for work locally or to become homemakers (Grubbs, 2020).

Community colleges experienced their greatest growth after World War II (Cohen, 2009). The Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, or G.I. Bill, greatly increased postsecondary enrollment in the aftermath of World War II (Batten, 2011). The G.I. Bill was funded through the federal government and offered a year of paid tuition for any veteran who had at least 90 days of military service, and up to four years of education plus a living expense stipend for those who had served longer (ibid). Funds were provided directly to veterans rather than being distributed to schools (ibid) Unlike other government benefits of the time, dollars were awarded regardless of factors such as race, making the G.I. Bill an egalitarian piece of legislation (ibid), although discriminatory admissions policies at the time limited those effects (Shermer, 2022). A high number of veterans took advantage of the Bill, with 5.6 million more Americans using their benefits to attend either high school or vocational school, with veterans accounting for 49 percent of registered students at colleges and universities (Batten, 2011).

In 1947, President Harry Truman assembled a commission of education and civic leaders to create *The Truman Commission Report* (Grubbs, 2020). This report recommended increased access and removal of barriers to higher education to ensure continued growth of democracy in the U.S. (President's Commission on Higher Education, 1947). Sometimes cited as the

framework for today's community colleges (Grubbs, 2020; Kim & Rury, 2007; Reuben & Perkins, 2007), the report recognized community colleges' unique role in providing general and vocational programs, especially for those who cannot complete a traditional 4-year education (Grubbs, 2020). The report was also the first time that the term "community college" was used for a general audience, and it recommended that colleges be expanded nationally to promote affordable access to higher education to Americans within their own communities (Boggs & Galizio, 2022). The report suggested that colleges and universities could be a vehicle for resolving social problems in the country, especially an end to segregation in higher education and removing barriers to college access based on national origin, race, and sex (Ris, 2022). The report helped to create a political agenda to guide postsecondary education policy and create new institutions that were responsive, accessible to the public, and globally relevant (ibid). The idea of providing access to education through grade 14 was a lasting one (Cohen et al., 2014).

The community college as an educational paradigm did not materialize overnight, but instead was the result of social and political changes in the U.S. educational landscape (Blocker et al., 1965). Higher education has arisen as a priority to be made available to the public, not only to a select few (ibid). The community college arose to fulfill needs not addressed by selective four-year universities or high schools which develop key skills but are unable to provide the focused technical education needed to prepare students directly for the workforce (ibid). Community college enrollment nearly tripled during the 1970s, growing from 1.63 million in 1970 to 4.52 million in 1980 (Grubb, 1988). As the employment landscape constantly shifts, community colleges are called to innovate to provide retraining and lifelong learning opportunities (Cohen et al., 2014). Community college administrators must navigate a changing

political landscape and develop the skills needed to face the complex problems within their local community (ibid).

Contemporary Legislation and the Community College Landscape

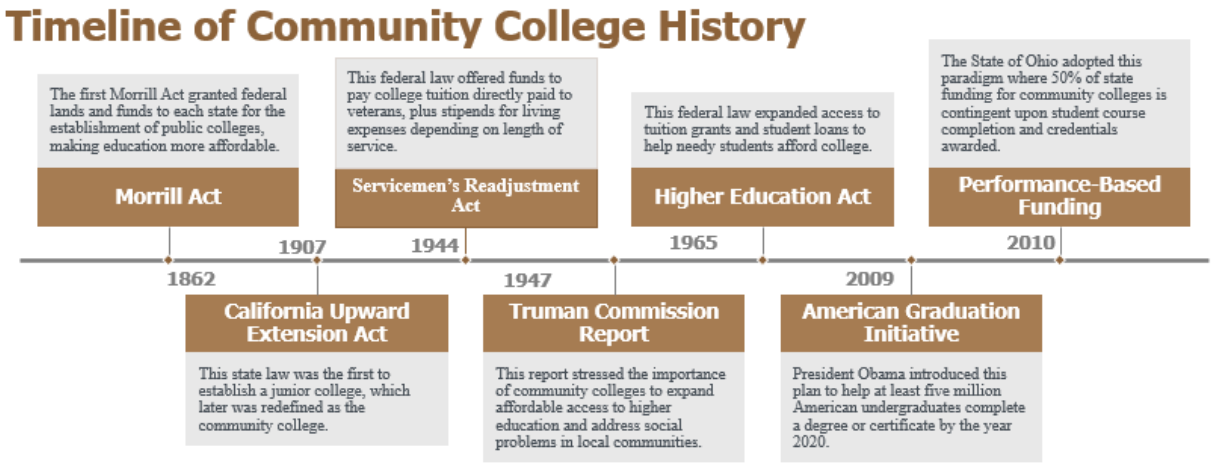
State and federal legislation continues to shape goals and challenges for community colleges. The 1960s became a boom time for community colleges, with the majority of them being founded during that decade (Eddy & Garza-Mitchell, 2017). In the 1960s, the federal government created a process for awarding financial aid, based on the principle that students are more likely to attend college if they have access to free grant monies and low-interest loans from the federal government (Johnson, 2013). The Higher Education Act (HEA) was passed in 1965, which provided for access to tuition grants and loans, helping students to this day bridge the gap between the cost of college and their ability to pay (Ris, 2022). Community colleges began to focus more on access and opportunity as essential parts of their mission (Grubbs, 2020). In the decades after the publication of the *Truman Commission Report*, state legislatures also funded expansions in community college campuses and invested in subsidizing student tuition (ibid). Currently, community college students represent 41% of all undergraduate students in the country (Pechac, & Slantcheva-Durst, 2021). Figure 2 below shows a timeline of important legislation which shaped community college history.

In a 1998 State of the Union address, former President Clinton hailed the importance of education through grades 13 and 14 and argued that it should be as ubiquitous as a high school diploma (Cohen et al., 2014). In the summer of 2009, former President Obama introduced the American Graduation Initiative which created a general plan to help at least five million more undergraduates complete a credential by the year 2020 (Palmadessa, 2017). In an immediate response, Ohio adopted a Performance-Based Funding paradigm where state funding is allocated

based on colleges' educational outputs, for example number of courses completed and credentials awarded, rather than the previous norm of tying funds to student enrollment (Hillman, Hicklin, & Crespín-Trujillo, 2018). Output-base funding trends are expected to become the norm across the U.S. (Ward & Ost, 2021).

Figure 2

Timeline of Community College History



Note. The above timeline was made using a public domain Microsoft Powerpoint template.

Defining the Community College

Community colleges are defined by specific characteristics that are not shared by their private or 4-year counterparts. In 1925, the American Association of Junior Colleges broadly defined junior colleges as institutions which offer curricula tailored to the civic and vocational needs of their community, with instruction appropriate to high school graduates which shows the same level of thoroughness as courses at a four-year college (Cohen et al., 2014). Today, the American Association of Junior Colleges is called the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and continues to be the primary advocacy organization for community

colleges in the U.S., representing more than 1,000 institutions and nearly 12 million students (AACC, 2022).

According to Ohio Revised Code §3354.01, Ohio community colleges are public education institutions created for the main purpose of providing instructional programs beyond the high school level to the area community in which the college resides. Code §3354.01 defines several categories of educational programs offered at community colleges: (1) "arts and sciences" which provide equivalents to classes to those offered at four-year universities; (2) "technical" which prepare students to meet the workforce needs of the community; and (3) "adult education" programs which provide either cultural enrichment, workplace, or general educational benefits to adult learners. Changes to the statute made by the 131st General Assembly of Ohio and House Bill 64 now permit for the awarding of applied baccalaureate degree programs.

The Community College Research Center mentioned several key roles of community colleges:

Figure 3

Main Roles of Community Colleges

Role	Description
Grants Degrees and Credentials	Key provider of certificates and two-year degrees
	Many community colleges offer baccalaureate degrees
	A majority of credentials are in occupational training fields
Provides occupational education	Programs provide technical training to prepare students for careers
	Prepares students to meet area workforce needs
	Serve students beginning their career
	Upgrades skills of employed workers and unemployed individuals in need of retraining
Offers remedial and developmental education	Provides English as a Second Language instruction

	Instruction for students who need additional preparation to complete classes at the college level
Other educational services	Provides economic development planning for community public servants

Note. Information taken from Dougherty, K. J., Lahr, H. E., & Morest, V. S. (2017). *Reforming the American community college: Promising changes and their challenges.* Community College Research Center: New York.

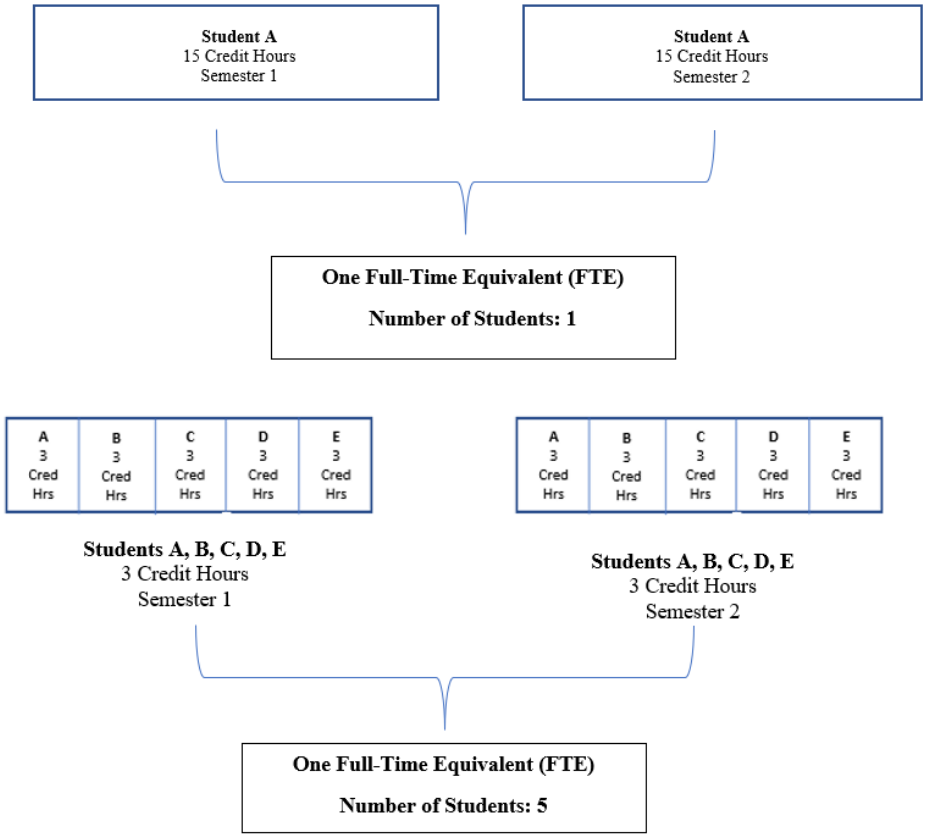
In summary, community colleges deliver services that are not able to be provided by area high schools or other institutions of higher education (Dougherty et al., 2017). Community colleges offer additional paths to completing a degree or certificate for students who are unable to follow a traditional program (Grubbs, 2020). Many community colleges focus their marketing approaches on their ability to offer lower-priced courses at more convenient times than their 4-year counterparts, such as on weekends and evenings (ibid). Affordability is enhanced by transfer pathways, which streamline the transfer of community college coursework so that classes taken by community college students can further their degree at 4-year institutions (Grote, Richardson, Glisson, Knight, Lee, & Watford, 2022). Community colleges respond to changes in the local labor market to offer educational programs based on employer and student demand (Grubbs, 2020). In this way, community colleges become a product of the local community in which they operate (ibid). A significant portion of community college funding comes from its local region, with much of their budgets coming from state appropriations, but also local taxation, tuition and fees, and donations from private community sources (Cohen et al., 2014).

Historically, community colleges are funded via three sources: federal, state, and local dollars, with state appropriations representing the most significant amount by far (Titus, Vamosiu, Buenaflor, & Lukszo, 2021). On average, state and funding sources from the local community represent around 41% of funding for community colleges, whereas federal grants make up around 23% of revenue (Titus et al., 2021). Revenue generated through tuition and fees charged to students makes up around 16% of available funds for community colleges on average (ibid). Decreases in state funding often necessitate increases in tuition and fees by community colleges in an attempt to make up budget shortfalls (ibid). However, because one of the main tenets of community colleges is to offer an affordable education for the local community, community colleges are limited in the tuition cuts they are legally able to make (Yuen, 2020).

Federal funds for 4-year universities and community colleges are awarded based on enrollment, using a measure known as full-time equivalent enrollment, or FTE (Yuen, 2020). FTE measurements treat each part-time student as a fraction of a full-time student (Yuen, 2020), with full-time defined as the equivalent of one student enrolled in 15 credit hours for two semesters (Romano & D'Amico, 2021). Community colleges report their total numbers of credit hours enrolled to the Department of Education each semester, and different mixes are possible to make up one FTE (ibid). For example, five students taking a three-credit hour course for two semesters can also equal one FTE for funding purposes (ibid). Figure 4 below demonstrates examples of FTE based on one student, as well as an FTE made up of five students, each completing three credit hours apiece per semester.

Figure 4

Federal Funding FTE Examples



Note. Chart above was developed with information taken from Romano, R. M., & D'Amico, M. M. (2021). How federal data shortchange the community college. *Change*, *53*(4), 22–28.

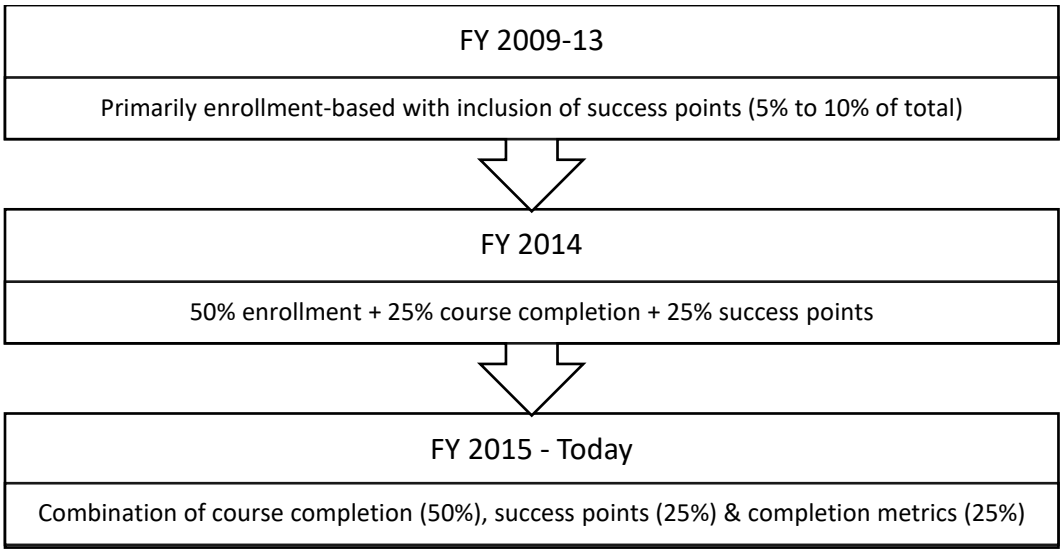
Importantly, FTE enrollment counts do not include classes not offered for credit, which depending on the state can include remedial course offerings, workforce development, and job training classes aimed at achieving core community service goals (Romano & D'Amico, 2021). Therefore, noncredit course offerings do not increase state or federal funding for community colleges, although they address key community needs. Also, the average community college student is part-time, encompassing 64 percent of students (Titus et al., 2021). Even more students balance a job while attending classes, limiting the number of classes they can complete per term (ibid). Working students represent 72 percent of part-time students and 62 percent of full-time students (ibid). Due to lower tuition and fee revenues, as well as smaller state and federal

funding appropriations, community colleges receive $8,800 less in revenue per student than their 4-year university counterparts (Yuen, 2020). This $8,800 per student amount is similar to the typical yearly revenues received by average community colleges (ibid).

With regards to state funding, 37 states have either implemented or are developing performance-based funding models as of 2022, with Ohio being one of the first states to implement the model (Chan, Mabel, & Mbekeani, 2023). Performance funding models tie a portion of state funding to institutional performance (Chan et al., 2023). Ohio and Tennessee are cited as the strongest exemplars of the paradigm, with the largest percentages of their state funding tied to performance (Chan et al., 2023; Ison, 2022; Snyder & Fox, 2016). In fact, in 2009 Ohio shifted its performance-based dollars from being optional bonus funds on top of state allocations to comprising half of the state's base funding for community colleges (Hillman et al., 2018). The funding system is based on a formula with different proportions of funding awarded based on student enrollment, as well as student completion milestones. Figure 5 below is a chart to explain the community college funding formula in the state of Ohio, as presented in a webinar by the Ohio Association of Community Colleges in 2021 (Rittner et al., 2021).

Figure 5

Ohio Community College Funding Formula: Recent History



Taken from: Rittner, L., Woodfield, R., & Snyder, M. (2021). Ohio community college state share of instruction (SSI) funding model 101 [Webinar]. Ohio Association of Community Colleges. https://ohiocommunitycolleges.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Ohios-Community-College-Funding-Model-101_Final.pdf

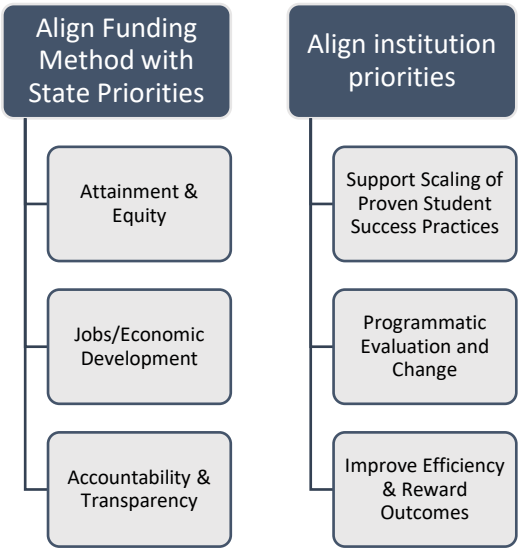
All performance funds in Ohio's community colleges are contingent on meeting "progress indicators," including completion of courses, degrees, and certifications (Hillman et al., 2018). Fifty percent of state dollars are contingent upon course completion, with special weight given to increases in four strategic access categories: (1) adults over age 25, (2) low-income students eligible for federal Pell Grant, (3) Minorities (Black, Hispanic, and Native American), and (4) academically underprepared students, as determined by standards created in 2009 within the Performance-Based Funding model (Rittner et al., 2021). Another twenty-five percent of state funding is awarded based on "success points" which colleges earn based on the number of students who complete 12, 24, and 36 credit hours towards their academic program (ibid). These milestones are considered to be key credit hour completion goals and meeting them makes it statistically more likely for students to complete their program (ibid). Another 25% of

state funding is based on completion metrics like numbers of students completing Associate Degrees and long-term certificates of fewer than 30 credit hours (ibid). Alternatively, these completion metrics include students who transfer to 4-year institutions after earning at least 12 credit hours at the community college (ibid). This means that if student completion rates suffer, colleges face losing up to half of the funding they would normally receive from the state (Dougherty et al., 2016). Fortunately, in the state of Ohio, performance-based funding is awarded based on a three-year average of these metrics, which limits the effect on funding for colleges who experience a temporary shortfall (Rittner et al., 2021).

Figure 6 below represents the rationale for the current performance-based funding paradigm in Ohio, according to a 2021 Ohio Association of Community Colleges webinar (Rittner et al., 2021). Figure 6 represents how state priorities are aligned and correlated alongside institutional college priorities (ibid). In order for the funding paradigm to be successful, both sets of priorities must be intact (ibid).

Figure 6

Rationale of Outcome-Based Funding: 2021



Taken from: Rittner, L., Woodfield, R., & Snyder, M. (2021). Ohio community college state share of instruction (SSI) funding model 101 [Webinar]. Ohio Association of Community Colleges. https://ohiocommunitycolleges.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Ohios-Community-College-Funding-Model-101_Final.pdf

Several studies have noted that the overall rate of degree completion in states who implemented the current performance-based funding paradigm has not increased (Chan et al., 2023; Ison, 2022; Hillman et al., 2018; Tandberg & Hilman, 2013). However, performance-based funding has been shown to increase completion of short-term certificates in community colleges (Chan et al., 2023; Ison, 2022; Hillman et al., 2018; Li & Kennedy, 2018; Thornton & Friedel, 2015). This is because students are encouraged to complete the college credential which requires the least amount of time (Ison, 2022; D'Amico, Friedel, Katsinas, & Thorton, 2014; Hillman et al., 2018). Low completion rates in community colleges greatly curtail numbers for the rest of the U.S. because of the large percentage of community college students in the higher education system (Pechac, & Slantcheva-Durst, 2021). Fewer than half of community college

students complete an Associate Degree, and those completers take an average of 6 years to do so (ibid).

Community College Administrative Structure

The Community College Resource Center stated that community colleges play a central role in U.S. society, fully justifying the special attention they have received from the federal government over the past 10 years (Dougherty et al., 2017). To understand the perspective of mid-level leaders in a community college, it is useful to contextualize the community college environment. According to Ohio Revised Code §3354.09, the responsibility for the operation of the college is assumed by a Board of Trustees, while supervision is the responsibility of the Ohio Department of Higher Education, which approves degree programs and is in charge of the State of Ohio Master Plan for education and its interpretation.

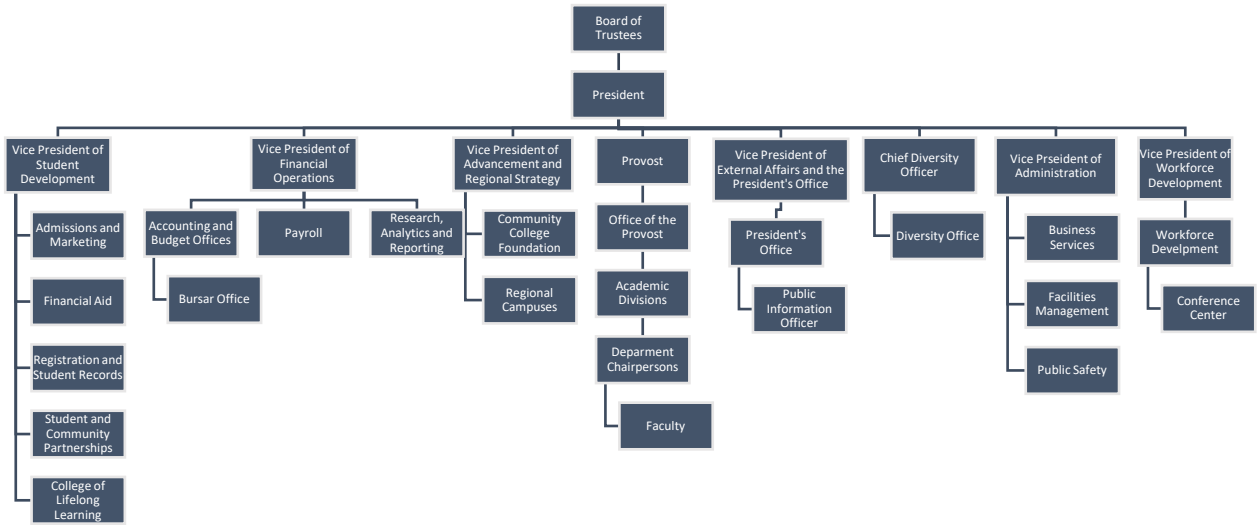
Although there are many administrative patterns in use throughout community colleges, community colleges have traditionally adopted at least some variation of what is known as the hierarchical or "tall" model (Johnson McPhail, 2016). Often, college structures are divisional, meaning that each individual unit or department is organized by function, with each office operating as an independent unit within the college (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Johnson McPhail, 2016). The power to implement programs and services belongs to administrators who have positions of authority in the institution, assigning responsibilities to staff and faculty below them on the hierarchy based on the employee's job position rather than abilities or talents (Cole, 2004; Johnson McPhail, 2016).

The smallest unit or building block in community colleges is the academic department (Cohen et al., 2014). All other segments of the organizational structure are subordinate to the

divisions in the chart below and function to support various programs (Blocker et al., 1965). Each academic program offered at the college is organized around a cluster of interrelated but independent groupings of college employees (Cohen et al., 2014). Each department in a community college has its own culture and procedures but also coexists with other departments who share ideas and are often interrelated (Lin, Eichelberger, & Leong, 2020). The AACC noted that effective leaders are able to use their interpersonal skills to work with various levels of staff and faculty to promote the college's mission (2005). Higher education policy calls for greater accountability and innovation from education institutions even as high-level leaders' phase-out (Gigliotti & Ruben, 2017). This means that each challenge affects all levels of colleges and universities, and so leaders often must unpack problems using an interdisciplinary lens (ibid). Below is a figure which typifies the organizational structure for a large midwestern community college.

Figure 7

Typical Community College Organizational Structure



Note. Information taken from Office of the President (2022, December 5). *President's Cabinet*. https://www.sinclair.edu/about/president/cabinet/

The above example organizational chart was created using webpage information from one of the larger community colleges in the Midwest. This community college has among the highest enrollment in its state, and includes learning campuses, making it a good example. Per Figure 7 above, the college includes the following Vice Presidents:

- **Vice President of Student Development:** Oversees student services departments, as well as university and community partnership programs, enrollment operations, and marketing communications to students
- **Vice President of Financial Operations:** Provides everyday leadership over financial planning for the College, including money management, accounting, and analysis.

- **Vice President of Advancement and Regional Strategy:** Oversees the College's foundation and monetary donations, as well as regional campuses
- **Provost:** Responsible for leadership of instruction for student learning, academic and faculty departments, and strategic planning of educational technology implementation.
- **Vice President of External Affairs and the President's Office:** Manages communication and information requests from external stakeholders
- **Chief Diversity Officer:** Strives to help others in the institution acknowledge students, faculty, and staff as important contributors to a belief in equity and inclusivity for all.
- **Vice President of Administration:** Oversees campus Bookstore, food services, parking, purchasing, mail center, facilities management, public safety, and property acquisition.
- **Vice President of Workforce Development:** Leads Workforce Development Office focused on conducting trainings on strategic business topics for the college and other businesses in the region, also oversees the Conference Center which provides event spaces for the college and community.

Leadership and Organizational Culture

Community colleges are organized as hierarchies, which makes compromise between competing forces a necessity (Cohen et al., 2014). In recent years, it has become more common for faculty, staff, and administrators to share governing power, rather than having power concentrated among administrators (ibid). Many community colleges have begun to expand their organizational structure horizontally, which allows for greater development of programs outside of departments specifically relating to academics (Bailey & Morest, 2004; Johnson McPhail, 2016; Otley, 2016). These programs can include non-credit lifelong learning education for seniors, workforce development training, and community partnerships offices (Bailey & Morest,

2004). The organizational structure chart above demonstrates an institutional focus on workforce training, lifelong learning involving non-credit classes provided off campus, and an office dedicated to community engagement. Also, external entities such as national and state authorities have expanded their influence on community colleges in recent years (Kisker & Kater, 2013). This is reflected in the Vice President of External Affairs position in the above organizational chart.

The AACC recommends that leaders use a systems perspective to assess and respond to changes in the needs of students and the community (AACC, 2005). Grouping interdependent departments horizontally together rather than stacking them hierarchically allows leaders and followers to focus less on their position or authority and more on inspiring stakeholders to work together to meet goals (Boggs & McPhail, 2001; Johnson McPhail, 2016). Being less centralized helps community college leaders move away from siloed, individualistic practices towards collaborative efforts which have a better chance of tackling today's complex problems (Bloomquist & George, 2022). This encourages the integration of perspectives between departments to address issues too complex to be dealt with by just one office in an institution (Klein, 2021).

Figure 7 above has groupings of interdependent departments all at the same level of the organizational hierarchy. For example, the Vice President for Student Development oversees five departments which all have the goal of furthering student development initiatives. Other than the Vice President, no one individual or department enjoys authority over the other departments in that grouping. Instead, the five departments are at the same level of the hierarchy where staff members can collaborate on shared projects. Job roles are carried out separately by departments who each have their own specialized knowledge. Each department is aware of the basic functions

of other similar departments, and they periodically work on projects but do not share decision-making power and have separate job responsibilities. Although the overall structure of the organizational chart from Figure 7 is vertical, with ultimate power being concentrated towards the top, there are aspects of horizontal structure as well in the organization.

Horizontal structure allows for leadership to cut across functional areas so that everyday authority is divided by function and project type rather than position title (Amey & Eddy, 2016). Because each system or department in a community college simultaneously overlaps with those of partner offices, leaders should view each system both individually and as a unit to make the most effective decisions (Bain, 2016). Problems can be solved more quickly when departments with overlapping responsibilities in a given project can communicate and work more closely together (Amey & Eddy, 2016). More horizontal structures allow for cross-functional teams that can work interdependently and allow for greater communication between the levels in the hierarchy (Johnson McPhail, 2016).

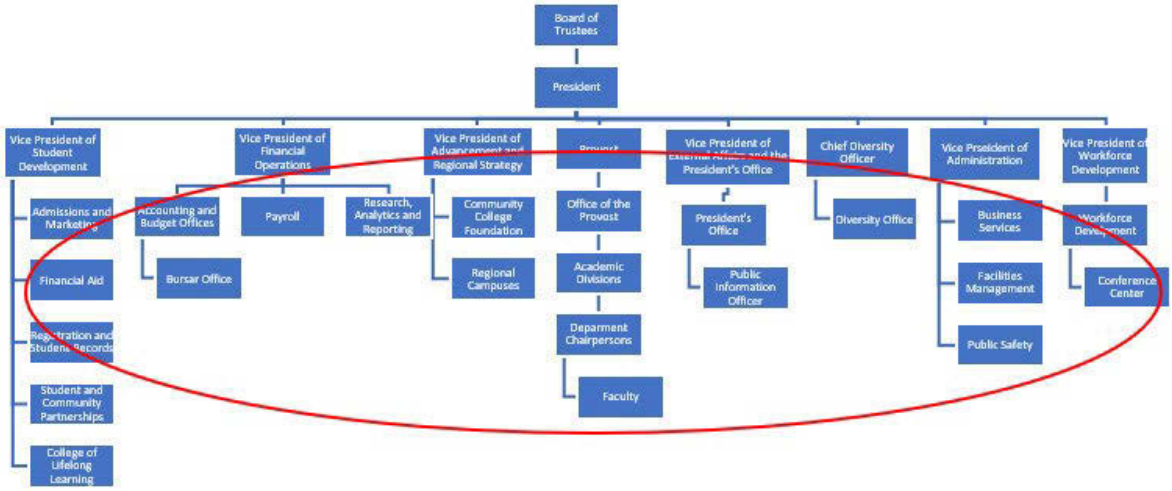
Defining the Mid-Level Leader in Community Colleges

Mid-level leaders occupy the space on the organizational ladder between senior-level leaders and entry-level workers (Márquez & Hernández, 2020). At times, they work at the grassroots level because they have daily contact with key departments on campus and help students navigate their college experiences to varying degrees (Garcia, 2020). Additionally, they are also called to provide support and oversee staff when higher-level leaders are not available (Márquez & Hernández, 2020). Many times, they are required to supervise entry-level professionals and make important decisions without close oversight (ibid). Position titles vary widely between institutions, but at community colleges they often include Advisor, Counselor,

Manager, Coordinator, or Director (ibid). Figure 8 isolates the placement of mid-level leaders in the organizational hierarchy of a typical large midwestern community college.

Figure 8

Mid-Level Leaders in Organizational Structure



Note. Information taken from Office of the President (2022, December 5). *President's Cabinet*. https://www.sinclair.edu/about/president/cabinet/

Mid-level leaders face a special lapse in training since organizations tend to invest in developing front-line and high-level leaders but overlook the complexity of life for mid-level leaders (Adams-Dunford et al., 2019). In a study of student affairs staff at nineteen community colleges, Lamb et al. (2018) found that many lower-level leaders learned their most crucial skills not through formal trainings but through simply trying various unproven ideas, often over a period of several years, to see what the outcome would be (Márquez & Hernández, 2020). This

same study found that leaders were very willing to attend development opportunities, but their campuses had few offerings available (ibid).

Newer professionals transitioning to a mid-level position are often overlooked with regards to onboarding, defined as development-focused training sessions held over the first year of the new position (Márquez & Hernández, 2020). By missing the opportunity for onboarding, professionals may lose the chance to establish long-term expectations for their role and establish connections with senior leadership (ibid). Individuals may not be aware of the skills needed to be successful (Adams-Dunford et al., 2019). These future leaders often face low morale as they begin the transition to higher levels of leadership without the authority needed to effectively enact initiatives (ibid). Partly due to this, half of community college leaders filling high-level academic officer positions reported a lack of desire to become college President (Eddy & Garza-Mitchell, 2017).

Most top-level leaders in community colleges are expected to either retire or leave their positions within the next decade (Cooney & Borland, 2018; Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017). In 2017, the AACC conducted a survey of community college leaders and found that 80% of college CEOs planned to retire within 10 years (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017; Phillippe, 2016). The average tenure of Presidents and CEOs is only five to seven years (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017). Community college budget shortfalls are also expected, with an expected decline of 7-30% over fiscal year 2021 due to COVID-19, which is possibly the largest loss on record (Salmi, 2020).

Leadership Versus Management

Many community college leaders find themselves with job titles like Leader or Manager (Márquez & Hernández, 2020). Institutions tend to use these job titles interchangeably, particularly in higher education. It is therefore important to clarify the function of leaders versus managers for the purpose of this dissertation (Wang, 2016). From a scholarly perspective, there is a distinct difference between leadership duties and management duties in an organization. Managers focus on maintaining order and efficiency (Wang, 2016). Management development trainings focus on using verified solutions to resolving known problems (Lathan & Seijts, 1998; Mailick, Stumpf, Grant, Kfir & Watson, 1998). Leaders, in contrast, develop a vision for the future and move other teammates towards a common goal (Wang, 2016). Leadership development focuses on improving professionals' ability to guide roles and processes (McCauley, Moxley, & Van Velsor, 2004). Both skill sets are crucial to the success of the institution, and individuals often embody both roles regardless of their job title. However, education for leaders is focused not on the transfer of technical knowledge but on the mastery of key competencies which allow leaders to acquire knowledge on their own (Kulik, Lazareva, Ippolitova, Egorova & Nedorezova, 2020).

As professionals rise from entry-level positions to having direct reports, they move from more strictly management functions of maintaining the status quo in the organization to leadership roles which require guiding others through change (Adams-Dunford et al., 2019). Although institution-wide change begins with high-level leaders, those at the mid-level can be instrumental in affecting change. Leaders throughout an organization can use models of change management as a blueprint for enacting initiatives if their goal is to transform an entire department or even the whole institution (Adams-Dunford et al., 2019). In these situations, key

leaders and stakeholders come together to provide input on implementing the change (Adams-Dunford et al., 2019).

For example, higher education institutions following Kotter's 8-Step Change Model (2012) often use upper-level leaders to create the overall vision, but mid-level leaders support the sense of urgency behind the change and develop strategies for achieving the goals (Adams-Dunford et al., 2019). Leaders at the middle of the organizational hierarchy can also help to communicate the action plan and form groups of stakeholders as a guiding coalition to spur others to enact the change, encouraging new ideas and identifying ways to track milestones (Kotter, 2012). Over time, mid-level leaders help to weave the new initiative into institutional policy, training the next generation in the tenets of the new paradigm (ibid). In addition to using models of change management to guide new initiatives, leaders can strategically hone new abilities to give them the tools they need (Adams-Dunford et al., 2019). To do this, they can embody a variety of leadership styles based on their own personality and the needs of their institution.

Definition of Leadership

Leadership cannot be precisely defined, only recognized when one is faced with it (Gallagher, 2002). Burns (1978) said that "leadership. . . is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize, in competition or conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological, and other resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers" (p.19). In summarizing a review of dozens of definitions of leadership, Northouse clarified that leadership is a process that happens within a group context and involves both influence and goal attainment (2007).

At its core, the relationship between leaders and followers according to Burns (1978) is the intermingling of people with different motivations and levels of power, as well as skill levels, but all in pursuit of a common purpose. This could be a finite relationship, such as what Burns (1978) calls transactional leadership, where one person reaches out to others to exchange things which both parties value. This is a relationship akin to bargaining or a trade, where the leader begins the process, but there is no lasting purpose to keep the leader and follower tied together beyond completing their specific mission (Burns, 1978). Leaders guide a process of cooperation and human interaction necessary for teammates to achieve goals together (Gallagher, 2002). Both leaders and followers share these goals mutually (Burns, 1978). Bennis (1989) posited that leaders tend to share the following ingredients: developing a guiding vision and acting with passion and integrity.

Foundational Leadership Theories Shaping Community Colleges

Examining leadership theory allows readers to piece together the commonalities between different theories and the variety of viewpoints which describe how effective leaders behave (Chemers, 2000). This also helps to inform the perspectives which lead to the creation of common frameworks used in practice by community college administrators. Bensimon, Neuman, & Birnbaum (1989) compiled a comprehensive list of leadership theories used in community leadership development and practices. Four decades later, I have updated the table (see Figure 9). Taken together, these theories help explain the basis for the competency-based frameworks introduced later in this chapter which will aim to capture the qualities of effective leaders (Chow et al., 2017). A list of key overarching leadership theories based on a review of the literature includes:

Figure 9

Foundational Leadership Theories

Theory Category	Description
Trait Theories	Identify specific characteristics believed to help a person assume and successfully function in leadership positions (Chemers, 2020).
Behavioral Theory and Path-Goal theory of Leadership	Examine activity patterns, managerial roles, and behavior categories of leaders (House & Mitchell, 1974).
Skills Theory	Focus on the skills and behaviors that administrators can exemplify and strengthen, rather than their personal qualities or characteristics with which they were born (Katz, 1955)
Role Theory	Describes how roles are developed between leaders and followers; demonstrates a shift from focusing on general characteristics and behaviors of leaders to the importance of responding to different situations, as well as the leaders' role in relation to followers (Biddle, 1986).
Power and Influence Theories	Attempt to understand leadership by the source and amount of power available to leaders and the way they exercise power over followers through either unilateral or reciprocal interactions (Birnbaum, 1989).
Symbolic Theory	Sees leadership as a social attribution permitting people to cognitively connect outcomes to causes and thereby make sense of an equivocal, fluid, and complex world (Sergiovanni, 1981)
Systems Theory	Helps leaders conceptualize leadership in community college by describing leaders as atoms in an organism, each individually processing information in self-contained but interconnected departmental spheres (Astaíza-Martínez, Mazorco-Salas, & Castillo-Bohórquez, 2021)
Transformational and Charismatic Leadership	A relational approach where leaders inspire followers to enact their vision by motivating them towards innovation and providing followers with individual attention (Bass, 1993)
Contingency Theory	Emphasizes the importance of situational factors in understanding effective leadership, such as the kind of task performed by a group and the external environment (Fiedler, 1958).

Situational Leadership	Rather than relying on specific traits or behaviors or one theory of leadership, situational leaders diagnose the needs of each situation and customize their behaviors to match what is required (Blanchard, Zigarmi, & Zigarmi, 2013)

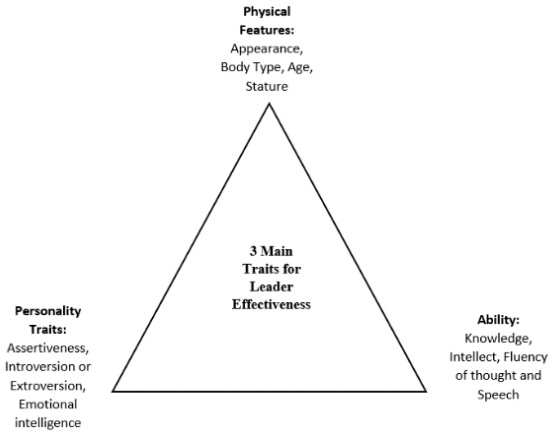
Note. Inspired by Birnbaum, R. (1989). The implicit leadership theories of college and university presidents. *The Review of Higher Education*, *12*(2), 125-136.

Trait Theories of Leadership

Drawing from an individualistic cultural context, early social philosophers in the late 1800s to early 1900s sought to describe the characteristics of individuals (Chemers, 2000). For example, Carlyle (1907) proposed the Great Man Theory of Leadership, which suggested that successful leaders embody certain personality and character traits which set them apart from followers. Literature mentions three categories of traits that leaders can possess: physical features, abilities, and personality traits (Alajmi, 2022). The three trait categories are represented in Figure 10 below.

Figure 10

Three Main Traits for Leader Effectiveness According to Great Man Theory



Note. Information taken from Alajmi, Meaad. (2022). Leadership theories: Application in the university setting. *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, *30*, 194–99.

Early studies conducted to test differences between traits in leaders and followers identified several candidates for traits helpful for leadership, including intelligence, assertiveness, and social sensitivity (Chemers, 2000). When describing over 200 years of studies on leadership traits, Fiedler (1981) described results showing that leaders tend to be brighter than followers, marginally taller, somewhat more socially inclined, and more extrovert.

However, after studying 30 years of trait studies, Stogdill (1948) reported that there was no single trait or grouping of traits that could be pinpointed as being related to leadership across all situations (Fiedler, 1981). Leaders cannot be easily identified based on personality traits, and practically every member of an organization carries out some type of leadership function at some point in time (Fiedler, 1981). In fact, the diversity of scenarios in which leaders work became a starting point for future theories of leadership (Chemers, 2000). These later theories would aim

to describe and predict the relationship between personal traits of leaders and the environment in which leaders operate (ibid).

Behavioral Theory and Path-Goal Theory of Leadership

When traits predicting leadership were unable to be fully pinpointed, researchers (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939; Kahn, 1951) began to study leader behaviors associated with positive outcomes such as high productivity and positive morale (Chemers, 2000). Arguably the most significant of the studies was conducted at The Ohio State University (Hemphill, 1950) and involved the development of a 150-item behavioral inventory called the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ). Analysis found that much of leader behavior could be explained by two major factors, with the first being focused on leaders' support of group satisfaction and morale and the second factor relating to building a structure for accomplishing tasks (Halpin & Winer, 1957). The most common behavior group, called "consideration," included expressing concern for subordinates' feelings, reducing conflict, and encouraging minority viewpoints in decision-making (ibid). Another factor was dubbed "initiation of structure" and encompassed the leader's adherence to procedures, criticism of subpar work, and emphasis on high performance (ibid). Although the LBDQ factors were found widely across a variety of leadership settings, they were not fully successful at predicting outcomes of leadership effectiveness, specifically follower satisfaction and group performance (Fleishmann & Harris, 1962; Korman, 1966).

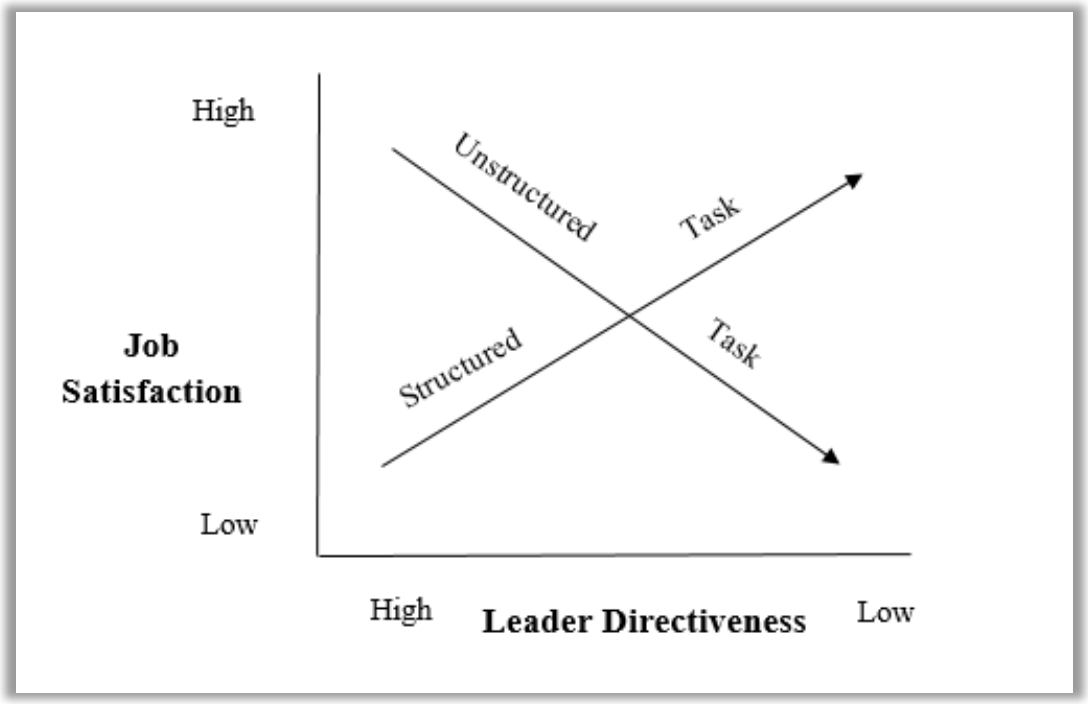
Whereas studies on the LBDQ score tried to relate leader behavior to organizational outcomes, House and his fellow researchers (House, 1971; House & Dessler, 1974; House & Mitchell, 1974) sought to merge behavioral approaches to understand how leaders can impact follower performance and motivation. They created the Path-Goal Theory which posits that a

leader's behavior influences positive performance for followers by impacting their perceptions of how easily goals are to attain, as well as the value of meeting goals in the workplace (House & Mitchell, 1974). This relationship means that when leaders clarify office goals or increase the attractiveness of each goal, one should expect the level of follower satisfaction to increase, along with performance and acceptance of the leader (House & Mitchell, 1974). It is important to note that the relationship between leader behavior and the three criteria (follower satisfaction, performance, and acceptance) depends on the personality of the follower and the workplace environment (ibid).

Path-Goal Theory predicts that a leader's structuring or direction would motivate followers in situations that lack structure due to being highly complex or unfamiliar to followers (Chemers, 2000). However, in situations with enough structure, too much guidance from leaders could be taken as micromanaging, causing a negative effect which is depicted in the diagram below from House and Mitchell (1974). The Path-Goal Theory has been supported in many studies and is an important contribution to our ability to describe the dynamics that enhance leadership effectiveness, although it is unable to predict future behavior (Fiedler, 1981). Figure 11 shows the correlation between job satisfaction and leader directiveness per the Path-Goal Theory of Leadership in the form of a chart.

Figure 11

Path-Goal Theory



Note: From House, R. J., & Mitchell, T. R. (1975). *Path-goal theory of leadership*. Washington Univ Seattle Dept Of Psychology.

Skills Approach to Leadership

Identifying important qualities in leaders has been a key ingredient in professional development trainings for decades. The Skills Leadership Theory by Katz (1955) is the first main approach to leadership which specifically focuses on skills (Markovic, Zorica, & Sami Ljajic, 2017). This approach was outlined in a *Harvard Business Review* article and based on Katz' own field research and firsthand observations (Katz, 1955). In his article, Katz argued that a main issue preventing effective workforce training is the fact that executives have difficulty defining what makes a good leader (Katz, 1955). Katz focuses on the skills and behaviors that administrators can exemplify and strengthen, rather than their personal qualities or characteristics

with which they were born. Regardless of a worker's personality traits, Katz (1955) posits that leadership potential can be developed by focusing on three main skills:

Figure 12

Three Key Skills According to Katz

Skill	Definition	Signs of Highly Developed Skill Level
Technical	The specialized expertise needed to meet objectives in the workforce. This skill involves working with processes or objects related to a specific discipline	Leaders adept in this skill have specialized knowledge and analytical ability within their specialty, as well as ease in the use of the tools and techniques needed for their field
Human	The leader's effectiveness when working with others or in groups. This skill involves being aware of one's own feelings and accepting others' perceptions	Leaders adept in this skill can explain their own thoughts and behaviors to others, while maintaining an accepting atmosphere where others can express concerns.
Conceptual	The ability to see the "big picture" of an organization, both the organization and its interdependent component parts	Leaders adept in this skill can perceive external factors which can affect their organization's functioning. They coordinate the institution's parts in a way that reflects the values of the organization while improving processes. Mastering this skill includes being able to foresee issues and implications of decisions to prevent consequences from negatively affecting the institution and external stakeholders.

Note. Information from Katz, R.L. (1955). Skills of an Effective Administrator. *Harvard Business Review*, *33*(1), 33-42.

According to Katz, it is important for leaders to be able to differentiate between each of the above three skills, and also understand how they intersect (1955). Katz also recommended professionals to develop each of the above skill categories separately. Katz delineated degrees of levels needed for each skill depending on whether a leader was at a lower level or executive level of the organizational hierarchy (ibid). He stated that technical skill can be less crucial for success the further up leaders move in the organization, provided his human and conceptual skills are strong enough to identify and coordinate other professionals with the technical skill that is needed. Katz also pointed out that middle managers should especially focus on their human skill so that they can effectively improve communication and encourage collaboration among their direct reports (ibid). At the highest level, executives must finely develop their conceptual skill to recognize the interdependent functions of all activities and interests in the organization (ibid).

Skills models are meant to help leaders strengthen their abilities and naturally focus on developing leaders as individuals rather than collaborative, relationship-building theories centered on teams (Croft & Seemiller, 2017). In order to work effectively as a team, leaders need to first consider their own skills and abilities and how those interplay with other colleagues (ibid). Recent leadership skills frameworks for community colleges such as the AACC's competencies lists and the Aspen Institute's framework reflect this focus on collaboration as well as individual leadership development (AACC, 2018; The Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream, 2013; Tarker, 2019). The AACC's competency framework also acknowledges the different skills needed for professionals at varying levels of the organizational hierarchy (AACC, 2013; AACC 2018; AACC, 2022).

Role Theory

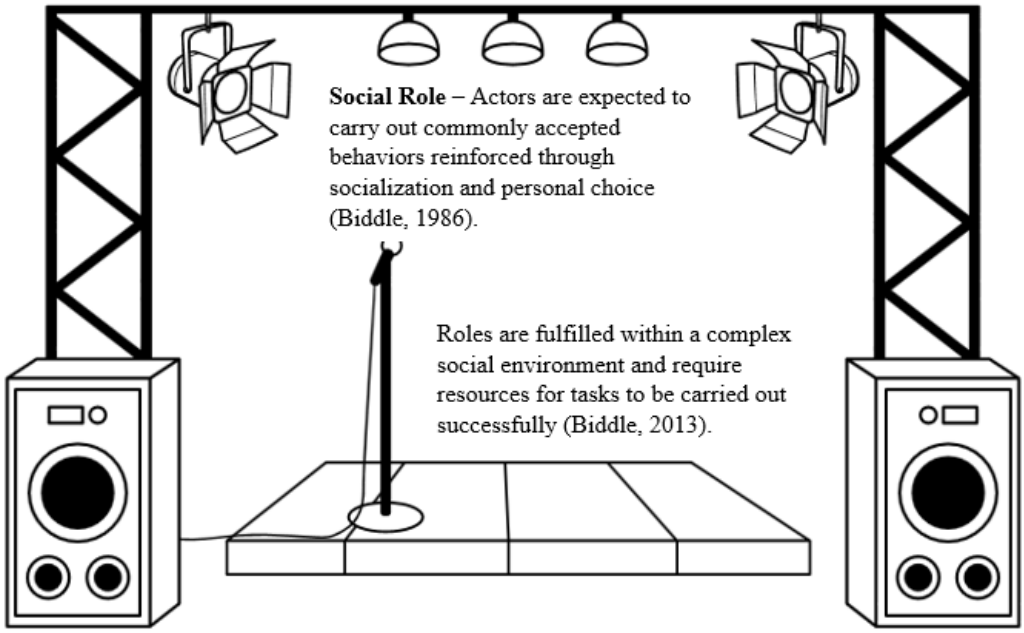
Role theory has evolved over centuries with no single founder (Biddle, 2013). Some of the earliest formalized role theory began as a metaphor for the theater, with actors required to perform designated parts in a widely understood social environment and given predictable scripts for what to say (ibid). Sociological theorist Biddle explored role theory in many different contexts, including a leadership lens. According to Biddle, role theory studies behaviors within a specific context, and characteristics of employees within various processes which produce, explain, or are affected by those behaviors (2013). Overall, the theory seeks to unveil how interactive processes among actors or participants in a social system work to shape the decisions and actions of a group (Georgakakis, Heyden, Ochmichen, & Ekanayake, 2022). According to role theory, roles are expected behaviors of participants in a social environment (Georgakakis et al., 2022). They are the main building blocks needed to decode associations and identify the nature of interdependencies between the various employees in an institution (ibid).

For Biddle (2013), roles are tied to a social position or status, which is a commonly recognized designation used to identify a person and some of their expected characteristics. For example, doctors and school custodians have their own social status in society and are expected to carry out certain functions such as writing prescriptions in the case of doctors or custodians maintaining the cleanliness of a school building (Biddle, 2013). People who embody a role often perpetuate these designated functions because they are socialized to learn what behaviors are expected of them in society and are empowered to enforce the actions which they deem appropriate for that role (ibid). In addition, roles are played out in a specific way depending on context, or the expected norms of behavior in a specific situation (ibid). Actors are not able to carry out their role expectations without the necessary environmental equipment or necessary

resources to do the job like time, tools, and knowledge (ibid). Many roles are embedded within social systems such as organizations where each job position is assigned tasks to fulfill, often in a sequence that can be complex and interconnected with the roles of other colleagues (ibid). Figure 13 exemplifies the definition of roles by using the stage as a metaphor.

Figure 13

Actors in Role Theory



Note. Information taken from Biddle, B. J. (2013). Role theory: Expectations, identities, and behaviors. Academic Press. Stage scene image taken from public domain clip art.

Power and Influence Theories

Power and influence theories examine the leadership framework by which higher education leaders implicitly interpret their role, allowing them to influence others in the less rigid hierarchical structures found in colleges (Birnbaum, 1989). Some theoretical approaches assert

that leadership is understood in the context of leader versus follower, but in higher education organizations, leaders consider their subordinates more as constituents or partners than followers (ibid). According to Birnbaum (1989), there are two major theories which encompass the main points of power and influence theories: social power theories and social exchange theories. In the social power theory, French and Raven (1959) defined power as the main way to influence others. Power is described as a one-way push from leaders to impact followers (Birnbaum, 1989).

French and Raven (1959) posited that there are five bases for power over others: legitimate, reward, coercive, expert, and referent (Kovach, 2020). With (1) legitimate power, leaders use social and legal systems to influence others; with (2) reward power, leaders use incentives to change others' behavior; with (3) coercive power, leaders influence by threatening punishment; with (4) expert power, leaders use perceived mastery and expertise to wield influence; with (5) referent power, leaders connect charismatically with others so that followers comply because they feel kinship with the leader (French & Raven, 1959; Birnbaum, 1989). Figure 14 represents each of the five types of power according to French and Raven (1959).

Figure 14

Five Types of Power

Note. Information taken from Kovach, M. (2020). Leader influence: A research review of French & Raven's (1959) power dynamics. *The Journal of Values-Based Leadership*, *13*(2), 15. Clip art taken from public domain images.

Birnbaum (1989) cites social exchange theory as a second overarching theory type regarding power and influence. Whereas social power theory was a one-way street of influence by leaders over followers, social exchange theory supports two-way influence where leaders have reciprocal relationships with followers, providing necessary services in exchange for followers' approval and compliance (Birnbaum, 1989). In this theory, followers directly limit leaders' levels of influence by expressing their expectations and needs (ibid). Supervisors who project an unfavorable influence can cause employees to be less motivated to be successful (Kovach, 2020). In this way, power and influence theory illustrates how leaders can influence

follower motivation and outcomes by successfully navigating this relationship dynamic (Kovach, 2020).

Symbolic Theory

Symbolic theories began to emerge in the 1970s and early 1980s and can be traced to the ideas of several authors, with its approach to leadership being credited especially to German leadership researcher Neuberger (Winkler, 2010). Symbolic leadership can be defined as leadership that is tied to meaning, where meaning is experienced in the form of symbols (Winkler, 2010). Symbolic theory helps professionals connect workplace outcomes to causes in their mind and make sense of their fluid and complex world (Birnbaum, 1989). Some scientists liken the symbolic perspective to a computer, where followers process information that leaders provide based on if-then rules, which are essentially cause and effect relationships (Lord & Shondrick, 2011). Neuberger (1995) describes symbolic leadership as a process whereby followers observe many types of inputs and pieces of information, such as organizational policies, reward systems, and leader behavior. Followers then interpret all of that information and use the meaning they derive from their reality to make decisions (Winkler, 2010).

Educational theorist Sergiovanni (1981) transferred knowledge of symbolic theory to the field of education. He noted that leadership behavior and style are not as crucial to effectiveness as the ability of leaders to communicate and reinforce their values for their followers. Neuberger mentions that symbols such as processes, language, and codified rules are interpreted by followers as substitutes for the leader and used to guide follower behavior, even if the leader is not available (1995).

Rather than focusing on overt leadership activities, symbolic theory highlights the importance of behind-the-scenes informal aspects of leadership, such as supporting institutional norms which govern behavior, as well as promoting informal behavior modelling and activities that reinforce ideal beliefs and values for followers (Sergiovanni, 1986). Instead of measuring leadership behavior and evaluating leaders' outcomes to determine leaders' effectiveness, symbolic theory focuses on the importance of social meanings embedded in the group's culture (ibid). Leaders who are aware of how events and policies will be interpreted by followers, and able to nurture group norms and ideals, will be more effective overall (Sergiovanni, 1981). Although creating meanings and symbols is a somewhat abstract concept, Sergiovanni noted several practical action steps that leaders can take to strengthen symbolic leadership in their organization, which are outlined in Figure 15 along with a description of each.

Figure 15

Principles of Action for Leaders Implementing Symbolic Leadership

Leadership selectivity	Leaders give attention to the activities they value. By focusing special attention on certain initiatives, leaders model the activities and set the tone of the institution by communicating to others which goals and activities should enjoy priority.
Leadership Consciousness	Modelling of principles, purposes, moral standards, and organizational beliefs by the leader. Consciousness is reflected in leaders' ability to give others a sense of meaning and appreciation for their job duties, fostering commitment.
Leadership Fidelity	Building of loyalty and devotion to organizational norms and work group aspirations. Leaders should institutionalize their vision and ensure that it matches that of the organization.

Note: Information taken from Sergiovanni, T. J. (1981). Symbolism in leadership (what great leaders know that ordinary ones do not). ERIC Clearinghouse: Washington, D.C.

Systems Theory

After delving into key theories which help understand the complex mix of traits and decisions guiding leaders' behavior, systems theory can help contextualize the reality in which community college leaders operate (Kowch, 2019). Systems thinking as it relates to leadership was first mentioned towards the latter half of the 20th century (Von Bertalanffy, 1960). Systems thinking contrasted with Descartes' scientific reductionism, which states that complex phenomena are better understood by breaking them down to their most basic parts (Shaked & Schechter, 2016; Rosenberg, 2006). In contrast, systems thinking postulates that the why and the how of a specific phenomenon can only be fully understood when leaders understand the parts in relation to the whole (Hammond, 2005; Shaked & Schechter, 2016). Systems thinking is applicable to a variety of disciplines and workplaces since it is a lens through which complex activities and relationships can be understood (Shaked & Schechter, 2016).

Community college mid-level workers face an especially complex situation due to their need to balance collaboration across the college hierarchy, as well as priorities including student support, day-to-day operations, and community needs (Márquez & Hernández, 2020). Systems theory observes the "nonlinear, open, and complex relational ecosystems" in which similar divisions like student services and academic affairs independently coexist (Kowch, 2019). Mid-level leaders must demonstrate great skill and tact to bridge the different levels of the organization and external stakeholders (Márquez & Hernández, 2020).

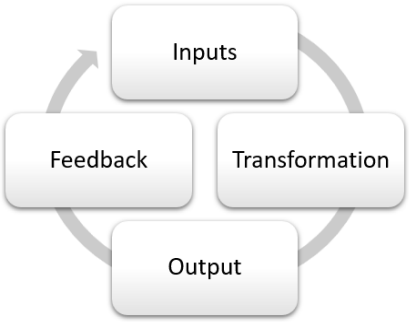
Systems thinking helps administrators conceptualize the interactions between leaders in individual departments within a college, so that these complex relationships can be observed (Astaíza-Martínez et al., 2021). Similar to atoms in an organism moving in a self-contained nucleus but also reacting with other atoms, the departments and staff members in community colleges move independently while also interacting with each other (Astaíza-Martínez et al., 2021). Department leaders and mid-level managers navigate a complex web of decision-making which can in turn affect the needs, roles, and decisions of others involved in overlapping projects (Amey & Eddy, 2016). Each part or department in a college works together in networks of interaction, rather than in separate parts (Shaked & Schechter, 2016).

The essence of systems thinking is that individual leaders undergo decision-making processes consisting of four parts: (1) inputs/data, (2) transformation of data into results, (3) outputs, which are the product or process that results from the transformation, and (4) feedback, which comes from internal and/or external observations (Bain, 2016). Leaders make decisions using the systems thinking process by analyzing information according to their leadership style and the nature of the problems they face, to eventually arrive at an output and seek feedback from other colleagues (ibid). Leaders seek feedback from members of their own department, as well as stakeholders from other departments who have overlapping job duties (Amey & Eddy, 2016). The inputs, outputs, and feedback involved in systems thinking provide leaders with mental and practical tools that guide the understanding and transformation of problem situations (Astaíza-Martínez et al., 2021).

Each part of the system comes together in a loop, demonstrated in Figure 16 below:

Figure 16

Systems Theory



Note: Information taken from Bain, J. (2016). Foundations of leadership and management. In V. X. Wang, B. Bain, J. Hope & C. Hansman (Eds.), *Educational leadership and organizational management: Linking theories to practice* (pp. 1-24). Information Age Publishing.

Shaked and Schechter (2016) developed the Systems School Leadership approach for leaders to analyze inputs and feedback for greater effectiveness in an educational setting. They identified four overarching actions that leaders take when implementing this approach: (1) Leading Wholes, or seeing the big picture of school life and not only its component parts; (2) Influencing Indirectly, by being aware of the various elements at play within a school environment where each element is connected and influenced by other elements circuitously; (3) Using a Multidimensional View, seeing several aspects of each issue simultaneously to predict future developments and their consequences, and (4) Evaluating Significance, or identifying patterns and distinguishing between important issues to be resolved and problems that are less important for the system to continue functioning.

Transformational Leadership

In 1978, political historian Burns (1978) was able to shift scientific interest away from focusing on individual traits and how they interact with the work environment and instead towards analysis of the relationship between leaders and followers (Chemers, 2000). This helped scientists to progress from attempting to predict leadership in specific situations to moving closer to more universal predictions across work environments (ibid). Transformational leadership represents a leader's tendency to engage in a relatively stable pattern of behavior across multiple types of work situations (Zaccaro et al., 2018).

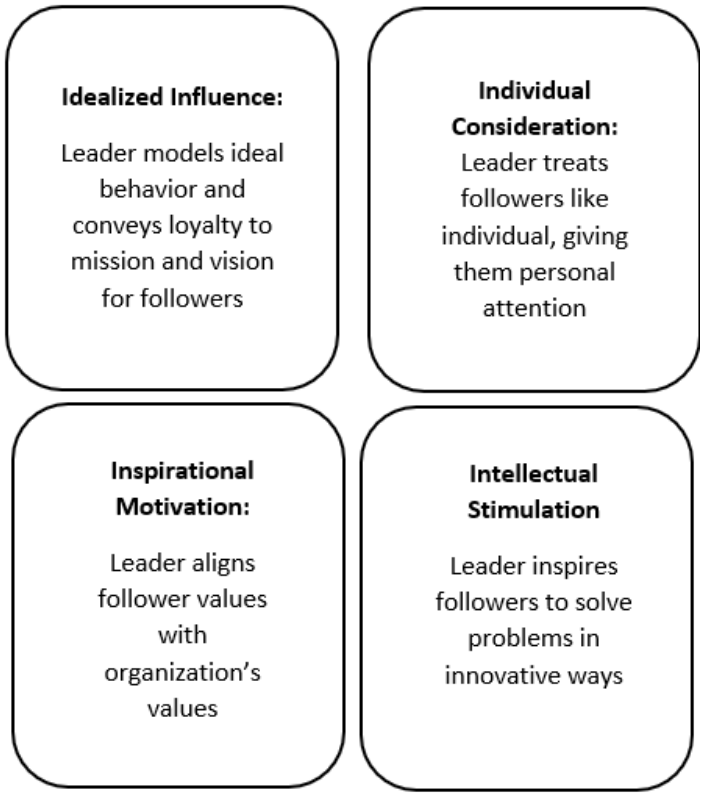
Burns (1978) defined leadership as the process of developing a relationship consisting of "mutual persuasion, exchange, elevation, and transformation" (p.20). According to Burns, the core of a leader-follower relationship is the interaction between people with differing motivations and potentials for power, but with the same overall goal (ibid). Leaders enact leadership when they use resources such as institutions and relationships to "engage and satisfy the motives of others" even when leaders and followers are in conflict or competition (Burns, 1978, p.19). Crucially, leadership involves not a finite state of being, but a process that does not end once a team reaches its goal (Gallagher, 2002). This leadership process must be reviewed on a regular basis, with the team constantly accounting for the changing needs of itself and its stakeholders (Gallagher, 2002). Transformational leadership occurs when leaders and followers engage together in a way that improves performance, motivation, and morality for all parties involved (Burns, 1978).

In 1985, Bass extended the work of Burns (1978), expanding the relational approach to transformational leadership by characterizing it with what he called the four I's: idealized influence, individual consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1993). (1) Idealized influence involves the leader acting as a role model and articulating a sense

of vision and mission for their followers; (2) inspirational motivation concerns how the leader aligns the values of the followers with those of the organization; (3) intellectual stimulation speaks to how the leader motivates followers to solve problems in new and creative ways; and (4) individual consideration describes how the leader treats each follower like an individual and gives them personal attention (Bass, 1999). Each of the four I's are listed and described in Figure 17.

Figure 17

The Four I's According to Bass



Note. Information taken from Bass, B. M. (1999). Two decades of research and development in transformational leadership. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 8*(1), 9–32.

A key part of the transformational leadership paradigm is on the opposite end of the leadership spectrum: transactional leadership (Waldman, Bass, & Einstein, 1987). According to Bass, transactional leadership is based on the concept of contingent reinforcement, where followers' needs are met as long as their performance is consistent with the expectations or contractual obligations of the leader (Bass, 1985). The most effective leaders display both transactional and transformational actions (ibid). However, in today's service-driven world, rewards given only if performance warrants them are not always possible or appropriate (ibid). Transformational leaders are more likely to thrive in complex and changing environments where new solutions are needed quickly, and followers' skills can be developed (ibid).

House's Charismatic Leadership Theory

In anticipation of Burns' development of transformational leadership theory (Chemers, 2000), House developed a theoretical study of charismatic leadership in which he evaluated the characteristics of leaders throughout history such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. who garnered incredible levels of devotion from followers (1977). House noted three categories of characteristics which charismatic leaders personified (ibid). Figure 18 lists the three categories and includes hallmarks of leaders who exemplify them.

Figure 18

Characteristics of Charismatic Leaders According to House (1977)

Characteristics of Charismatic Leaders

- **Personal Characteristics:**
  - Moral correctness
  - High self-confidence
  - Influence and Direct Others
- **Behaviors:**
  - Clarify goals
  - Example of ideal attitudes/behaviors
  - Develop attractive self-image for followers
- **Situational Influences:**
  - Shared moral lens of leader and followers
  - Economic factors and social upheaval

Note. Images taken from public domain clip art. Information taken from House, R.J. (1977). A 1976 theory of charismatic leadership. In J.G. Hunt & L.L. Larson (Eds.), *Leadership: The cutting edge.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Personal characteristics typified an assuredness of the moral correctness of one's beliefs, as well as high self-confidence and a need to influence and direct others (House, 1977). *Behaviors* included clarifying goals, exemplifying desirable attitudes and behaviors, cultivating an attractive self-image for followers, demonstrating high confidence in followers, and inspiring followers to be motivated to exemplify desired behaviors like altruism (ibid). Lastly, *situational* influences on charismatic leadership could include leaders expressing goals in the context of a shared spiritual or moral lens, as well as external influences like social strife or economic crisis (ibid).

Contingency Theory

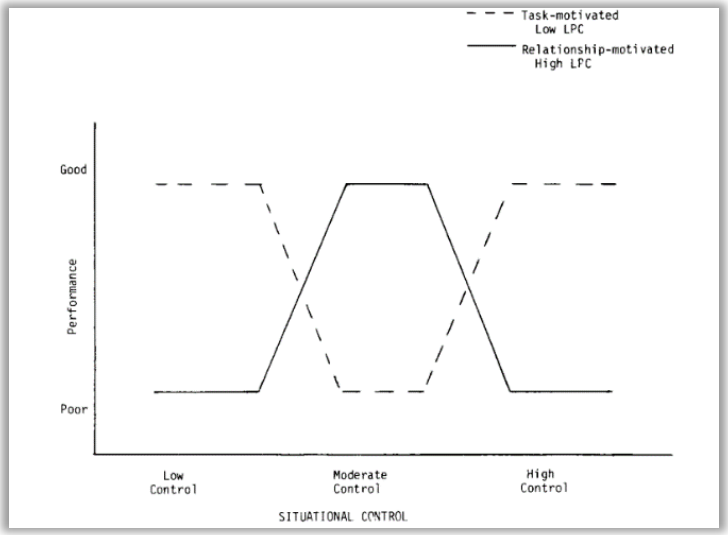
Overall, contingency theories state that the effectiveness of leadership depends upon the situation (Fiedler, 1958). When developing Contingency Theory, Fiedler (1981) asked why high structure is effective at times while high follower support is best in others. To Fiedler, the reasoning had to do with the individual personalities of followers, and it aims to predict leader effectiveness (1981). Fiedler found that certain personalities respond to specific situations in a way that better fits the needs of the task at hand (1981). Contingency theory itself posits that a leader's effectiveness hinges on two interacting factors (ibid). The first factor is the leader's personality, especially the degree to which the leader is motivated by task completion, or alternatively whether the leader is motivated by developing close interpersonal relationships with followers instead. The second factor is called Situational Control, which is the extent to which a given situation provides the leader with power, control, and influence over the outcome of the situation. Situational Control helps gauge the likelihood that the leader's decisions will result in task completion and/or better interpersonal relations. To measure Situational Control, leaders must determine (1) how loyal and supportive their team is, (2) how straightforward and well-defined the task at hand is, and (3) whether the leader has the power to incentivize or punish followers based on performance (ibid).

Contingency theory predicts that leaders who are motivated by task completion will be most adept in situations with either very high or very low levels of control over the outcome of the task, whereas leaders motivated by interpersonal relationships with followers will be most effective in situations where they have moderate control (ibid). To describe the degree to which leaders are task-oriented versus relationship-oriented, Fiedler created a scale called Least Preferred Coworker (LPC). According to the scale, leaders with low LPC scores are focused mainly on task completion, whereas leaders oriented to interpersonal relationships have high

LPC scores. Fiedler represented the relationship between performance and situational control in the form of a graph, which is included as Figure 19.

Figure 19

Contingency Theory



Note: Taken from Fiedler, F. E. (1981). Leadership effectiveness. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *24*(5), 619–632.

In the above figure, the relationship-motivated leader's performance is shown by the solid line whereas the task-motivated leader's performance is depicted by a broken line (ibid). The figure shows that leaders can improve their effectiveness by either changing their behavior to match the situation, or by modifying the situation to match their behavior by using their level of control and influence (ibid). Levels of situational control can change over time (ibid). For example, leaders who continue on the same team can experience stronger interpersonal relationships and loyalty from their followers, which gives them greater influence (ibid). Also, the degree to which the task is defined or clear can sometimes be changed, or the leader can be

given greater power over their followers, perhaps by being given the ability to hire or withhold rewards from team members (ibid). The most common way for leaders to increase their situational control is through training, since training clarifies the goal of tasks and helps leaders evaluate their team's success with task performance (ibid).

Overall, contingency theory holds that no leadership theory is universal in every situation (Harrison, 2018; Reed, 2019). To effectively achieve their goals, leaders must be able to adjust their leadership style depending on the needs of the situation (Harrison, 2018; Reed, 2019). Individual leader characteristics can become intertwined with situational characteristics to increase effective leadership behaviors and responsiveness to the varying situations found in the workplace (Zaccaro et al., 2018). Leaders react to the perceived requirements of their job, while certain situations can catalyze leaders to rise to the occasion and be more effective (ibid). Also, situations in the workplace often require leadership choices and actions which come from individual traits and skills of the leader (ibid). Capabilities like social acuity help leaders to perceive the needs of a situation by helping them detect which unique planning and structuring behaviors are needed for their followers, and leaders who can be flexible in their behaviors make more successful leadership choices (ibid).

Contingency Theory

Situational Leadership

Contingency theory highlights the role of varying situational variables which impact leadership effectiveness (Bolden et al., 2003). Situational leadership theory was developed by Hershey and Blanchard in 1988. The theory posits that there is no one single leadership style that

can be considered the best (Blanchard et al., 2013). Instead, the most effective leadership style to use varies by situation (ibid).

Hershey and Blanchard developed the theory as they studied the relationships between task behavior, follower skill level, and relationship behaviors (Alajmi, 2022). Task behavior is when leaders clearly define job tasks to their followers, whereas relationship behavior is the development of personal connections and psychological contracts between the leader and follower (ibid). The follower's skill level, also known as level of maturity, shapes whether the leader focuses on task behavior or relationship behaviors as their followers' needs change over time (ibid). To determine the follower's skill level, leaders must examine two factors: (1) follower competence, as evidenced by demonstrated knowledge and skills, and (2) follower commitment, which is a mix of worker confidence and motivation (Blanchard et al., 2013). A worker's development of competence and commitment is specific to a particular goal or task, meaning that a follower can be at one development level for one task and another level for another task (Blanchard et al., 2013). Figure 20 outlines the four major phases of worker development with regards to competence and commitment as they become accustomed to their task.

Figure 20

Development Levels in Situational Leadership Theory

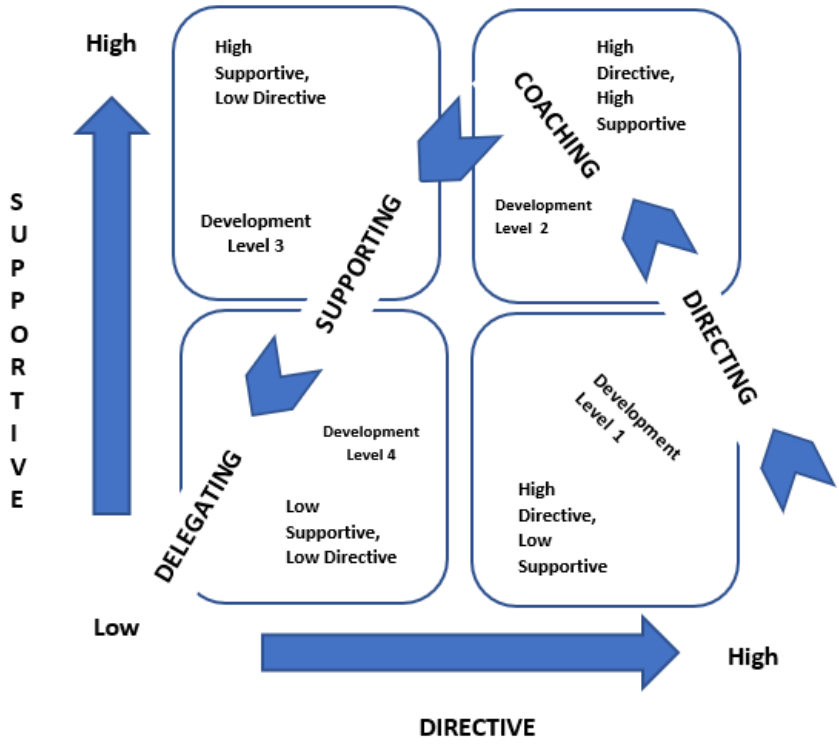
Information taken from: Blanchard, K. H., Zigarmi, P., & Zigarmi, D. (2013). *Leadership and the one-minute manager: A situational approach to leading others*. William Morrow.

Level 1 identifies workers as "enthusiastic beginners" because they are new to tasks and therefore low on competence, but they have high levels of commitment because they have confidence in their transferrable work skills. As they learn more about the task at hand, workers arrive at Level 2 called the "disillusioned learner" where they have developed some competence in the task but may become frustrated with their progress which lowers their commitment. At Level 3, workers become "capable but cautious contributors" who demonstrate competence through ability to complete the task, but still lack confidence to do the task on their own. Finally, at Level 4 workers become "self-reliant achievers" where their experience and knowledge give them high levels of both confidence and commitment.

As leaders analyze their follower's development level, they engage four overall leadership styles according to situational leadership: (1) directing, (2) coaching (3) supporting, and (4) delegating (Blanchard et al., 2013). Figure 21 exhibits each leadership style, as well as how each develops over time.

Figure 21

Leadership Styles in Situational Leadership



Taken from: Blanchard, K. H., Zigarmi, P., & Zigarmi, D. (2013). *Leadership and the one-minute manager: A situational approach to leading others*. William Morrow.

Directing involves high directive behavior and low supportive behavior, where the leader clarifies tasks and goals while monitoring the follower's performance and providing constant feedback. Coaching involves both high directive and high supportive behaviors, with the leader continuing to define tasks while encouraging the follower to be involved in decision-making to use their burgeoning skills. Supporting involves low directive behavior and high supportive behavior where the leader and follower collaborate to make decisions, with the leader focusing on guiding the follower's collaborative process. Lastly, delegating involves low directive

behavior and low supportive behavior because the follower is now able to independently make decisions, with the leader supporting their growth and motivating the follower to move forward (ibid).

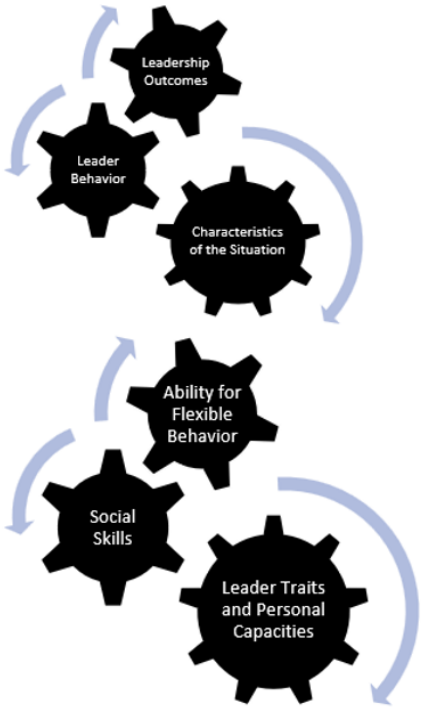
Takeaways from Foundational Leadership Theory

There are many perspectives on leadership (leadership traits, transformational and charismatic leadership, contingent and situational leadership). By using the perspectives of highlighted leadership theories, it is possible to gather key takeaways for what leaders must do to be effective (Chemers, 2000). Chemers defines effectiveness for leaders as being able to influence followers towards goal attainment (2000). When leaders match their personal characteristics well with the parameters of their situation, this can help increase leaders' confident behaviors and make them feel in control (ibid).

Traits, skills, behavior, situational factors, and outcomes can be thought of as integrated parts of a relative relationship to leadership (Zaccaro et al., 2018). Rather than having a causal relationship, where one directly leads to another, each factor can be seen to interlock in a forward, backward, or sideways motion like the gears in Figure 22 below (ibid). Once the process starts, pieces start to affect each other. Leaders' personal traits can cause the development and expression of leadership ability (Zaccaro et al., 2018). These abilities, like social acuity and flexibility, can also motivate individuals to demonstrate behaviors helpful for leadership, like responding to the needs of situations in the workplace environment (ibid). Also, certain traits and abilities, like assertiveness and achievement-striving, can predispose leaders towards leadership situations and behaviors, as well as help them to determine the most effective behaviors needed for that situation, as demonstrated in the figure below (ibid).

Figure 22

Interlocking Relationships Between Traits, Skills, Behavior, Situational Factors, and Outcomes



Note. Chart inspired by text from Zaccaro, S. J., Green, J. P., Dubrow, S., & Kolze, M. (2018). Leader individual differences, situational parameters, and leadership outcomes: A comprehensive review and integration. *The Leadership Quarterly, 29*(1), 2-43.

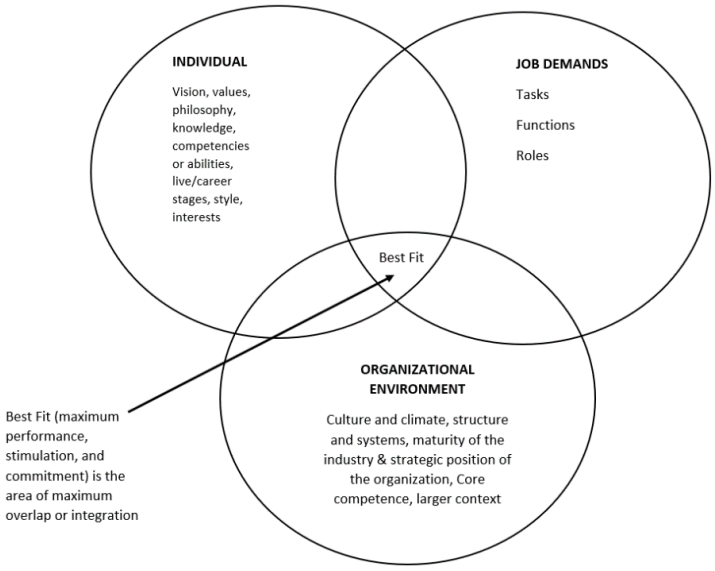
Mid-level leaders demonstrate this dynamic as they are given more of a leadership role in their organization (Adams-Dunford et al., 2019). By demonstrating skills like competency and confidence, they garner trust from followers and establish legitimacy (Chemers, 2000). Once this is accomplished, leaders can coach their followers to motivate them towards goal attainment, as described in path-goal theory (House, 1971). Leaders can use the skills and traits that they and their followers possess as tools to further the institution's mission (Chemers, 2000). It is possible for leaders to be so effective at creating a supportive, motivational work environment where

followers intertwine their personal goals with group goals and are transformed in the process (Bass, 1985). As leaders transition to higher levels within the organizational hierarchy, new leaders “take the training wheels off” and begin to use their own critical thinking skills to make complex decisions (ibid). Their actions are based on the technical skills developed during their entry-level phase of performing management functions (ibid).

Overall, the leadership competency movement challenges the skills and trait theories by proposing that employees can achieve improved performance by mastering competencies or key capabilities needed for work (Chow et al., 2017). The original founder of the competency movement in leadership, Harvard University professor David McClelland (1951), highlighted the importance of intelligence, skills and personal characteristics in the educational realm (Chow et al., 2017). Boyatzis transferred the idea to the management field, defining competencies as capabilities or abilities (2008). Boyatzis noted that a basis for the competency approach is contingency theory, stating that workers achieve their peak performance when their capabilities are consistent with the necessary job skills and the organizational environment (Boyatzis, 2008; Boyatzis, 1982). Since competencies encompass behaviors and personal talents, competencies can be developed over time, so performance can be improved by developing worker competencies (Boyatzis, 2008).

Figure 23

Theory of Action and Job Performance



Taken from Boyatzis, R.E. (2008). Competencies in the 21st century. *Journal of Management Development, 27*(1), 5-12.

Figure 23 further describes contingency theory in the workplace, which lead to the development of competency theory (Boyatzis, 2008). Mastery of key skills in the work environment leads to maximum performance, which is observable by others and demonstrated by outstanding behavioral habits (Boyatzis, 2008). In an article in *The Leadership Quarterly*, Zaccaro et al. called this "performance requirements matching" where the most effective leadership outcomes result when the characteristics of individual leaders highly match the performance requirements of the leader's role (2018).

Leadership Competency Frameworks

Leadership competency frameworks, which focus on listing desirable traits and behaviors for future leaders, form the basis of professional development programs in many organizations (Conger & Ready, 2004). Over time, using competency models has become more popular for leadership development across organization types (ibid). Competency frameworks provide clear

expectations for leader behavior which can be consistently adopted on an institution-wide scale and also be connected to human resource processes like succession management (ibid). Competency frameworks are not perfect, but they can be a useful tool for individual self-evaluation and building leadership development programs (ibid).

Prevailing Community College Competency Frameworks: 2005-2022

To address a projected shortage of leaders, advocacy organizations like the AACC and the Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream conducted qualitative studies to identify skills and behaviors essential for present and future community college CEOs (Tarker, 2019). First, the AACC created a framework in 2005 called the AACC Competencies for Leadership which attempted to pinpoint the skills necessary for community college executives to master their environment (Tarker, 2019). The AACC competencies framework also, "helps emerging leaders chart their personal leadership development process" and informs recruitment and professional development (AACC, 2005, p. 2). Each of the competencies lists describes key skills needed for effective community college leaders, based on extensive qualitative research with college CEOs, seasoned leaders, faculty members and mid-level leaders (AACC, 2005; AACC, 2013; AACC, 2018, AACC, 2022).

The first step towards developing the AACC's leadership competencies list was a 2001 leadership summit which resulted in the creation of a Leadership Task Force by the AACC's trustee board which had various goals: 1) establish a Future Leaders institute for training future leaders and CEOs, 2) create a virtual catalog of university-based community college programs and courses, 3) develop research briefs on leadership, 4) generate a new CEO workshop, and 5) publish a series of "how to" guides for community college administrators (Ottenritter, 2012). The overall themes of the competencies included: leadership can be learned, preparing future leaders

for impending waves of CEO retirements was an urgent need, and behaviors related to institutional transformation are crucial for effectiveness (AACC, 2005; AACC, 2013; AACC, 2018; AACC, 2022; Tarker, 2019).

It is important to note that neither the AACC competencies documents nor the Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream's report were developed by theorists but instead through qualitative research with practitioners i.e. community college staff and CEOs (AACC, 2005; AACC, 2013; AACC, 2018; AACC, 2022; The Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream, 2013; Ottenritter, 2012; Tarker, 2019). I contacted Dr. Angel Royal, Chief of Staff at the AACC who verified that the AACC's competencies list was the result of these qualitative studies and conversations with leaders at all levels of community colleges (K.G. Royal, personal communication, May 20, 2022). The AACC worked with consulting agency ACT, Inc. to develop a report called *A Qualitative Analysis of Community College Leadership* from the Leading Forward Summits which became the building blocks of the first edition of the AACC's competencies list (AACC, 2004). Four editions of the AACC competencies exist, with the first iteration developed in 2005 through a series of Leading Forward Summits involving qualitative surveys and interviews with community college leaders, consultants, and scholars between 2003 and 2005 (Tarker, 2019). The original competencies included: organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism (AACC, 2005). One hundred percent of respondents identified each of the aforementioned six competencies as highly important to the effective performance of a community college leader (AACC, 2005).

Foundational Theories within the AACC Frameworks

A review of the four editions of AACC (2005, 2013, 2018, 2022) competencies shows that leadership principles are entrenched within each of the documents (Tarker, 2019). Professional development is an intrinsic part of the goals for leaders, according to theory (Bass & Avolio, 1993). In fact, leaders feel personally responsible for the development of their followers to ensure that the organization reaches its full potential (Bass & Avolio, 1993).

AACC's Competencies, 1st Edition

The first edition of the AACC competencies reflects components of a variety of foundational theories (Tarker, 2019). Below in Figure 24 is a listing of each competency, along with a summary of the competency's description. A portion of each summary is highlighted to denote similarities to a foundational leadership theory previously described, with the most common theory being contingency theory.

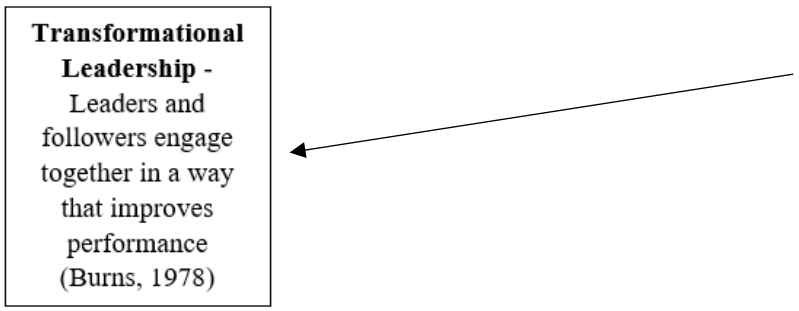
Figure 24

AACC's Competencies, 1st Edition with Foundational Theory

AACC Competency	Summary of Description
Organizational Strategy	Effective leaders protect the health of the organization, strategically improve quality by using data-driven evidence to solve problems and develop a positive

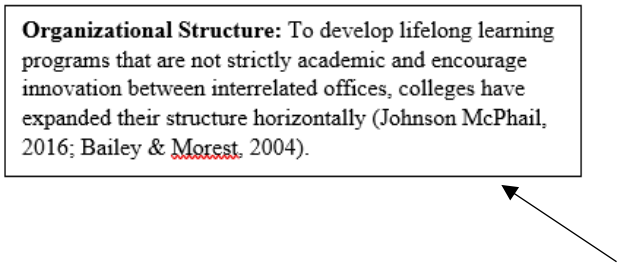
Contingency Theory - workers achieve their peak performance when their capabilities are consistent with the necessary job skills and the organizational environment (Boyatzis, 2008)

	environment to support innovation.
Resource Management **Symbolic leadership:** Organizational policies and reward systems allow followers to better understand the college vision (Winkler, 2010)	Leaders equitably maintain processes and organizational assets to fulfill the vision of the college.
Communication **Systems Theory -** The inputs, outputs, and feedback involved in systems thinking provide leaders with mental and practical tools that guide the understanding and transformation of problem situations (Astaiza-Martínez et al., 2021).	Leaders engage in open dialogue at all levels of the college to support policies, convey ideas, and champion shared values to connect with internal and external audiences.
Collaboration	Leaders embrace diversity, demonstrate cultural competency, and nurture the success of students,



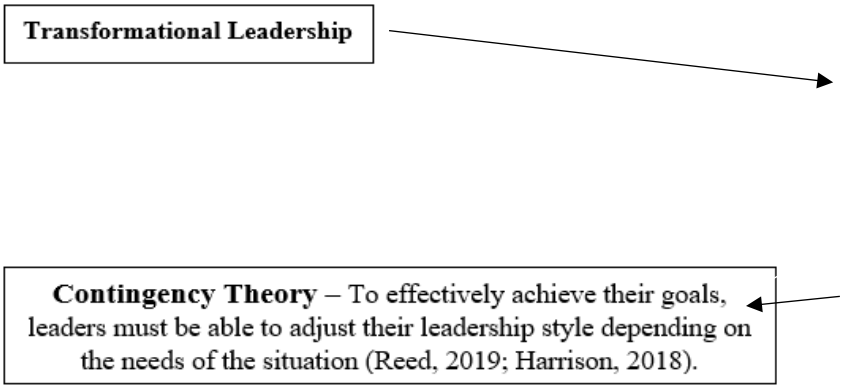
stakeholders, and beneficial relationships.

Community College Advocacy



Leaders promote open access and innovation as primary goals for the college and advance lifelong learning and community college goals as a global model for higher education.

Professionalism



Leaders demonstrate transformational leadership through their authenticity and vision, while regularly assessing their own performance through feedback and evaluation.

Note: Taken from American Association of Community Colleges. (2005). *Competencies for community college leaders.* American Association of Community Colleges.

AACC's Competencies, 2nd Edition

Published in 2013, the second edition of the AACC competencies established a pipeline consisting of three stages of a community college president's career, starting with a pathway to presidency, then the first three years of the presidency, and lastly skills needed after the first three years (Tucker, 2019). These stages are exemplified below in Figure 25. A main goal of publishing an updated edition of the AACC competencies was to increase the longevity of tenure for community college CEOs by describing how skills must be developed over one's career (AACC, 2013).

Figure 25

AACC Competencies, 2nd Edition Subheadings

Note: Taken from American Association of Community Colleges. (2013). *AACC competencies for community college leaders* (2nd ed.). Retrieved from https://www.aacc.nche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/AACC_Core_Competencies_web.pdf

The second edition of the AACC's competencies framework contained five competencies, rather than six: (1) organizational strategy; (2) institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management; (3) communication; (4) collaboration; and (5) community college advocacy (AACC, 2013). Professionalism, the sixth competency from the first edition, was removed, and many of its tenets were absorbed by the organizational strategy competency, such as demonstrating transformational leadership through vision, and understanding the culture of the community college. (AACC, 2013). Each new edition of the AACC competencies reflects the changing environment for community college leaders and a new perception of leadership, which went from being focused more on the individual and institution to including aspects that better address external demands (Eddy & Garza-Mitchell, 2017).

A listing of the AACC competencies from the second edition is included in Figure 26, along with an arrow denoting the leadership theory which shares elements in common with each competency (Tarker, 2019):

Figure 26

AACC's Competencies, 2nd Edition with Foundational Theory

AACC Competency	Summary of Description
Organizational Strategy **Transformational Leadership:** Leaders shape the shared values of the organization but should be ready to change that culture when needed (Bass & Avolio, 1993).	An effective community college leader promotes the success of all students, strategically improves the quality of the institution, and sustains the community college

	mission based on knowledge of the organization, its environment, and future trends.
Institutional Finance, Research, Fundraising, and Resource Management	An effective community college leader equitably and ethically sustains people, processes, and information as well as physical and financial assets to fulfill the mission, vision, and goals of the community college.
Communication	An effective community college leader uses clear listening, speaking, and writing skills to engage in honest, open dialogue at all levels of the college and the surrounding community.
Collaboration & Ethics	An effective community college leader develops and maintains responsive, cooperative, mutually beneficial, and ethical internal and external relationships that nurture diversity, promote the success of all

Situational Leadership: To help followers gain confidence and commitment, leaders use supportive behavior where the leader and follower work together to make decisions, with the leader focusing on facilitating collaborative processes (Blanchard et al., 2013).

Contingency Theory: Mastery of key skills in the work environment leads to maximum performance, which is observable by others and demonstrated by outstanding behavioral habits (Boyatzis, 2008).

	students, and sustain the community college mission.
Community College Advocacy	An effective community college leader understands, commits to, and advocates for the mission, vision, and goals of the community college on the local, state, and national level.

Crisis and Opportunity: Aligning the Community College Presidency with Student Success

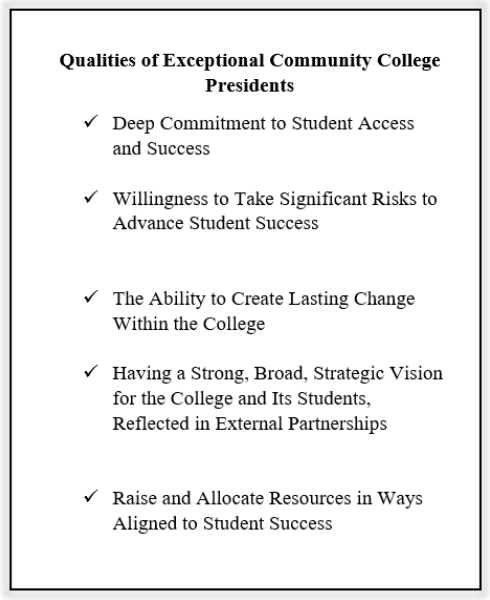
In 2013, at the same time that the AACC was developing and honing its competencies list, the Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream developed a separate framework for community colleges called *Crisis and Opportunity: Aligning the Community College Presidency with Student Success* which was created through a series of focus groups and interviews with community college presidents (The Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream, 2013). This framework divided the key qualities of a community college president into five categories (The Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream, 2013).

The five main attributes of a community college president according to the report are included in Figure 27. These five characteristics are similar to the in number and substance to the five original competencies developed by the AACC (2005). The "Willingness to Take Significant Risks" leadership quality appears to be the most different from any of the AACC

competencies, but review of the report (2013) shows that the most commonly identified risks among college CEOs were low levels of student success and realigning resources, which is reminiscent of the resource management AACC competencies (2005; 2013; 2018). The importance of resource management is underscored by the dominant performance-based funding paradigm in the U.S which ties student success measures to community colleges' main source of funding (Hillman et al., 2018).

Figure 27

Crisis and Opportunity: Aligning the Community College Presidency with Student Success



Note: From The Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream. (2013). Crisis and opportunity: Aligning the community college presidency with student success. Retrieved from https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/files/content/upload/CEP_Final_Report.pdf

The *Crisis and Opportunity Report* emphasized the importance of collaboration between multiple levels of community college professionals and investment in leadership training (Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream, 2013), which was also a theme throughout the AACC competencies. Both the 3rd edition of the AACC competencies shown below (2013) and the *Crisis and Opportunity Report* (2013) include student success as a main quality or competency for leaders. The first three AACC competencies (2005; 2013; 2018) and the *Crisis and Opportunity Report* (2013) share some aspect of resource management and cite the importance of leaders' vision as a key guiding point for each community college.

In a review of literature related to community college frameworks, Tucker (2019) argued that the *Crisis and Opportunity Report* exemplifies a source of potential confusion for leaders attempting to glean meaning from these prevailing community college leadership frameworks. Participatory leadership and collaboration are overarching themes in the AACC competencies documents (2005; 2013; 2018) and the *Crisis and Opportunity Report* (2013), but readers comparing the *Crisis and Opportunity* leadership quality and AACC competency related to collaboration will see that the term is used in a somewhat competing context. The AACC competencies depict collaboration as part of responsiveness, interdependence, and institutional team building (2005; 2013; 2018). However, the *Crisis and Opportunity Report* places collaboration under the leadership quality "the ability to create lasting change within a college" (2013, p. 9). This leadership quality is about eliminating information silos between departments, as well as fostering effective listening and communication (Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream, 2013; Tucker; 2019). Throughout the introduction to the *Crisis and Opportunity Report*, collaboration is described as a joint effort by all those involved in leadership and lauded as a main quality needed for community colleges (2013). Although the two frameworks acknowledge

many of the same leader characteristics, comparing individual competencies in each report creates the illusion that the two are competing (Tucker, 2019).

AACC's Competencies, 3rd Edition

The third iteration of the AACC's competencies was published in 2018 and revised with qualitative research and feedback from the AACC Commission on Leadership and Professional Development, the AACC Board of Directors, the 2018 Presidents Academy Summer Institute, the AACC Faculty Advisory Council, and directors of doctoral graduate programs in community college leadership (Whissemore, 2018). The document itself addressed skills and attributes needed for three separate employee groupings: faculty, mid-level leaders, and senior-level leaders/CEOs (AACC, 2018). Each employee grouping shared the same 11 focus areas, but with each topic customized to capture the unique experience and needs of each employee grouping (Whissemore, 2018). The preamble of the AACC competencies recognizes the differences in duties between job groupings in the community college (AACC, 2018). Several of the competencies are the same or similar to those of previous editions, including a focus on the organizational structure, communication, and collaboration (AACC, 2005; AACC, 2013; AACC, 2018). Three considerations or goals for the updated version of the competencies were named in the report (1) Increasing student access and success; (2) institutional transformation; (3) guiding career progression for professionals at all levels.

The Preamble section of the third edition of the AACC competencies mentions institutional transformation as a critical factor in revising the competencies in 2018 (AACC, 2018). According to the AACC, this transformation means maintaining constant evolution and thinking beyond the conventional modes of program and service delivery (AACC, 2018). The third edition of the AACC's competencies (2018) has many correlations with contingency theory

because of its heavy focus on how leaders can improve outcomes by transforming their work environment and developing key traits needed for success (Fiedler, 1958). These key traits were identified by the AACC as including authenticity, emotional intelligence, ethics, and embracing change (Tarker, 2019; AACC, 2018). Each of the 11 competencies for mid-level leaders, shown in Figure 28, has major tenets in common with contingency theory:

Figure 28

AACC's Competencies for Mid-Level Leaders, 3rd Edition with Contingency Theory

AACC Competency and Focus Area	Correlation to Contingency Theory
Organizational Culture College mission, vision, culture and values	Leaders must ensure that the institutional environment allows for workers to develop the necessary job skills and is congruent with worker behaviors and personal talents (Boyatzis, 2008)
Governance, Institutional Policy, and Legislation College organizational and governance structure, policies and procedures, and Board relations	To increase the probability of task completion and improve interpersonal relationships, leaders must gauge the loyalty and support of followers, as well as reward structures within the organization (Fiedler, 1981)
Student Success Data usage, performance review, evaluation for improvement, and consistency between college operations and a student-focused agenda	To effectively achieve their goals, leaders must be able to adjust their leadership style depending on the needs of the situation (Reed, 2019; Harrison, 2018).
Institutional Leadership Be an influencer, support team building, performance management, lead by example, problem-solving, conflict management, professional development, customer service, and transparency	Leaders can clarify tasks, hire or withhold rewards from team members, and provide additional training to increase worker effectiveness and encourage ideal behaviors (Fiedler, 1981)

Institutional Infrastructure Strategic and operational planning, budgeting, prioritization and allocation of resources, accreditation, facilities master planning and management, technology master planning	Having a high level of task structure (clarity or ambiguity of work tasks) in the workplace is one of the most crucial elements of success (Fiedler, 1967).
Information and Analytics Qualitative and quantitative data, Data analytics	It is essential to analyze the workplace leader-member relations, task structure, and position power, in addition to tracking work outcomes and effectiveness to determine when changes need to be made (Fiedler, 1967).
Advocacy and Mobilizing/Motivating Others College ideals, stakeholder mobilization, media relations, and marketing and social media	Leaders provide individualized attention to their followers and cultivate interpersonal skills to improve leader-member relations (Fiedler, 1981).
Fundraising and Relationship Cultivation Fundraising, alumni relationships, media relationships, legislative relations, public relations, workforce partnerships	To maximize effectiveness, leaders provide constant and individual communication with followers and other stakeholders (Fiedler, 1981).
Communications Active listening, global and cultural competence, multi-generational engagement, email etiquette, fluency with emerging technologies, consistency in messaging, and crisis communications	Leaders must gauge the needs of their followers, as well as environmental factors in the workplace, to make constant adjustments based on the needs of followers and the characteristics of the work environment (Fiedler, 1981).
Collaboration Interconnectivity and interdependence, work with supervisor, institutional team building, collective bargaining	Favorable work outcomes occur when the quality of leader-member relations, degree of clarity of tasks, and the authority of a leader's position are all at a high level (Fiedler, 1967).
Personal Traits and Abilities Authenticity, emotional intelligence, courage, ethical standards, self-management, time management, familial impact, forward-looking philosophy, and embrace change	Workers can improve performance by developing the key traits needed for success (Boyatzis, 2008; AACC, 2018).

Note. Taken from American Association of Community Colleges. (2018). AACC competencies for community college leaders (3rd ed.). https://www.aacc.nche.edu/publications-news/aacc-competencies-for-community-college-leaders/

AACC's Competencies, 4th Edition

A fourth edition of the AACC's competencies was published in Fall 2022 and reflects opinions from community college leaders from different generations, sexual orientations, and positions within the college from entry-level employees to seasoned CEOs (AACC, 2022). In this newest edition, competencies were listed, along with specific illustrations of each competency to demonstrate what each competency means to professionals in each employment grouping (AACC, 2022). The competencies were updated with the goal of adapting and improving upon the third AACC iteration for future and contemporary audiences, especially by looking at the question of leadership competencies through diverse lenses (AACC, 2022). The other three goals of the document were: to support college succession planning, identify and develop new talent, assist employees in honing their leadership skills, and to serve as a reference for prospective new employees interested in higher education leadership (AACC, 2022). The competencies booklet has separate specialized sections for the following expanded employment groupings: Faculty, Entry-Level workers, new Managers, Executives, and the Chief Executive Officer of the organization (AACC, 2022).

The competencies for Mid-Level Leaders share many similarities with the previous edition from 2018, also focusing on the organization's culture and environment, as well as student success, leadership, workplace transformation, and resource development (AACC, 2018; AACC, 2022). This highlights aspects of Fiedler's theory of contingency, encouraging leaders to transform their environment, as well as harness their own skills (1958), to remove institutional bias and meet the unique needs of students and staff so they can all meet their goals (AACC, 2022). A listing of the 4th edition of the AACC's competencies, along with a short description of each and their correlation to contingency theory, is provided in Figure 29.

Figure 29

AACC's Competencies for Mid-Level Leaders, 4th Edition with Contingency Theory

AACC Competency and Focus Area	Correlation to Contingency Theory
Institutional and Cultural Awareness Embraces the college mission, vision, and values	Leaders can provide training to clarify institutional goals and mission, which helps leaders evaluate whether performance is meeting the needs of the organization (Fiedler, 1981).
Student Success An effective manager is on the front line of student access and success and strives to meet the unique needs of students so that regardless of the disadvantages that they have faced or continue to face, they can achieve their educational goals.	Leaders can improve institutional effectiveness by either changing their personality and behavior to match the situation, or by modifying the situation to match their personality by using their level of control and influence (Fiedler, 1981).
Leadership An effective manager understands that employee success depends on harnessing individual leadership skills and working as part of a team.	The quality of interpersonal relationships among a leader and followers/stakeholders is one of the most crucial keys to success (Fiedler, 1967).
Institutional Transformation An effective manager understands the importance of implementing profound change within the institution that has significant impact on the communities that the institution serves.	Leaders must feel empowered to make immediate changes to their workplace environment if something is lacking or if it does not meet the needs of their followers (Fiedler, 1981).
Fiscal Planning and Resource Development An effective manager understands the importance of local and state processes for budget allocation, is a good steward of the dollars allocated to perform job responsibilities and understands the need to seek external funding sources to support innovation.	Leaders must focus on facilitating collaborative processes where the leader and followers/stakeholders work together to make decisions (Blanchard et al., 2013)
Advocacy An effective manager understands and embraces the role of champion with regard to public and government relations advocacy	Leaders provide individualized attention to their followers and cultivate interpersonal skills to improve leader-member relations (Fiedler, 1981).

and mobilization of stakeholders to support the community college core values.	
Partnerships and Collaboration An effective manager cultivates partnerships by investing time in mutually beneficial, ethical relationships where collaboration supports student success.	Abilities like social adeptness help leaders to perceive the needs of a situation and detect which planning and structuring behaviors are needed to enhance success for themselves and followers (Zaccaro et al., 2018).
Communication An effective manager demonstrates effectual communication skills.	Leaders can gain greater influence over followers by strengthening their interpersonal relationships with others (Fiedler, 1981).

Note. Taken from American Association of Community Colleges. (2022). AACC competencies for community college leaders (4th ed.).

An outcome of publishing the AACC's competencies list and the Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream's framework was the development of formal institutes and programs for leadership development. In the first edition of its competencies, the AACC said, "Supporting leaders with exposure to theory, concepts, cases, guided experiences, and other practical information and learning methodologies is essential" (AACC, 2005, p.3). Leadership competencies and abilities can evolve when leadership development experiences are applied (Zaccaro et al., 2018). Leader traits predispose professionals towards certain development activities, like how high cognitive ability and need for achievement increases leader readiness for training, especially activities related to identity beliefs formed from childhood experiences (Zaccaro et al., 2018). Over time, leadership competencies can emerge and grow through leadership development experiences (ibid).

Defining Leadership Development

According to the AACC's competencies documents, employee development was a key consideration in developing the competencies, especially to strengthen skills for career progression and improvement in one's current position (AACC 2005; AACC, 2013; AACC, 2018; AACC 2022). In a 2017 report by the Aspen Institute, researchers recommended expanding leadership development and mentorship opportunities for aspiring high-tier community college leaders in order to develop a more diverse pool of future presidents.

When discussing definitions of leadership development, Allen, et al. (2008) noted a crucial difference between the term leader development and leader*ship* development (Ardichvili & Manderscheid, 2008; Day, 2000). Traditionally, leader development has been mainly focused on the individual leader's skills and abilities (Barling, et al., 1996). Training with this approach generally focuses on one-on-one or intrapersonal training, as well as strengthening skills and abilities (Barling et al., 1996; Neck & Manz, 1996; Skarlicki & Latham, 1997; Stewart et al., 1996). With leader development, there is a clear delineation between followers and leaders (Day, 2000). Allen et al. (2008) and Day (2001) determined that leader development is focused on the individual level, whereas leader*ship* development requires interaction between leaders and the social-cultural environment in which they function.

Olivares, et al. (2007) argued that leader development on an individual scale is important for leadership, but not enough by itself. According to Olivares et al. (2007), leadership requires individual development to be understood and intertwined with social systems, working in tandem with other leaders, and in the context of an organization's mission and goals. It can be thought of as a cycle of promoting and developing a leader's potential (Brungardt, 1996). More recent research suggests that leadership is a complicated exchange between the leader and their environment (Fiedler, 1996). In this school of thought, leadership is an effect rather than a cause

(Drath, 1998) and is a social process involving everyone (Barker 1997; Drath & Palus, 1994; Wenger & Snyder, 2000).

Leadership development seeks to increase the overall ability for employees to participate effectively in leadership roles and processes (McCauley, et al., 1998). The activities aim to build workers' ability to be able to foresee unexpected challenges (Dixon, 1993). Leadership is an ongoing process that can happen anywhere (Fulmer, 1997). Bass (1990) stated that most leadership programs focus on either improving leaders' attitudes, skills, knowledge, personal style, or a combination of these. Development includes both formal and unstructured learning activities, with the goal of growing knowledge and experience continually over the worker's lifetime (Brungardt, 1996). Leadership development in the workforce today recognizes that development can occur as part of work projects which are strategically tied to organizational goals (Dotlich & Noel, 1998).

Kolb (1983) said that learning lessons from experience enhances development. Through their research, Davies and Easterby-Smith (1984) found that job experiences were the most important source of development for skills/abilities like: communication, conflict resolution, delegation, motivation, decision-making, problem-solving, and task-related duties. Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy (1993) said that leadership is enhanced when leaders take time to think about successful and unsuccessful choices. Many foundational researchers have found that mentoring is important to development (Johnson, 1980; Roche, 1979; Zey, 1984; Shapiro, 1985; Kram, 1983).

Mentorship programs, either formal or informal, can support emerging leaders. For example, mid-level leaders might be paired with more senior leaders, or networking events may be held for specific levels of leadership in order to foster informal but long-lasting relationships

(Garcia, 2020). The AACC's 2018 competencies document stressed the importance of executive coaching, as long as the mentee selects their own mentor, and the mentor is familiar with the mentee's exact job duties. Mentorship may lead to increased understanding of new leaders' understanding of their own role, as well as building relationships with senior professionals, and increased overall communication skills (Márquez & Hernández, 2020). It can be a way to identify lower-level leaders who might have an interest in advancement, as well as strengthening skills for those with no desire to move within the organization (ibid). These opportunities provide top-level leaders with an opportunity to assess mid-level professionals' skills, while providing training and giving the option to develop long-term succession plans if the mentee and mentor's goals and needs coincide (Márquez and Hernández, 2020).

General Characteristics of Leadership Trainings

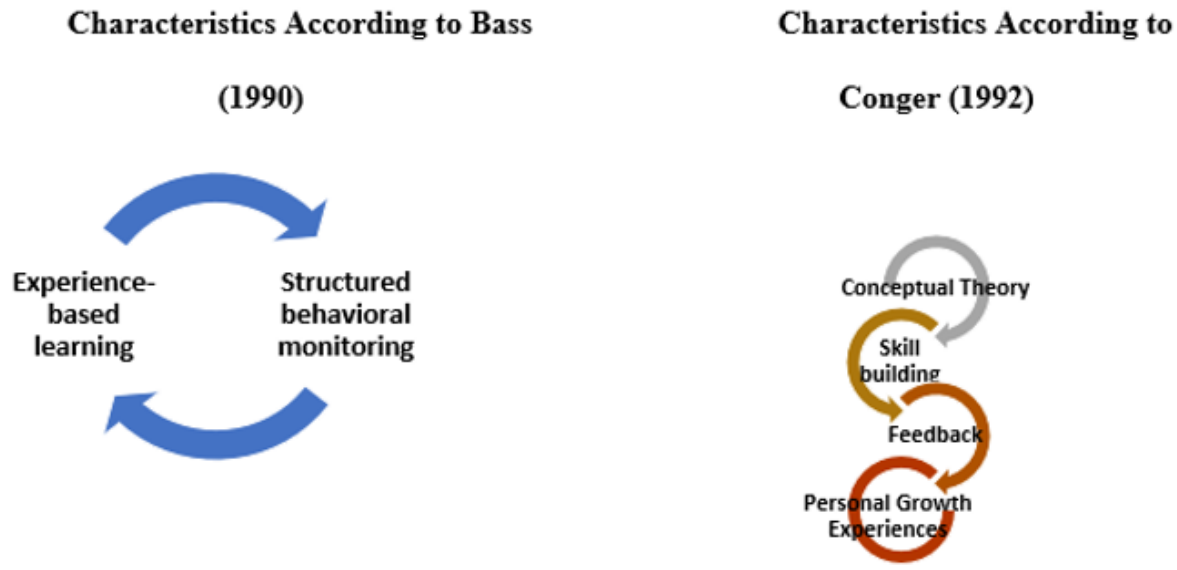
According to Brungardt (1996), leadership development theory tries to identify and explain variables involved in the entire spectrum of leadership development, and it involves learning from one's experience. Bass (1990) stated that experiential approaches combined with structured behavioral monitoring appeared to be the most successful in meeting training objectives. Based on his qualitative research, Conger (1992) developed a framework to help describe leadership development activities by placing them into four categories: personal growth, feedback, conceptual understanding and awareness, and skills building. This means that ideally, leadership development programs should encompass each of the four attributes (Conger, 1992).

According to Conger, programs should begin with teaching conceptual models of leadership where theory is taught, then include skill-building where teachable skills are taught (1992). Skills that cannot be taught could become the focus of awareness building during the training so that future leaders can work on growth in those areas when they return to the office

(Conger, 1992). Skills like communicating, problem-solving, visioning, and decision-making are all behaviors that can be learned (Brungardt, 1996). Once skills are introduced, feedback should be employed to assess how participants interpreted the skills that were presented, followed by more skill building (Conger, 1992). Personal growth experiences should also be employed along the way to help leaders assess motivations for leadership and to free participants of less useful behaviors (Conger, 1992). Figure 30 demonstrates the two-tiered characteristics of leadership trainings according to Bass, as well as Conger's theory which is more process-oriented with each leadership development activity building on the others (Bass, 1990; Conger, 1992).

Figure 30

General Characteristics of Leadership Development Trainings



While most researchers agree that experience can play an important role in development, many also emphasize how important specialized leadership training can be for leaders (Brungardt, 1996). Within the realm of leadership development activities are two more specific methods of growing workers' skills: leadership education activities and leadership training

activities (ibid). Leadership education involves learning activities meant to enhance leadership abilities specifically, such as more formal and structured learning environments that seek to act on the leader to promote their development. Leadership training is meant to enhance education for a specific job position (ibid). Roberts (1981, p. 19) described leadership training activities as "directed at helping the individual being trained to translate some newly learned skill, or piece of information, to a real and immediate situation."

The AACC uses its competencies lists as the framework for the design and development of the curricula for its AACC John E. Roueche Future Leaders Institute and AACC Future Presidents Institute (Wallin, 2012; AACC, 2022). The AACC also encourages community college leaders to use the AACC competencies as a way to converse with colleagues, identify new opportunities in the workplace, and improve skills (AACC, 2018). Programs offering a Doctor of Education degree often focus on skills-based courses as well (Eddy & Garza-Mitchell, 2017). The third edition of the AACC competencies describes a suite of leadership programs which provide supportive spaces for cohorts of leaders to network and learn from each other, as well as senior community college leaders in their area of practice (AACC, 2018). Some of the most popularly attended include the AACC Future Leaderships Institute, The Chair Academy, the Executive Leadership Initiative, and Harvard's Institutes for Educational Management (Forthun & Freeman Jr., 2017). There are also leadership institutes dedicated specifically to ethnic or racial groups present in community colleges, such as the Racial Equity Leadership Academy, National Council on Black American Affairs' Leadership Development Institute, Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities and the National Community College Hispanic Council.

Looking Forward: Implications for Leaders

As part of the conclusion of a literature review, Webster and Watson (2002) recommend providing implications and takeaways for both researchers and leaders. Eddy and Garza-Mitchell recommend that aspiring leaders use formal trainings such as graduate programs to learn multiple frames of reference to look at a problem, but also expose themselves to complex problems (2017). The nonprofit education organization Achieving the Dream encourages community colleges to tap the expertise of all employees, especially mid-level leaders who can help to fill gaps between senior leaders' visions and campuswide implementation of projects (McPhail & McPhail, 2020). Encouraging mid-level leaders to participate in the strategic planning of new initiatives is also a method of practical leadership development to prepare future leaders for the day when they will use existing organization structures to spearhead change (McPhail & McPhail, 2020). Pulling lower-level leaders in as consultants on college initiatives is another way to provide seamless training while also benefitting the organization directly. In an ever-changing environment, community colleges can help ensure their futures by deliberately developing, and depending upon, their mid-level leaders.

Multiple scholars agree with many aspects of the AACC competencies (2005; 2013; 2018; 2022), such as the importance of communication and effectively conveying solutions to problems facing the institution (Eddy, 2010; Eddy, Sydow, Alfred, & Garza-Mitchell, 2015). Conflict resolution and risk-taking are also important for growth (Eddy, 2010; Eddy & Garza-Mitchell, 2017). However, lists of competencies can fall short of the goal if they do not include an experiential learning component (Carroll, Levy, & Richmond, 2008; Duree & Ebbers, 2012). Mid-level leaders with the right competencies and confidence can provide direction to their followers, serving as front-line leaders for change initiatives that lie ahead (McPhail & McPhail, 2020).

Conclusion

In this literature review, I began by introducing the purpose and methods used to systematically analyze theories, models, and history related to leadership and community colleges. After the introduction came an orientation to the context surrounding community colleges, including their history and the legal environment in which they operate. Later, the structure of community colleges was illustrated, along with an explanation of mid-level leaders and the role they play in the institution as it relates to leadership, management duties, and training needs. Key leadership theories were presented which influenced prevailing community college leadership frameworks (Tarker, 2019). These theories demonstrated how skills, traits, and behaviors gathered from multiple theories equip leaders to more effectively respond to the various situations found in the workplace (Zaccaro et al., 2018). To be effective, their personal traits, characteristics of the environment, and the requirements of job roles should be closely matched (Blanchard et al., 2013; Boyatzis, 2008; Fiedler, 1981; Zaccaro et al., 2018). Leaders can use the various competencies present in the AACCs and other leading frameworks and theories presented in this literature review to diagnose their office situation and effectively implement either directing or supportive behaviors to meet the requirements of the environment (Zaccaro et al., 2018). Because designing leadership development trainings was a main goal in developing prevailing leadership theories and competency frameworks, the final part of this literature review was dedicated to characterizing leadership development and overall takeaways for community college leaders based on this work as a whole.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore mid-level community college leaders' perspectives on leadership to identify priorities for future leadership development trainings. Mid-level leaders are found on the organizational hierarchy between entry-level employees and senior-level leaders (Márquez & Hernández, 2020). The number of mid-level positions has risen over the past few decades to become the largest administrative group of professionals in colleges and universities (Adams-Dunford, Cuevas, & Neufeldt, 2019). These leaders serve as the implementers and interpreters of institutional policy for their followers, serving as the driving force for executing organizational priorities (ibid). Mid-level leaders may be needed to move into their college's highest levels soon, especially since a survey by the AACC found that 80% of community college CEOs plan to resign within 10 years (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017; Phillippe, 2016). Possibly even more crucially, community colleges are experiencing their lowest enrollment in 20 years (US Census Bureau, 2022). If mid-level managers are not supported, they may leave the education field before having an opportunity to move within their organization (Weissman, 2023). There may not be enough trained staff to replace the executives that are stepping down.

Mid-level managers face a special lapse in training since organizations tend to invest highly in training front-line and high-level managers but overlook the complexity of life for mid-level managers (Adams-Dunford et al., 2019). Individuals are encouraged to seek opportunities to develop their skills but may not be aware of the competencies needed to be successful (ibid). Due to lack of training, mid-level professionals are perhaps the least prepared to handle workplace conflict when compared to their contemporaries in other levels of colleges and universities (ibid). For this reason, a qualitative study on mid-level professionals at a community

college was implemented to put existing leadership literature into practice while identifying training goals to help develop emerging leaders.

A study on mid-level community college leaders has many benefits. There is a shortage of community college leadership literature because most data centers on four-year institutions (Eddy & Khwaja, 2019). However, organizational needs at community colleges differ significantly from those of four-year universities (ibid). Community colleges across the country could use the findings from this study to implement their own research. Community colleges that already have robust leadership development programs could use this study's results to assess their professional development opportunities. The results of this study will also be of interest to policymakers and researchers, as supporting college affordability continues to be of high importance at state and federal levels (Nguyen, Kramer, Evans, & CEPA, 2018).

Research Questions

Part of the impetus for this research is the scarcity of studies dedicated to the perspectives and training needs of professionals at the middle level of community colleges (Márquez & Hernández, 2020). Because this study aimed to interpret the complexity of lived experiences for mid-level leaders, a qualitative research methodology was employed (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Using open-ended survey questions, this study asked leaders to identify characteristics and skills needed to advance in their organization based on their personal and professional experiences. Leaders were also asked to describe their personal leadership style and whether they are interested in mobility within the college. Contingency theory informed the research and survey questions for this study. Because competency frameworks help identify specific behaviors and characteristics of effective leaders to assist in designing leadership development trainings

(Conger & Ready, 2004), the AACC's competencies frameworks also inspired several of the survey questions.

The research questions that guided this study were:

Research Question 1: What are the top competencies for career success as identified by mid-level leaders at a midwestern community college?

Research Question 2: According to mid-level leaders, what are the most commonly identified training objectives for leadership development at a Midwestern community college?

What follows in this chapter is a comprehensive detailing of the research methodology used to conduct the study, including: (1) a description of the conceptual framework; (2) research design; (3) population; (4) instrumentation; (5) trustworthiness and biases; (6) limitations; and (7) data collection and analysis procedures.

Conceptual Framework

According to Lyons & Doueck, theory in a dissertation provides an organizing framework through which to guide research to complete a study (2010). One use of theory is to explain and describe phenomena, as well as to provide theoretical significance to the research findings, providing a foundation in theory which validates the results (ibid). This dissertation, which focuses on identifying leadership competencies for success and training, had contingency theory as its theoretical framework. Contingency theory is a basis for the competency approach to leadership (Boyatzis, 2008). According to contingency theory, workers can achieve their maximum performance level by ensuring that their personal abilities are congruent with the requirements of their job role and their organizational environment (Boyatzis, 2008; Boyatzis, 1982). Contingency theory encompasses aspects of other foundational theories, such as trait and

behavioral theories, but gives leaders the flexibility to identify which leadership style is the most effective based on a given situation (Fiedler, 1981). Contingency theory is most applicable to groups with interdependent tasks (Miner, 2005) which is exactly the work environment in a community college.

Contingency theory effectively exemplifies the workplace complexity that mid-level community college leaders experience because it measures leader and group effectiveness at multiple levels of analysis (Ayman et al., 1995). To strengthen the theory itself, the main theorists Ayman, Chemers, and Fiedler studied individual leaders' motivations and needs through qualitative and quantitative responses (Ayman et al., 1995; Miner, 2005). Leader and follower experiences of the characteristics of tasks in their workplace were measured by reports from leaders, subordinates, and researcher observations of aspects of various situations (Miner, 2005). Overall team and organizational results were measured through follower satisfaction, performance evaluations, and completion rates of outcome milestones established by the organization (Ayman et al., 1995; Fiedler, 1978).

AACC's Leadership Competencies and Contingency Theory

Competency-based hiring practices are becoming a high priority in the workforce, as opposed to a previous focus on earning specific credentials to qualify for leadership positions (Gallagher & Maxwell, 2019). A main benefit of competencies as a theoretical construct is that they help identify not only ideal behaviors in the workplace but also infer the intent of the worker by clarifying characteristics of average versus outstanding employees (Boyatzis, 2009). The basis for the concept of competency is theory describing worker performance, specifically basic contingency theory (ibid). Both contingency and competency theory aim to predict and explain worker effectiveness (ibid). Competencies attempt to identify general behavioral habits

of successful leaders (Boyatzis, 2009), whereas contingency theory considers the needs of leaders, task requirements, and the organizational environment to predict the most effective actions needed from leaders in varying situations (Fiedler, 1978). In summary, competency theory does not encompass all of the complexity of contingency theory, but it aims to identify readily understood behaviors and characteristics of leaders who have found balance between their individual, job, and organizational needs (Boyatzis, 2009).

Foundational leadership theory, especially contingency theory, is entrenched in each of the four editions of the AACC competencies as seen in the literature review from Chapter 2 (Tarker, 2019). Contingency theory, along with the idea of competencies for mid-level community college leaders, heavily influenced the design of the survey questions for this study. The survey questions for this study and their theoretical origins are included in Appendix A of this chapter. Applications for contingency theory, especially in the context of the AACC's competency framework which has been updated in a world after the COVID-19 pandemic, provided a basis for several points of research which are elaborated upon in the upcoming sections which describe the research design, participants, instrumentation, veracity, limitations of the study, and data collection and analysis procedures.

Design and Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of mid-level leaders at a Midwestern community college as they negotiate the leadership ladder. The study consisted of an open-ended survey which was sent to a total of 480 participants. These participants were defined as staff members with managerial or leader job responsibilities (including project coordinator, developer, specialist, or program administrator). To fit the definition of mid-level leaders, invited participants were neither entry-level nor CEOs. The sample was selected through

convenience sampling, using the college staff directory which is publicly available online. Participants were recruited using emails that were sent out to all staff with leadership responsibilities at the large Midwestern community college (see Appendix C for example email text).

Meta studies on leadership mention response rates of 50% or greater, but electronic surveys tend to have a significantly lower response rate than in-person or mailed surveys (Lucas, Goldman, Scott, & Dandar, 2018; Saleh & Bista, 2017). Therefore, there was an expectation that at least 10-15% of those would take the survey, resulting in a sample of 50 to 60 participants. However, a total of 88 responses were received, resulting in an 18% response rate.

Figure 31 below shows the demographic breakdown of respondents. The vast majority of them (72%) were female, between the ages of 36 and 65 (77%), has been a leader for 15 years or less (74%), and have 5 direct reports or less (79%).

Figure 31

Survey Respondent Demographic Information

Attribute	**Respondents**	**Percentage**
Sample Size	88	100%
Gender	Female 63	72%
	Male 24	27%
	Prefer Not to Say 1	0%
Age Range	26 to 35 15	17%

	36 to 45	22	25%
	46 to 55	29	32%
	56 to 65	18	20%
	65 or older	4	1%
Length of Employment	5 years or less	21	24%
	6 to 10 years	26	30%
	11 to 15 years	18	20%
	16 to 20 years	13	15%
	21 years or longer	10	11%
Number of Direct Reports	No Direct Reports	40	45%
	5 Reports or Less	30	34%
	6 to 10 Reports	9	10%
	11 to 15 Reports	6	1%
	16 to 20 Reports	1	0%
	21 or More	2	0%

The survey consisted of 20 questions (15 open-ended and five demographic) which were developed and sent via email using Microsoft Forms (see Appendix A for survey text). Overall, the survey encouraged staff to expand on their perceptions regarding leadership at a community

college and skills needed for success. The survey began with introductory questions asking about positive aspects and challenges for leadership. Then, respondents were asked about training topics which in their opinion might improve their performance at a community college. Participants were also asked about the skill set necessary for mid-level leaders and their viewpoint on each. They were asked to identify the most important skills to improve their leadership and advance in their careers. Lastly, the survey collected demographics such as gender, length of employment, and whether or how long the respondent held a managerial role. To validate the survey and ensure reliability, I enlisted two mid-level leaders from the Financial Aid & Scholarships office, which was not involved in the research study, to complete the survey before the study began in order to obtain feedback.

Franklin University's Informed Consent Template was used for the informed consent section of the survey. Participants were asked to click a link provided within the recruitment email to access a secure Microsoft Forms document. The first section of the survey page included the consent document and information. Participants were required to click "I agree" before they could access the survey questions. Individuals who clicked "No, I do not agree" to indicate that they did not wish to participate were not able to view the survey questions and instead were instructed to close their browser window. Survey responses were saved on an encrypted Cloud Atlas.ti account. Any printed information was to be stored in a locked location until three years after the conclusion of the research studies, at which time they would shredded according to Franklin University's record-keeping policy. However, no information was printed from the study.

Description of Research Participants

This study focused on mid-level staff members at a large Midwestern community college. Mid-level leaders are defined as staff with leadership responsibilities who are not at the level of Vice President or CEO. Faculty members were not invited to participate. All mid-level leaders at the college were sent the survey invitation email, including Directors, Assistant Directors, Operations Managers, Coordinators, Facilitators, Specialists, and Project Managers. To avoid bias, members of the office in which I am employed were not invited to participate.

Trustworthiness and Researcher's Bias

Ensuring the rigor of an inductive, qualitative study does not involve being able to replicate the study, but rather whether the interpretation of the data is credible and the result of a systematic process that reveals insights into relevant concepts (Nowell & Albrecht, 2019). As such, a direct relationship between the research questions and the open-ended survey questions means that the study is following the requirements for rigor in a qualitative study (Nowell & Albrecht, 2019).

I used inter-rater reliability to ensure that the data was being appropriately coded in a way that is consistent with the methodology of other colleagues. To complete this step, 10% of the survey responses were coded anonymously by a second researcher who used their Atlas.ti account to view a secure shared document consisting of ten percent of the responses. A comparison of the codes and a match higher than 70% ensured the trustworthiness of the study. Having another researcher as a secondary data analyst helped to identify any assumptions that I may have made which could shape the results (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

Limitations

Because this study was qualitative, it is difficult to generalize the findings. That is the study's greatest limitation. Quantitative research studies are able to ensure a random sample and are also able to reasonably produce results which can be considered representative of the total population (Hays & McKibben, 2021). However, the participants of this study participated voluntarily and were not selected at random. Also, this study's results were limited to voluntary reports of individual participants' personal opinions. Respondents were not asked to read any literature on leadership theory prior to participating, and there was no specific level of expertise required to participate.

After several recent phishing attempts at the Midwestern community college at which the study was held, some potential participants may have decided to avoid clicking links provided in emails and may have opted not to participate for that reason.

Facilities and Equipment/Measurement and Instrumentation

The open-ended survey instrument was created using Microsoft Forms software and sent out to participants via email.

Procedures

This study was approved through Franklin University's Institutional Review Board process under the exempt category because the research was completed in an educational setting using a survey format and it posed no more than a minimal risk to participants. Once IRB approval was granted officially by Franklin University, I also obtained IRB approval through my community college of employment. Upon receipt of approval through the study site, the survey recruitment email was sent out to the 480 mid-level staff members of the college. The

recruitment email introduced the survey, explained the goals of the research, and highlighted the confidential nature of the study. It included a link to a Microsoft Forms survey (Appendix B).

Upon accessing the survey link, participants were taken to an overview of the survey, which provided the informed consent information as a condition to proceed to the survey. Additionally, respondents were able to see information regarding the benefits and risks of participation, a description of the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, my Franklin University contact information, as well as that of my dissertation committee chair and Institutional Review Board approving the research. Participants were required to electronically accept or decline their consent, and only those who accepted the informed consent section were directed to the survey. Upon receiving IRB approval at both Franklin University and the research site, I sent out an email including the population of mid-level professional staff members. Two weeks later, I sent a follow-up email to that same group, which resulted in additional survey participants over another two-week period. No follow-up contact was made to participants.

Survey results were collected on a secure Microsoft Forms survey template, using my Franklin University Microsoft 365 account which is password protected and encrypted by Microsoft. The Microsoft Forms template was set so that all information was anonymous, and no respondent information was collected via Microsoft Forms. Once data was collected via Microsoft Forms, it was uploaded to a password-protected Cloud account on Atlas.ti for coding. The Microsoft Forms document was then deleted. Atlas.ti encrypts the data exchanged between web browsers and Atlas.ti Web using the latest TLS authentication, per its website. I was the only person with access to my username and password for Atlas.ti.

Data Analysis Procedures

Atlas.ti cloud was used to code the interview responses. My coding methodology closely mirrored the method developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), one of the most widely used methods of thematic analysis in qualitative study (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). While coding, I was also careful to note elements of foundational theory in action, including competency and contingency theory. I also paid special attention to survey responses which included recommendations from mid-level leaders for future leadership development.

The coding technique that I employed was recursive rather than linear. When coding, I read through the survey responses multiple times, each time reassessing new data and themes that came to light (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). My first step when coding was to familiarize myself with the entire data set by reading all survey responses several times, being sure to actively focus on all responses and possible emerging themes. Step two was to create initial codes by taking note of potential data items of interest, connections between responses, and any questions. These codes did not overlap with other codes, and were inductive, capturing issues raised by the data alone without yet rising to the level of overarching themes. The third step was to analyze my codes to look for broader themes that arose during the coding process. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), it is important to take note of any themes that may be significant, whether or not they are related to the research question (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

Next, themes were identified through an analytical process. I examined the coded data within each theme and verified that the data adequately supported each theme (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). I also ensured that each theme was distinct from other themes (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). For example, I noted overall themes including: (1) the most commonly cited competencies for leaders based on the responses, (2) top barriers for leaders, (3) top training objectives for mid-level leaders, and (4) takeaways for community college administrators due to the COVID-19

pandemic. As points for discussion at the end of this dissertation, I noted similarities and differences between respondents' answers, the AACC's competencies, and foundational leadership and leadership development theory.

Summary

Within this chapter was an overview of the qualitative methodology used for this study. The chapter began by delineating the need for leadership development opportunities to bolster the skills of emerging leaders in community colleges. I then presented the conceptual framework of contingency theory, as well as the AACC competencies which together influenced both this study's research questions and survey questions. Then followed a description of participants in the study, actions taken to ensure reliability, identification of biases and limitations, and lastly procedures. Potential emerging themes were also identified which will be analyzed more thoroughly in the Findings section in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to collect perspectives on leadership from mid-level community college leaders to gather takeaways for future leadership development. In June 2022, I administered open-ended surveys to mid-level staff leaders at a large Midwestern community college. The survey was based on the study's research questions, which explored the following topics: (1) identifying the top skills for career success; and (2) compiling the most commonly identified training objectives for leadership development. As identified in the systematic literature review, the objective for this research study was to address the lack of leadership development research for mid-level community college professionals.

I used an inductive approach to analyze the research, meaning that I allowed the findings to emerge from raw data based on the most commonly occurring and significant themes within the survey responses (Thomas, 2006). By using an inductive approach, I was able to condense large quantities of data into a summary format, establishing links between the research questions and the survey responses (ibid). The recommended coding process involves grouping similar ideas into codes and identifying prevailing patterns and themes in research (Gibbs, 2018). My data analysis led to the emergence of four major themes and 12 related subthemes presented in this chapter. The major themes encompass respondents' most commonly expressed thoughts on leadership. The subthemes further define those themes within the context of the survey questions by drilling down into the various dimensions of skills, challenges, and training objectives for mid-level leaders.

After a description of respondent demographics, the inductive themes from the findings will be introduced, which represent the majority of sections of this chapter: (1) the top competencies for leaders; (2) barriers to mastering those competencies; (3) suggested topics for

leadership development; and (4) takeaways from the COVID-19 pandemic for mid-level managers.

Survey Questions and Numbers of Respondents

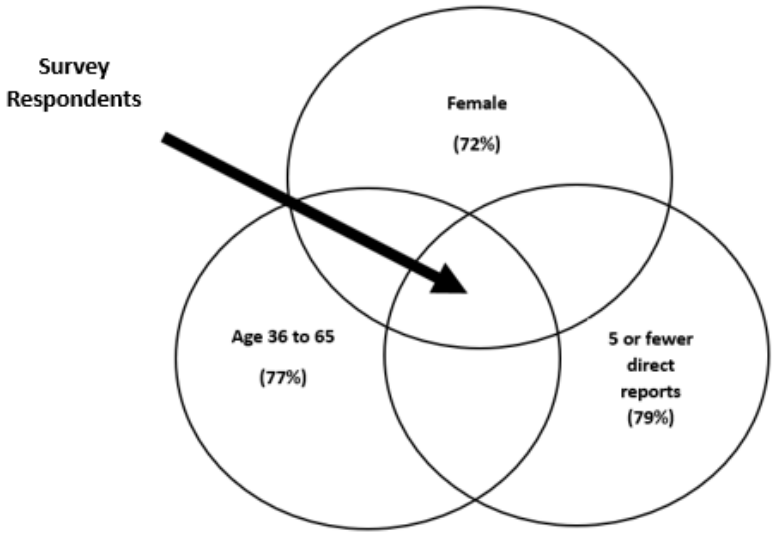
The survey questions asked participants to provide responses based on groupings of topics related to the skills and characteristics of effective leaders. The survey began with introductory questions asking respondents what they enjoyed most and least about working at a community college in general. Then, respondents were asked to share any career advancement goals or plans they had. Next, they were asked to describe their own leadership style and aspects of leadership which they enjoy. Participants were next asked to identify qualities of successful leaders and challenges that they face. Respondents were asked how their leadership role changed over the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were also asked to identify any pitfalls for leaders to avoid, such as common mistakes that negatively affect the workplace. Towards the end of the survey, respondents were asked to identify training opportunities to improve their leadership performance. Subsequently, participants were encouraged to identify any competencies or skills which they find important to success as a mid-level leader. Lastly, the survey collected demographics such as gender, length of employment, whether the respondent was a manager, and if so, for how long. Appendix D comprises a summary of questions with the top five most common responses.

Out of the 2,500 total college employees, the survey was emailed to 480 staff members with leadership roles (Fast Facts, 2023). The demographic breakdown of the 88 respondents revealed several shared characteristics among the majority of survey participants. The participant sample was divided nearly in half between leaders with direct reports and those with no direct reports. The vast majority of respondents (72%) were female, between the ages of 36 and 65

(77%), have been a leader for 15 years or less (74%), and have 5 or fewer direct reports (79%). This mostly female gender breakdown is consistent with research demonstrating how the staff sector of community colleges has a higher concentration of females than any other realm of higher education (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2017). In fact, an article from the journal New Directions for Community Colleges called the community college workplace a "feminized space" (ibid, p.52). I found no significant differences between survey responses made by male versus female participants.

Figure 32

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents



Trustworthiness of Study

When compiling my findings for the study, I identified 155 codes and 10 code groups. The most prevalent code groups became the themes of this chapter, outlined in Figure 33 below. To ensure the trustworthiness of my analysis, an anonymous professional methodologist coded 10% of my survey responses for comparison, as outlined in the previous methodology chapter. There was nearly a full overlap of codes in common when I compared the other researcher's

codes to mine, with nearly all of them paraphrasing mine. After completing my coding process, I used the OpenAI coding feature of the coding software Atlas.ti to generate a code report, which was also very comparable to my own. Figure 33 below represents a list of my 10 code groups, as compared to the code groups of the anonymous researcher who coded 10% of the survey responses. The third column shows the code groups as developed by Atlas.ti by using the OpenAI feature which allows artificial intelligence to develop codes and groups.

Figure 33

Comparison of Code Groups

My Code Groups	Anonymous Researcher	AI Code Groups
Career Mobility	Career Advancement	Job Mobility
Barriers for Leaders	Challenges for Leaders	Mistakes
Mistakes	Common Mistakes of Leaders	Mistake
Takeaways from COVID-19	COVID Change as a Leader	COVID Lesson
Career Wants	Job Mobility	Want Job Mobility
Leader Qualities	Leadership Style	Leader Quality
Enjoys/Do Not Want	Most/Least Enjoy About Work at a Community College	Helping Students
Leadership Style	Qualities of a Leader	Leader Style
Top Competencies	Skills as a Leader	Competency
Top Training Objectives	Training Opportunities	Training Topic

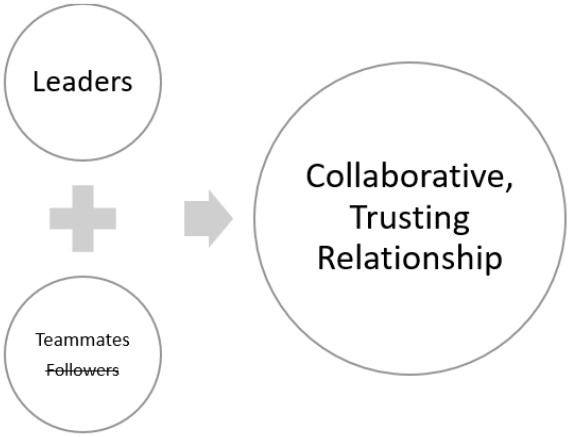
Introduction to Themes

This introduction will present the overarching takeaways from the study, exploring the collaborative relationship between mid-level leaders and their followers, as well as the importance of sharing feedback with colleagues. Most respondents did not refer to the leader-follower relationship as such, but instead mentioned leaders and "teammates." This demonstrates the perspective of leaders as equal partners with fellow professionals who work together to achieve common goals for the college. Survey participants stressed the importance of the leader/teammate relationship more often than any other comments. Communication and collaboration were the strongest recurring overall themes throughout the survey responses. Respondents expressed enjoying the process of sharing ideas with their team and valued feedback very highly. Participants expressed how important it is for leaders to be open to the opinions of their teammates.

Participants mentioned micro-managing as the hallmark of an ineffective leader. Twenty-four respondents recommended that leaders, "give the team room to grow and be creative," so that colleagues can, "take ownership of projects" without the leader's strict oversight. For respondents, giving colleagues breathing room to work allows teammates to develop their own leadership style and explore their needs and goals. It sends a clear message that leaders trust their teammates as capable professionals. For respondents, this competence includes knowing when to reach out if guidance is needed. Instead of closely monitoring teammates, respondents urged leaders to develop a respectful and trusting relationship built on strong communication, listening, and a consistent feedback loop.

Figure 34

Leaders Plus Teammates (Not Followers) Make Collaborative Relationships

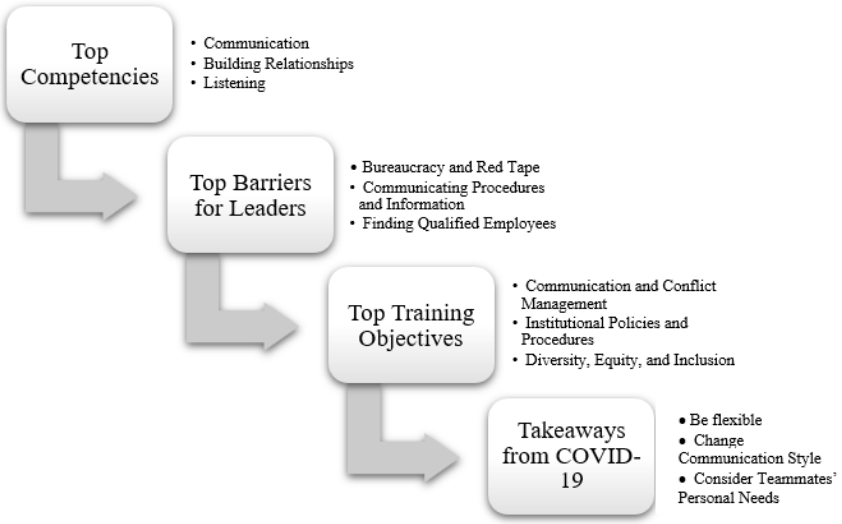


Communication was by far the top skill mentioned for leaders, occurring more commonly than any other topic, suggestion, or takeaway. It was the most commonly acknowledged competency for leaders based on the responses, cited in both the first and second most often-reported barriers to leader success, the top requested topic for future leadership development trainings; and was numbered as a main lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic. The second most frequent takeaway within the survey responses was related to collaboration. A total of 29 respondents, or one third, reported their main style of leadership as collaborative.

Below is Figure 35 summarizing the various themes and subthemes which will be presented throughout this chapter.

Figure 35

Themes and Subthemes of Study



Theme 1: Top Competencies for Mid-Level Leaders

The survey included questions asking each mid-level leader to identify at least three main skills necessary for leadership success. Respondents had the option to provide more than three competencies if they chose. When evaluating survey responses, three competencies emerged as clear themes: (1) communication, (2) building relationships, and (3) listening. Figure 36 below compiles the most prevalent competencies, along with their frequency and direct quotes from respondents describing each.

Figure 36

Top Competencies and Descriptions

Competency	Number of Responses Containing Competency	Description of Competency
Communication	45	"Being able to articulate thoughts and communicate information with other people"; "Leaders need to distribute information that is understandable to all"

		"You must be able to state clearly what your expectations or needs are"
Building Relationships	21	"Making connections" "Knowing who from across the institution can help with various projects and initiatives and having a relationship with them so that they want to help"
Listening	19	"A good listener will hear even the things that aren't being said."

Competency: Communication

By far the most referenced skill for leaders was communication, according to respondents. Many identified communication as a key to success, especially for mid-level leaders who are often required to communicate across multiple tiers of the organization, both with frontline workers and high-level leaders. For respondents, effective and considerate communication is crucial. One participant said, "this is critically important because it is necessary to be able to articulate and compose information in a respectful manner using inclusive and equitable language as opposed to divisive and exclusive language."

Another pervasive dimension of communication was sharing information across departments. Respondents cautioned that it can be difficult for multiple departments to keep up with policy, staff, program, and Human Resources policy changes. At this Midwestern community college, participants reported unfamiliarity with lesser-known policies such as, "hiring and firing" and policies related to part-time staff members. When pinpointing the cause of this issue, a respondent noted, "minimal collaboration between departments (silos)." For mid-level leaders, this means tools and resources that could benefit all departments are not being

shared. One respondent mentioned that this information isolation results in, “different mentalities between staff/faculty.” Several respondents spoke of staff members feeling disconnected from faculty members, with each side feeling less able to relate to one another.

Below in Figure 37 are quotes from participants illuminating the main themes related to communication.

Figure 37

Aspects of Communication Per Respondent Feedback

Aspect of Communication Competency	Response
Communication as Crucial	“This is the building block for relationship which is what connects us to those we lead”
	“Communication - this is the crux of leadership”
Communication at Multiple Levels	“Communication: mid-level typically means you are reporting up and down the org chart”
	“Ability to communicate clearly and effectively needs of those under my leadership to those who are above me in the system and vice versa”
	“Communication is built into nearly every crevice of our careers. We must not only express ourselves clearly and effectively, but we must also be able to effectively listen and engage our stakeholders and co-workers.”
Importance of Effective Communication	“No matter what level of leadership communication cannot be avoided and you must be able to communicate effectively and efficiently to ensure that the messages are appropriate, clear, concise, professional, etc.”
	“Without clear communication, details can be missed and projects can be completed that don't match the necessary parameters.”
Communicating Procedures and Information	“Communication of policies and college initiatives, particularly across division lines”
	“Sometimes the right hand does not always speak to the left hand on changes, keeping the needed areas informed, etc. and this creates

	issues when you are not informed as a leader to properly make the changes within your department or be able to communicate the items to your staff."

The importance of clear communication could not be overstated throughout the survey. One respondent mentioned that communication is, "important to success because the more information people have, the better they can do their jobs." Several respondents mentioned the verb "articulation" in their responses defining the competency of communication. Respondents stressed the importance of leaders being able to articulate or clearly state their intentions, expectations, and needs. Mid-level leaders who are not able to clearly articulate will likely experience several issues which can arise, described in Figure 38 with quotes from respondents:

Figure 38

Pitfalls of Not Clearly Articulating Information

- **Projects will not be correctly implemented: "**If objectives, outcomes, and/or goals are not communicated clearly, the tasks and/or projects may not be completed properly and/or on time."
- **Conflict can arise:** "If the leader does not communicate with her/his team well, the team will begin to work around the leader or talk amongst themselves reducing respect for them."
- **Team members can be left discontented:** "The needs of the team may go unfulfilled."

For respondents, strong communication skills are especially important for mid-level leaders. Not only do they regularly convey ideas to members of their own departments, but also throughout the college and community. Others mentioned working with internal stakeholders as well as external organizations. One respondent reported, "I have to get key concepts across to front-line staff and executive leadership." It is important to communicate using many different styles, or as one leader said, "various methods with the understanding that individuals process

information differently." To convey these key concepts, each mid-level leader must be a "translator" to communicate messages to different departments. This is especially true in higher education where teams can be highly specialized, with intricate policies and procedures. These translators are needed so that every stakeholder has the same understanding of the goal and can weigh in on the best ways to implement projects.

To effectively translate ideas, respondents recommended using the jargon and preferred method of communication for each type of stakeholder. For example, some departments might prefer to use Microsoft Teams for quick communications about sudden updates. Financial Aid, Registration, and Academic Advising may use acronyms at times to describe policies and should strive to make communications as accessible to a wide public as possible, especially considering the large number of front-line workers who are new to the college. Fortunately, one respondent had advice for mid-level leaders trying to tackle the skills needed for effective communication: "Sometimes, I have to tailor messaging so each stakeholder groups gets the necessary information, which could be more detail-orientated or tactical for front-line staff, and high-level/outcomes oriented for executive staff." When communicating, leaders should consider their audience's perspective and background to ensure that their message is being conveyed in an effective way.

Competency: Building Relationships

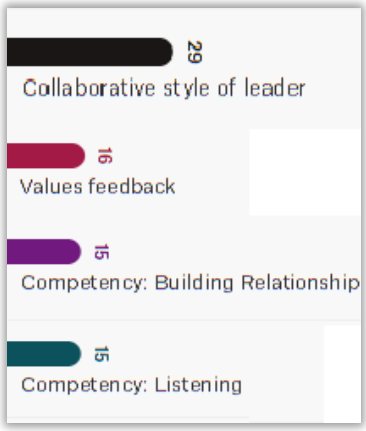
Another crucial aspect of building relationships is the ability and willingness to seek input from teammates. Respondents described building relationships as sharing and receiving ideas, both from team members within the same department and developing stakeholder relationships in other offices. One respondent explained these two dimensions, "Our institution is so interconnected that it requires us to be collaborative, both with those within our department

and other departments." Participants often mentioned tackling problems by consulting their teammates who share the same goals: "I like to hear from the team to identify the real problem and then problem solve together." Leaders reported trying to involve all stakeholders who might be affected by the project at hand: "I like to get input from involved parties and then review them in line with expectations and desired outcomes."

Figure 39 below shows the frequency of codes related to collaboration throughout the survey responses. In twenty-nine responses (33%), participants identified their own leadership style as collaborative. Sixteen responses (18% of participants) mentioned valuing feedback, and building relationships and listening were identified as important skills in 15 responses each.

Figure 39

Collaboration-Related Code Frequency



To achieve the competency of Building Relationships, respondents recommended starting with direct reports and colleagues within one's own department. It is important for leaders to get to know their employees, especially taking, "the opportunity to find ways to find strengths and encourage greatness." By motivating employees to leverage their strengths, leaders help

colleagues feel valued, which motivates them to perform at their best. Once mid-level leaders feel confident that their relationship with their core group of teammates is strong, they can start networking with stakeholders throughout the organization.

The figure below summarizes common pieces of advice about building these foundational relationships.

Figure 40

Tips for Developing Supportive Teammate Relationships

- ✓ "Connect with people on an individual level"
- ✓ "Employ empathy and establish trust"
- ✓ "Practice discretion when information is shared with them"
- ✓ Support each other: "A team also expects their leader to advocate for them in meetings and to other leaders."
- ✓ "Knowing everyone's strengths, weaknesses and interests allows the leader to position everyone for success."

For respondents, networking is another key to ensure success. For survey respondents, this includes developing a strong rapport within the department and also creating a web of tightly knit colleagues from other key departments. A benefit of building relationships with stakeholders from other offices is to encourage leaders to combine their resources to support one another. One respondent advised, "It is vital you have one good contact (ideally in a position above your own) in each of the offices you typically need to work with. This person can help elevate your wants/needs and create space for your own and your project's advancement." Relationships between departments have the benefit of sharing expertise to achieve better outcomes.

To begin collaborating with outside partners, staff members can start by identifying stakeholders who might be helpful for future projects. Leaders can do this by thinking about how

their office workflow interacts with operations in other departments: “thinking about how it braids into the other work being done at the college.” This can help mid-level leaders identify opportunities for collaborating with other departments. For example, there may be processes that are being duplicated by other offices, or projects that could be better implemented with the support of staff from other departments.

Competency: Listening

A total of 30 respondents, over one third, mentioned listening as an important skill for leaders to develop. Respondents stressed the necessity of making a, “commitment to listening to all constituencies before making decisions.” For mid-level leaders, actively listening to teammates’ entire message must become a habit, since it is, “the heart of conflict resolution.” Leaders can use listening as a tool to prevent conflict. Respondents recommended that leaders make themselves aware of what their team members need, because employees want to be heard. One mid-level leader provided advice for how to achieve this: “A good listener will hear even the things that aren't being said. A good listener asks probing questions to dive deeper into things.” Another respondent supported this idea with their own perspective, recommending that leaders, “ask follow up questions to better understand expectations, what’s needed, etc.”

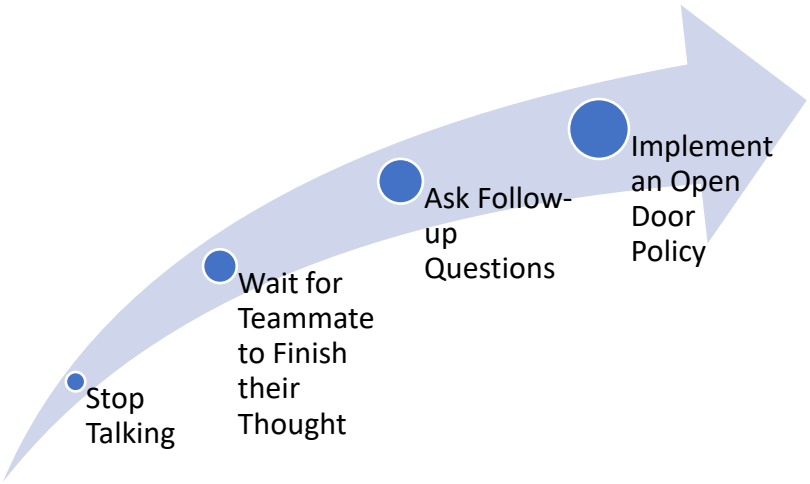
For the survey participants, part of listening is humbling oneself to, “recognize they do not know everything.” Leaders can make grave mistakes if they do not lean on their teammates’ expertise. One stated, “It is just as important to listen as it is to communicate.” Being a leader does not mean always being the one speaking. One respondent said that leaders sometimes assume that they know what their colleague means to say in a conversation. However, “if we take the time to listen, we may find that the other person has a great deal of important things to

say, and our listening may give them the chance to talk things out and develop their own response."

To master the competency of listening, respondents recommend first making sure that others are given many opportunities to speak, keeping in mind that teammates are vital resources. Leaders should not be, "talking non-stop" or, "hear part and then leap to the conclusion." Instead, they need to wait for their colleague to express their full thoughts. Respondents recommended letting teammates know that their expert opinion is highly valued. When conversing with coworkers, mid-level leaders recommended continuing the conversation until they achieve a full understanding of what is being said. Several respondents mentioned the importance of having an "open-door policy" where teammates can approach their leader about any topic. Having the patience to listen to all concerns can give leaders the chance to help teammates talk their issues out to find the most appropriate solutions, especially if they are experiencing problems that could affect office processes.

Figure 41

Suggestions for Better Listening



Respondents recommended that other leaders be open to receiving regular input and constructive criticism from teammates to make sure they are serving at their best. For participants, listening to feedback means being open to others' ideas. Respondents recognized that hearing negative feedback can be unpleasant, but it is important to check in with teammates consistently. When listening to feedback, one respondent recommended that leaders keep in mind that each person has a unique perspective based on their background and personal experiences. That respondent recommended, "Listen without judgment . . . Our journeys have been different/unique to our culture, heritage, and generation."

Theme 2: Top Barriers for Leaders

Throughout the survey responses, participants identified barriers to success which affect mid-level leaders in particular. These issues are especially pertinent in a post-pandemic world where services and processes are being provided in a hybrid environment, using multiple new technologies and methods of communication.

Challenge: Bureaucracy and Red Tape

Twenty respondents pointed to the bureaucratic format of community colleges as being a cause for inefficiencies, lost time, and confusion for mid-level leaders. One respondent noted, "Working with broken tools means the team's output potential will always be limited." Over 20 participants brought up bureaucratic "red tape" as an issue that reduces the college's effectiveness. Several participants observed how decisions often must be approved by a committee via processes which can seem elusive or hard to pinpoint. One respondent mentioned that "we have quite a few, very detailed processes in order to make any kind of change." Another respondent tried to explain why: "It is hard to get things done because it seems everything needs

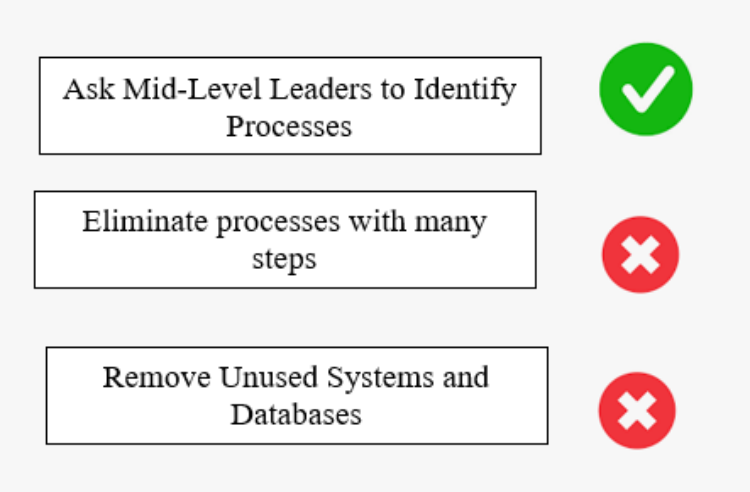
to be approved by a committee." Complicated processes that aren't effectively conveyed lead to inconsistencies, "especially in references and procedures" in procedures and staff manuals. One respondent lamented that, "some of the bureaucracy/red tape causes decisions to be delayed or not happen at all."

When identifying the source of the red tape, several respondents cited outdated processes. At times, colleagues continue ineffective procedures because they are "the way we always have done it." In a constantly changing environment, it is important for the college to audit processes to ensure they are up to date. One respondent pointed out that one barrier to completing administrative tasks is the plethora of data systems and software needed to complete processes. They said, "I of course am not a fan of all the systems we use and wish there was a way to get our work done efficiently without so many systems." However, two respondents pointed out that staff members who are truly committed to the college's mission should reach out to help others who are struggling.

Several respondents had other suggestions for improving this problem. One stated that they would like to find a way to complete their work without using so many systems, which others defined as using different webpages or portals to complete similar tasks. A suggestion was made to help staff learn to use the Help Desk portal and other internal tools to be better able to find needed information on their own. Others wondered whether there would be a way to update some processes so that there are fewer steps involved. One mentioned, "hoop-jumping and 'this is the way we always have done it' getting in the way of progress." Therefore, the college could ask mid-level and high-level leaders to identify processes in need of updating. Respondents appeared to be ready with processes in mind that were in need of improvement. Figure 42 below summarizes the main takeaways from survey participants to help reduce red tape.

Figure 42

Cross Red Tape Off of the College's List



Ten respondents noted that the COVID-19 pandemic showed them how processes can change. One leader said, "Pre-COVID, many of our procedures were somewhat set in stone, informed by many years of experience. During COVID, we had to find new, creative ways of doing things." Crucially, another respondent noted how the old ways of doing things are often no longer appropriate: "…student expectations have shifted, and we must find new ways to meet their needs." This underscores the importance of innovations such as those suggested in Figure 42 above. Keeping processes updated and streamlined is a key factor in staying flexible enough to adapt to new challenges.

Challenge: Communicating Procedures and Information

Continuing with the overarching theme of communication, ten respondents cited communicating procedures and information as a main issue hindering leadership at the college. Respondents generally defined this barrier as, "understanding policies, procedures, laws, as they apply to what we do and being able to pass that information on effectively to others." They explained that understanding policies can be very difficult due to constant change, including

turnover of key staff members, changes in laws and policies, as well as changes in the various systems and software types used by the college. To respondents, part of the problem is the minimal collaboration between departments, which can appear like, “silos” where information is kept in separate departments but not shared for the benefit of all. A few respondents mentioned that staff and faculty can often feel as though they live in different universes within the college, which decreases the chance of information sharing.

Lack of communication results in situations where, “sometimes the right hand does not always speak to the left on changes, and keeping the needed areas informed.” Leaders in one department might not inform stakeholders in neighboring offices that might be affected by a new decision. This leads to stressful situations where teammates have to react to unforeseen problems. Respondents reported feeling uneasy in these situations, noting that sometimes there are expectations placed on them of which they are not aware, and therefore cannot fulfill. One recommendation for improving in this area is for leaders to share tools and resources among their colleagues so that everyone can grow from that knowledge.

Challenge: Finding Qualified Employees

Especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, mid-level leaders noted changes in the workforce that make it especially difficult to recruit, attract, and retain employees. One respondent noted that there are, “lots of competitive jobs with better pay and benefits” in other fields, which makes working in a community college less attractive. Several participants mentioned that they do not feel that their achievements and hard work are acknowledged enough, which makes them feel less fulfilled even when they know they are doing a great job. Eight respondents noted the lack of advancement opportunities at the college, so even the best and brightest do not feel that they have enough access to mobility within the organization. This is a

major issue because 61 respondents (69%) expressed interest in moving within the institution rather than staying in their current position. A total of 14 respondents (15%) expressed wanting to be a departmental director, with six (0.07%) interested in becoming a Vice President. Two respondents (0.02%) reported that they plan to become community college Presidents. It is important that mid-level leaders continue to feel engaged so that they do not go elsewhere. In fact, nine respondents reported plans to leave the college in the near future. Six more participants (0.07%) were unsure if they wanted to move further up the organizational hierarchy, often because they did not want to sacrifice the balance between work and their personal life.

Figure 43

Interest In Job Mobility

Question	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Are you interested in job mobility?	Yes	61 respondents	69%
	No	22 respondents	25%
	Maybe	5 respondents	6%

According to respondents, recognizing potential talent in a new employee is a challenge. One respondent lamented, “Recognizing proven talent is comparatively easy. But selecting candidates with skills and attitudes to make an impact on the success of the organization is more difficult.” That same respondent noted that leaders who are able to successfully support emerging leaders will find them to be loyal to the institution, “that recognized their potential and gave them opportunity.” Participants pointed out that encouraging new professionals is a way to welcome individuals of more diverse backgrounds, adding richness to the organization.

Theme 3: Top Training Objectives

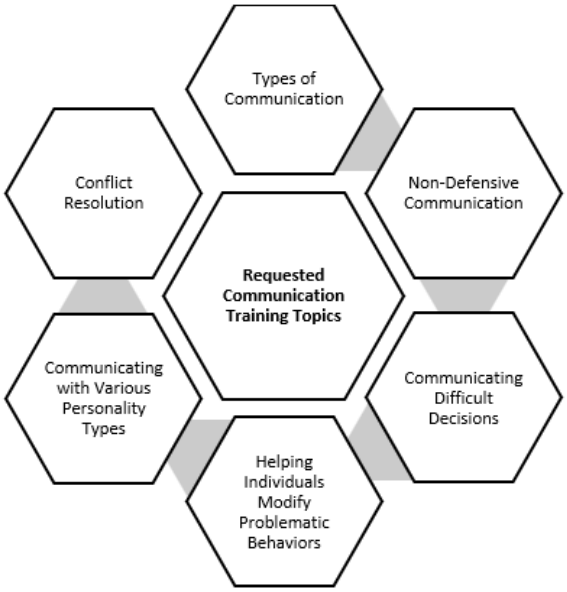
It may come as no surprise that the most commonly cited training topics were those of conflict resolution and improving communication skills. Twelve mid-level leaders firmly stated that development activities should involve peers so that professionals can share ideas. Another suggestion from several respondents was to provide opportunities for projects where mid-level leaders could collaboratively work together towards a goal. They recognized that they do not often have, "opportunities for managers to get together from time to time to bounce ideas off one another, help each other on how to deal with a situation, etc." Making these key, "inter-departmental connections" to share perspectives could be a game-changer with regards to teambuilding and collaboratively improving processes at the college. Seventeen participants mentioned the phrase, "lead by example" in their response when asked to describe key qualities for leaders. Using other successful leaders to model effectiveness affords more opportunities to do just that.

Training Objectives: Communication and Conflict Management

Respondents expressed interest in learning about various communication topics, specifically (1) the different types or styles of communication, (2) non-defensive communication strategies, (3) how best to discuss or communicate difficult decisions, (4) how to help individuals modify behaviors that are problematic in order to effectively address issues as they arise, (5) collaborating with colleagues who possess various personality types, and (6) conflict resolution. A representation of these topics is illustrated in Figure 44 below.

Figure 44

Requested Communication Training Topics



Overall, respondents were interested in multiple facets of these topics like, “learning how to deliver feedback/unwelcome news in a positive way.” This was called, “diplomacy” by respondents. Participants were knowledgeable about several key causes of conflict. They were also clear about the topics in which mid-level managers could develop their skills. For example, respondents saw that identifying problematic behaviors and communication pitfalls that could cause conflict is key. Therefore, learning how to help teammates address triggers and correct issues was a high priority. In respondents’ experience, self-management can help with this skill. One participant said, “I've learned that a key skill is managing myself -- my reactions, my reaction time, even my facial expressions -- in order to lift up people so that we do the very best work.”

Taking time to process and master one’s emotions was called “patience” by several mid-level leaders. They described patience as another way to make it easier to process unpleasant feedback: “It’s important to take time to digest change/information/new loads of responsibility without getting upset or bitter. It’s also an important skill when you are faced with staffing

challenges or staff that are complaining or discontent." In addition to developing this skill of patience, Leaders were interested in being better able to face confrontation. They also expressed a desire to become better mediators so that they could step in and feel confidently able to help diffuse difficult situations. Participants recognized that varying personality types and communication styles in the workplace can cause conflict if leaders are not knowledgeable about their colleagues' needs. Therefore, they were interested in learning about different personality types and communication styles so that they could recognize them in their teammates.

Training Objective: Institutional Policies and Procedures

Seventeen respondents requested staff development activities related to institutional policies and procedures, specifically human resources policy and administering departmental budgets. Two staff members noted how they felt, "thrown into" a new managerial or leadership role without having the proper tools, especially, "hard skills" like navigating the internal software programs required to manage everyday tasks such as approving timesheets and monitoring departmental spending. Budget management was the most common single topic related to procedures. Mid-level leaders were interested in learning how to develop a budget, with doubts especially about the internal college process of using the budget tool within the staff portal. They expressed confusion about, "the budget process" which includes how often to monitor the budget, troubleshooting tips, and how to ensure compliance when overseeing their office budget.

Separate recommendations for training development included strengthening skills related to, in respondents' words, "less-common" policies, specifically the needs of part-time staff members and institutional policies on overall concerns that all staff members periodically experience, like maternity leave and the various types of personal leave that staff can utilize in

certain circumstances. Examples included the Family Medical Leave Act for staff that exhaust their personal and sick leave, as well as bereavement leave. Additionally, participants acknowledged that some training courses exist for new managers, but they are optional. Leaders requested required orientation sessions for new managers outlining expectations for their new role. These sessions could include the aforementioned policy-related skills of navigating internal systems to approve timesheets and manage budgets. Figure 45 below shows a summary of the training topics requested by mid-level leader participants.

Figure 45

Commonly Requested Policy and Procedure Trainings

Training Objective: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

An additional training topic was related to a main priority of the college: diversity, equity, and inclusion. Respondents acknowledged the variety of existing learning activities on this theme, and several mentioned that they attend those regularly. However, they had specialized recommendations that would be helpful for mid-level leaders. One request was, "being afforded training to become a certified DEI practitioner." This would allow mid-level

leaders to not only become more knowledgeable but also train their staff on diversity-related topics. Several respondents noted that being familiar with diverse perspectives would help to prevent conflict, conserving institutional resources in the long run. One participant noted that, "…DEI training helps with supervision and hiring as well as student interactions." Figure 46 demonstrates the main benefits of training mid-level leaders on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Figure 46

Mid-Level Leader Benefits of Completing DEI Training

Several participants mentioned cultural competency as a skill that can help leaders interact harmoniously with their teammates. It can help leaders understand and empathize with their teammates' perspectives. Understanding colleagues' unique needs based on their culture and experiences helps leaders to ensure that no one feels excluded or left out. One respondent mentioned that empathetic leaders, "tell people what they need to know without alienating them." Respondents defined cultural competency as learning about teammates' cultural backgrounds. They also stressed that leaders become very familiar with the overall office

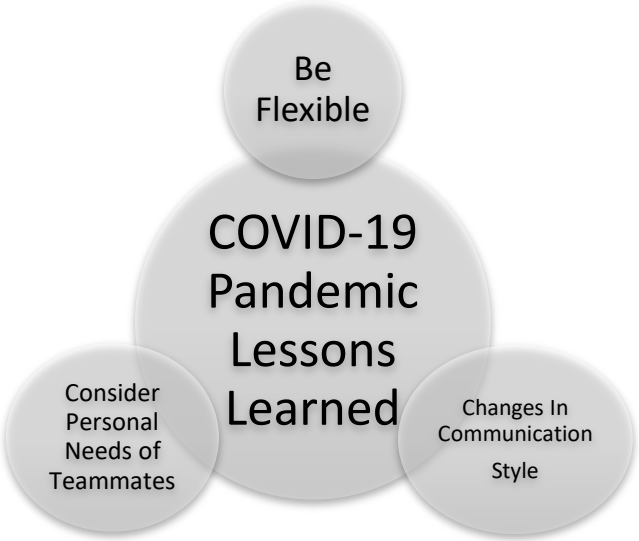
"ecosystems" including teammates' personal needs and priorities, as well as the office's culture. According to respondents, being unfamiliar with the office environment can negatively impact employee relationships and office operations.

Theme 4: Takeaways from COVID-19

Mid-level leader respondents had clear lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. The most common takeaways were (1) Be Flexible, (2) Communication Style Changes, and (3) Consider Personal Needs of Teammates. Learning topics are illustrated in Figure 47 below.

Figure 47

Lessons Learned from COVID-19 Pandemic



COVID Lesson: Be Flexible

Nineteen respondents stressed the importance of flexibility or openness to change during the COVID-19 pandemic. One mentioned, "I think I have learned to be more adaptable," when reflecting on a skill developed during the pandemic. For mid-level leaders, this has meant being

more open to adjusting teammates' work schedules according to their needs. For example, one participant mentioned, "giving employees more flexibility to get jobs done at various hours." This meant, "adapting to change without lowering expectations." Several echoed this sentiment, declaring that the former 8am to 5pm workday became much more fluid during the pandemic. This has now become a permanent fixture in several respondents' departments. A couple of leaders mentioned that they learned to collaborate more with their teammates to identify staff and student needs. They reflected that this knowledge has helped them respond and keep employees satisfied, especially in times of illness when special contingencies often had to be made.

Openness to change brought with it many rewards, like process improvements. One respondent said, "When we first started remote work, I led by converting many of our physical tasks to digital, which made many of our processes move much quicker." Moving workflows to an online format also met the changing needs of students who were becoming more comfortable with completing enrollment tasks remotely. Periodically, campus would close due to high COVID-19 transmission rates in counties where campuses were located, making online processes crucial to students with enrollment steps left to complete. Embracing change to streamline processes is becoming more common long-term, with several respondents, "even more interested in digital innovations" after successfully implementing new procedures during the pandemic.

COVID Lesson: Changing Communication Style

During the COVID-19 pandemic, 11 respondents noted that they learned to communicate more effectively. Communication challenges included getting messages across using email, keeping teammates engaged and emotionally connected, as well as collaborating effectively using newer virtual meeting products like Zoom and Microsoft Teams. At the beginning of the

pandemic, campus shut down completely for several months. This created a sudden need for more written communication. Electronic communications like email replaced in-person conversations. Several respondents noted that emails need to be much more concise than spoken communication because some colleagues are not interested in reading long emails. To keep emails effective, respondents recommended customizing each message based on the needs of the intended audience.

Respondents noticed how it can be more difficult to make personal connections with others while working virtually. This meant leaders had to be more intentional in reaching out to colleagues since they were no longer physically close enough to conference at a moment's notice. One participant remarked, "I spent a lot more time supporting my team emotionally, mentally and finding ways to still stay connected and available." Leaders had to communicate often to make sure that their teammates felt that their leader was still just as available for concerns or questions as if they were all sitting across from each other in the office.

Figure 48

Top Communication Tips Learned from COVID-19

Tip #1: I will say I have greatly increased the number of individual touchpoints, in smaller time blocks, with individuals, and learned to adjust my communications to leadership and other employees.
Tip #2: Covid has also challenged me to look carefully at how I communicate expectations -- something is lost when you are behind a screen, so communication (verbal, written, non-verbal) must be tightened up and intentional for efficiency and effectiveness.
Tip #3: I have to be more intentional interacting with all my staff on a regular basis, especially part-time staff who may work in-person opposite days from me. More phone and video meetings. Constantly checking over Teams or email. More written communication.

Many departments used Zoom and Microsoft Teams meetings in place of in-person gatherings during the pandemic. Respondents noted that leaders should not solely rely on those tools when monitoring work, communicating ideas, and ensuring that everyone is heard. Multiple types of communications including email, phone, and video meetings were often necessary to maintain the necessary level of scrutiny on projects. One respondent expressed the need to carefully consider one's words to avoid misunderstandings via Zoom, "The online environment requires a person to be more intentional about paying attention to the other person/people in a conversation, as well as working harder to be sure that what we say is what we mean to say." One respondent noted that using purely remote meetings means it can seem, "much harder to get a handle on whether the job is being done well." It can also be a challenge to ensure that all input is shared in virtual meetings. One participant mentioned, "Speaking up in a Zoom meeting is sometimes difficult. Voices get drowned out and the community is negatively affected." For respondents, getting complex ideas across was also a challenge during the pandemic. Leaders found that their messages needed to become more detailed. Otherwise, "things can get lost in translation," with ideas getting muddled if they were not correctly transmitted from one colleague to another.

COVID Lesson: Consider Personal Needs of Teammates

Fifteen respondents mentioned long-lasting lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic about being aware of, and responsive to, their colleagues' personal needs. Respondents recommended that leaders get to know their teammates' personal situations outside of work and be considerate when things, "sometimes get messy." In addition to sudden illness due to the pandemic, several respondents noticed that their teammates experienced unexpected emotional strain which affected their work. One leader noted, "Most people have not faced death as closely

as I have. So many feared death and the loss of others, while I live with it daily, as we all do, but many do not realize it until something like the pandemic came along." Respondents recommended that leaders should make a special effort to, "be available to staff if they are struggling." They should ensure that teammates feel safe by not making them feel guilty if their work output is periodically affected by personal issues they might be experiencing.

Addressing colleagues' personal needs is one way of preventing turnover, which several reported as being a challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic. Staffing difficulties added to the unpredictability of daily operations in the college. In fact, twenty-eight respondents lamented a lack of resources as a major challenge which takes a toll on morale. One participant mentioned, "Resources--both human and monetary--can get stretched thin, which can lead to rather hectic workloads." Anything that leaders can do to be more forgiving and flexible with work schedules can go a long way towards retaining staff. Figure 49 shows the most commonly mentioned lessons cited by respondents.

Figure 49

Common Lessons Learned Regarding Teammate Needs

The changing needs of students during the pandemic offered an opportunity to be more flexible with staff schedules. Offices began offering virtual appointments for students to complete their enrollment steps rather than in-person meetings. This meant that staff no longer needed to be on campus one hundred percent of the time to assist students. Ten respondents noted that they have had to innovate in order to meet the new needs presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, becoming, "…very flexible and come up with solutions that were doable in both the actual workplace and remote workplace scenarios." One respondent said, "Trying to balance individual needs with the needs of the organization is challenging. There are ongoing staffing challenges and we have had to be creative in how we provide coverage of all areas." Two respondents pointed out how upper-level leadership has high expectations of goals relating to serving students and, "building our organization to help our students better may require more foresight and resources."

Summary

This chapter presented key takeaways from a qualitative study conducted on mid-level leaders at a midwestern community college. Participants were neither entry-level professionals nor high-level leaders. Most participants had five or fewer direct reports. The majority of respondents expressed an interest in moving up the organizational ladder in the future, with several planning to rise to the highest levels of the college. Leaders provided their unique perspectives and lessons regarding the key skills needed for effectiveness on the middle level of the college hierarchy, challenges they encounter daily, requests for further training topics, and takeaways from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The main overarching theme of the survey responses underscored the importance of promoting a collaborative, trusting relationship between leaders and their teammates. For mid-

level leaders, a key to success and harmony within the office is to seek feedback from team members and treat them as valued partners. Survey respondents recognized the importance of listening, considering teammates' personal needs, and communicating messages using multiple modes of communication to monitor progress and prevent issues before they start. To better meet student and colleague needs, participants expressed interest in trainings on communication styles, conflict management, and diversity. Participants cited micromanaging and controlling behaviors as fast contributors to the breakdown of these ideal, respectful relationships.

Takeaways from this survey could help to address the lack of training for mid-level leaders (Adams-Dunford, Cuevas, & Neufeldt, 2019) by providing them with support based on qualitative research taken directly from staff members. Responding to emerging leaders' needs would be a step towards stemming the flow of resignations and retention challenges which are causing employee shortages in community colleges (Weissman, 2023). The upcoming chapter will offer similarities and differences between these survey findings and the AACC's competencies for mid-level leaders from 2022. The forthcoming summary chapter will also offer recommendations for mid-level leadership development based on the survey findings and leadership development theory from the literature review.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This chapter will analyze the findings of the qualitative study in the context of previous studies, such as the AACC competencies and other research on mid-level leaders, with the goal of expanding knowledge in the field. I will present the key takeaways for practice for mid-level community college leaders based on an evaluation of my qualitative survey results and how they relate to: (1) AACC's Competencies for Mid-Level Leaders, (2) other recent studies involving mid-level leaders, (3) leadership development theory from Conger (1992) and Bass (1990), and (4) recommendations for future research informed by recent leadership development studies. I will begin by listing the AACC's Competencies for Mid-Level Leaders 4th Edition and comparing them to findings from my qualitative research survey. Results from both studies will be evaluated in the context of other recent studies which provide takeaways about the collaborative work environment of mid-level leaders (Amey, Garza Mitchell, Rosales, & Giardello, 2020; Ayers & Gonzales, 2020; Eddy & Khwaja, 2019; Eddy, et al., 2023; Gulley, 2017; Márquez & Hernández, 2020). Another key finding from this qualitative study was how mid-level leaders defined their own leadership style, and the results will be analyzed in light of a recent similar study which also asked mid-level leaders to describe the concept of leadership.

Staff development, especially from leaders who are already aligned with the college's organizational culture, is crucial for addressing pending retirements and turnover in the community college sector (Eddy et al., 2023). Therefore, the latter sections of this chapter will present recommendations for leadership development training from this survey's participants, informed by frameworks from Conger (1992) and Bass (1990). This will include the top ten skills to develop in future trainings, as identified by survey respondents. Because it is important to ensure that development activities coincide with the goals of future participants, I will

summarize the main professional aspirations of mid-level leader participants per the qualitative survey to ensure that those goals stay at the forefront of any future training design. Lastly, recommendations for future research based on both the premise of this study and other recent studies with mid-level leaders will be raised.

Comparison of Findings with Prior Studies

In this first section, I will compare this survey's results with those of the AACC's Competencies for Mid-Level Leaders and then incorporate input from several recent studies involving mid-level community college leaders. Using recent trends in community college literature and other research, I will offer possible explanations for variations between this study's results and those of the AACC's competencies. Literature from other studies including middle leaders supports several key findings from this study. More research is needed, but areas in which this study's results overlap with other literature on mid-level leaders could help to validate this study's findings, leading to a better understanding of the experiences of middle leaders.

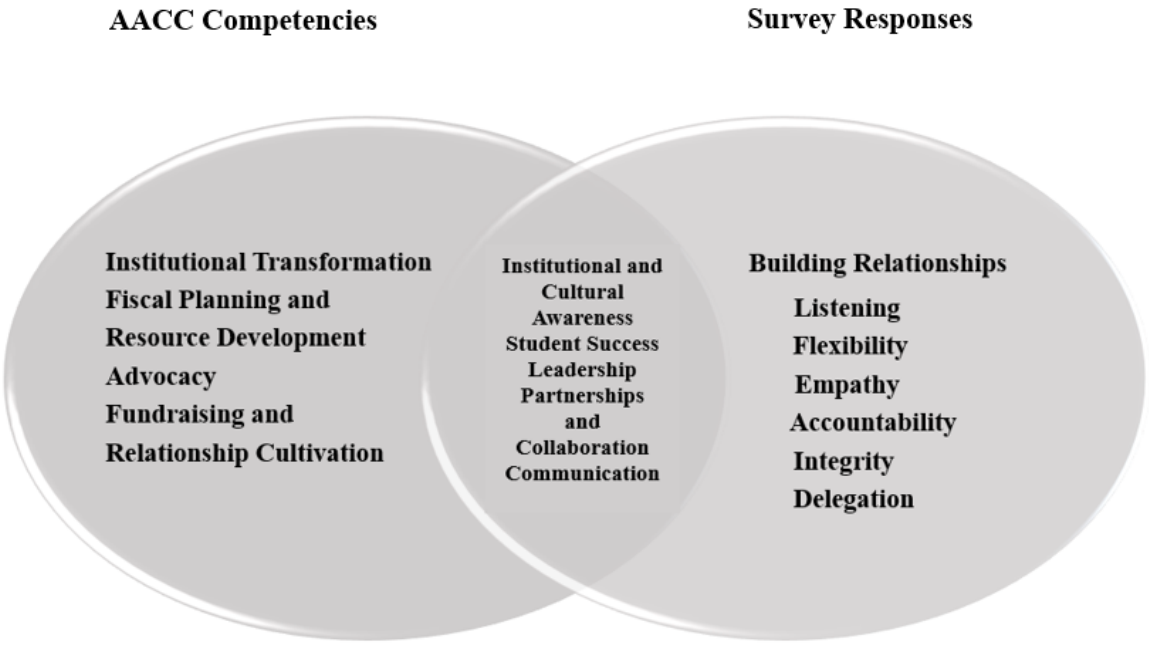
Analysis of AACC Competencies and Survey Responses

The theme of the AACC competencies reflects a focus on leaders' individual abilities and characteristics to achieve goals (AACC, 2022). Overall, the document emphasizes how individual leaders should strive to make transformational change in their institution, also called, "Leading from the Middle" (ibid). For the AACC research participants, key competencies needed to achieve this level of change included the skill of Institutional Transformation, or strategic planning and evaluation of data to identify college needs and enact long-standing change (ibid). To achieve this, mastery of Fiscal Planning and Resource Management, Advocacy with outside stakeholders, and Fundraising and Relationship Cultivation were all seen as crucial

competencies by the AACC's research participants but were not included within the top skills identified by this qualitative survey's respondents (ibid). Figure 50 below shows a Venn Diagram listing the competencies which the 4th edition of the AACC competencies has in common with this study's top skills, as well as the competencies which were unique to the AACC competencies list and the responses from this survey.

Figure 50

Commonalities Between Survey Responses and AACC's Competencies for Mid-Level Leaders, 4th Edition



Note. Taken from American Association of Community Colleges. (2022). AACC competencies for community college leaders (4th ed.). American Association of Community Colleges.

Five skills from this qualitative survey coincided with those of the AACC competencies (2022) . Drilling down into the details on these five shared skills shows that this survey's respondents were mostly in agreement with the AACC's research participants, which could lead to a more focused guide for mid-level leaders given additional research. There were notable differences in perspective which will be discussed in an upcoming section using other studies on mid-level leaders. Figure 51 below displays a summary of each of the five shared competencies, with the AACC competencies on the leftmost column. The key behaviors necessary to achieve each skill are illustrated with bullet points below each AACC competency (ibid). The rightmost column of Figure 51 includes each competency according to this qualitative survey's responses, with bullet points listing how participants defined that skill. There are many similarities within each competency, and the commonalities have been highlighted in yellow below.

Figure 51

Comparison of AACC Competencies Findings and Qualitative Survey Responses

AACC Competency and Behavior	Survey Response and Definition
Institutional and Cultural Awareness • Embraces the college mission, vision, and values • Collaborate to improve student services by evaluating the organization's design and task allocation structure • Cultural competence • Equity Mindedness	**Institutional and Cultural Awareness** • Awareness of institutional policies and procedures • Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion • Collaboration • Self-Management • Audit processes to avoid red tape and cumbersome or confusing processes
Student Success • Value of a credential/return on student investment • Support transfer pathways for students • Ongoing evaluation of programs for improvement	**Student Success** • Ensure that available resources are enough to implement goals; "Building our organization to help our students better may require more foresight and resources" • Help others meet their goals

• Develop the ability to identify the root causes of problems	• Assist students from diverse backgrounds
Leadership • Analyze data usage • Engage and seek feedback from colleagues • Be knowledgeable about policies and implementation to ensure compliance • Support academic freedom and critical thinking for students • Combat stereotypes • Build a diverse team	**Leadership** • Collaborative style of leader • No micromanaging • Motivates others • Hands-off and flexible leadership style • Takes time to listen to others' ideas and needs rather than only expressing personal opinions • Knowledgeable about teammates' personal needs, backgrounds, and personalities
Partnerships and Collaboration • Interdepartmental collaboration • Academic and workforce partnerships	**Partnerships and Collaboration** • Builds relationships with stakeholders from various levels of the college and throughout community • Leaders ask for feedback from stakeholders and use those suggestions to improve processes
Communication • Zero tolerance of micro aggressions • Display professional etiquette during video conferences and when sending emails • Demonstrate effective verbal and written communication	**Communication** • Distributes information, especially procedures and project details, effectively and respectfully to all stakeholders • "Translator" of ideas using knowledge of each stakeholder's preferred method of communication (email, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, text, etc.) • Leaders inform partners of changes as projects evolve • Delivers difficult news and negative feedback in a positive, productive way

Note. Taken from American Association of Community Colleges. (2022). AACC competencies for community college leaders (4th ed.). American Association of Community Colleges.

As illustrated in Figure 51 above, there were a few key differences in meaning between the AACC competencies and this survey's responses. Overall, the AACC definitions were more

broadly focused on prioritizing skills for individual leaders to improve (2022). In contrast, this survey's competencies included practical advice on how leaders can support teammates and work together to achieve common goals. For example, the AACC defined the Institutional and Cultural Awareness competency as embracing the college's mission and overarching organizational design (2022), but this survey's participants went a step further by emphasizing the importance of auditing institutional processes to avoid inefficiency. For this survey's respondents, cultural awareness goes beyond the AACC's definition of acknowledging how other cultures influence one's own cultural understanding (2022). Survey participants emphasized how emotional intelligence, specifically self-management, is part of cultural awareness because leaders must manage their personal biases and combat inequality so their actions always, in one respondent's words, "lift up people so we do our very best work."

Participants in this study viewed the Leadership competency as encompassing knowledge of teammate needs and improving one's listening skills to fully process feedback. In this way, the competency of Leadership ties into the related skill of Partnerships and Collaboration, which both the AACC competencies and survey respondents agreed involves building relationships with both internal and external workforce stakeholders (AACC, 2022). Lastly, as opposed to the general guidelines that the AACC provided for developing the Communication competency, survey respondents produced more practical recommendations for improving the skill. According to survey participants, leaders can improve their communication competency by filtering project details and processes to all stakeholders, translating confusing jargon, and using teammates' preferred methods of communication to transmit messages in a respectful way. For survey participants, effectively handling change is also an important part of the competency.

This skill involves keeping partners apprised of changes as projects develop and sharing ideas, including negative feedback, in a positive and uplifting way.

Although other studies including mid-level leaders are scarce, a 2023 study asked both senior-level and mid-level leaders to describe leadership, both in their own words and as compared to the AACC competencies for leadership (Eddy et al., 2023). Respondents in the study identified three top skills which were also identified in this qualitative study, but not included in the AACC competencies (ibid). Participants in the Eddy et al. study mentioned, "the need to empower others to leverage the talents of all staff and faculty" as one of the top skills for mid-level leaders (2023). That skill shares similarities with the Building Relationships competency from this qualitative survey, which mid-level respondents defined in this survey as, "the opportunity to find ways to find strengths and encourage greatness." The Eddy et al. study also identified integrity and ethics as top competencies, which is congruent with the results of this study (2023).

Analysis of Possible Reasons for Differences

The themes of communication and collaboration permeated this qualitative study of mid-level leaders, whereas the AACC competencies were more focused on the individual leader (2022). The reason for these differences is not immediately apparent, since both studies were conducted at nearly the same time, with nearly the same sample size. The research for the AACC's fourth edition competencies list was completed between 2021 and 2022. This qualitative study was conducted shortly afterwards in June 2022. The AACC involved 100 attendees in its surveys and interviews to create its fourth edition of the competencies list, and this qualitative study surveyed 88 mid-level leaders (ibid). However, continuing to analyze key characteristics of participants in both studies may shed additional light. The AACC competencies

fourth edition's respondent sample had an evenly mixed gender breakdown (ibid), whereas this study had a strong majority of female participants. Also, the AACC's participant group consisted of a variety of stakeholders at all levels of community colleges (ibid) whereas this study focused on mid-level leaders only. According to recent studies comparing mid-level and senior-level leaders, these gender and position traits of respondents may explain many of the differences.

This qualitative study had a mostly female gender breakdown of respondents, with 72% of participants identifying as female. A 2023 study by Eddy, et al. surveyed 770 leaders in community colleges at both the middle and senior levels. The study found that women were more likely to use inclusive language and reinforce the importance of collaborating with others for leadership, whereas men were more likely to highlight their own role in motivating others to meet goals (ibid). Also, a review of 25 years of literature on community college leaders noted that throughout the history of leadership, female leaders have been associated with more collaborative approaches to leadership (Eddy & Khwaja, 2019; Eddy, et al., 2023). In fact, over time community college journals have increasingly advocated the collaborative and communicative leadership style (Eddy et al., 2023). Therefore, survey respondents in this qualitative study who read community college journals might have felt empowered to continue towards their naturally participatory approach to leading (ibid).

Several other studies have noted that communication and collaboration tend to be hallmarks of mid-level leaders specifically (Amey et al., 2020). One article published in *New Directions for Community Colleges* called mid-level leaders, "communication channels inside and outside of the institution" because they bridge departments by ferrying messages from one group of stakeholders to another (ibid). Another article reiterated how, "midlevel leaders translate and implement decisions inside their departmental homes," meaning that they convey

messages using the unique language of each office (Ayers & Gonzales, 2020). These aspects of translating information and communicating with stakeholders throughout the college were mentioned throughout this survey's findings as well.

Another study by Gulley (2017) asked mid- and upper-level student services staff members from three community colleges about their role in achieving their college's mission. Mid-level respondents in that study mentioned feeling a, "sense of shared vision and shared responsibility toward the end result that we're striving for" (ibid). The participants reported regularly using collaboration as a tool to carry out their shared mission of supporting student learning (ibid). The researcher in the study noted that collaboration was more common within student service departments than programming-related departments such as student organizations and clubs (ibid). In fact, collaboration with faculty and academic departments helped the student services leaders understand the importance of their contribution to the college (Márquez & Hernández, 2020).

Another qualitative study by Amey et al. noted that mid-level leaders are more likely to view leadership efforts using the collective "we" rather than the first-person pronoun "I" when interviewed (2020). Amey et al. observed that this rhetorical quality is due to the fact that mid-level leaders share leadership when they are involved in projects and change processes, as opposed to higher level leaders who have more concentrated power (2020). The study conducted by Eddy et al. noted that the actions of top-level leaders such as presidents and vice presidents reinforced mid-level leaders' perceptions of what was expected at the college (2023). Therefore, if high-level leaders at a college promote a collaborative work environment, that could be a cause for survey respondents in this study to echo strong values of collaboration (ibid).

How Do Mid-Level Leaders Define their Own Leadership Style?

Although the AACC competencies focused on skills to help individuals become more effective community college leaders (2022), a recent 2023 study by Eddy et al. asked mid-level leaders to describe leadership as a concept, which is similar to a survey question included in this qualitative study. The Eddy et al. study found that men and women can define leadership differently, and sometimes depict the same concepts in different ways (ibid). The prompt for that study was "How do you define leadership?" (ibid). In that study, nearly half of both women and men used definitions focused on individual leader abilities, as opposed to describing leadership as contingent upon collaborating with others or focused on achieving the college's mission (ibid). Examples of individual-focused responses were related to leaders being an example for others, influencing colleagues, and setting the vision for the team (ibid).

This qualitative study included the similar question, "How would you describe your own leadership style?" Splitting respondents into gender categories and evaluating responses based on leader-focused versus other-focused responses reveals that in this study as well, at least half of both women and men used individual-focused descriptors to define leadership. The phrase, "I lead by example" was also common, meaning that the leader sets the tone for the office. Other leader-focused responses mentioned transformational leadership or charismatic leadership, where leaders use their skills to create a vision for the office. Leader-focused viewpoints are in contrast to other-focused definitions of leadership, which define leadership as a relationship-building experience where teammates come together to achieve a common goal (Eddy et al., 2023). In this qualitative study, other-focused responses referenced leaders supporting or coaching their teammates, underscoring respondents' view of their role as motivators focused on guiding their colleagues towards departmental goals.

Figure 52

Leader-Focused Versus Team-Focused Responses, Broken Down by Gender Identity

Gender Identity	Number of Leader-Focused Responses	Number of Team-Focused Responses
Male	12	24
Female	31	32

This split between team-focused and leader-focused definitions of leadership shows that many respondents in both this study and Eddy et al. think that leaders possess certain key traits which help them influence others, but they also share power with teammates (2023). In the Eddy et al. study, even leaders who defined leadership as being focused on the individual leader recognized the importance of assembling and managing teams (2023). The researchers interpreted this trend as a move away from historical conceptions of individualistic leadership where power was concentrated at the head of the office (ibid). This takeaway is consistent with this survey's responses, where even the leader-focused responses underscored leaders' commitment to motivating and guiding teammates rather than commanding them. Although more research is needed on this subject, this could represent a shift for community college leaders towards team-focused leadership and away from definitions like the "Great Man Theory" or charismatic leadership theory which were so prevalent decades ago (Eddy et al., 2023).

Recommendations for Leadership Development

One of the key themes from this qualitative survey's findings was mid-level leaders' suggestions for training objectives, as well as preferences for professional development training formats. Participant feedback could help customize recommendations from leadership

development theory to ensure that future trainings fit the needs of mid-level leaders. A main benefit of this survey is that its findings can be used by community college administrators and future researchers to isolate the theories, skills, and activities that mid-level leaders identified as most pertinent to them. The theoretical takeaways from Conger (1992) and Bass (1990) presented in the literature review are useful guides to describe the key ingredients for effective leadership development trainings. Conger's (1992) framework described four main attributes for impactful leadership development activities: (1) fostering an understanding of pertinent conceptual theory, (2) skills building, (3) feedback, and (4) personal growth experiences to assess leaders' personal motivations and identify unhelpful behaviors. The survey responses in this study identified specific leadership theories which resonate with mid-level leaders, skills to develop, and suggestions for collaborative personal growth experiences.

With regards to leadership theory, the most cited leadership styles in the survey were collaborative leadership and servant leadership. In fact, 30 respondents (34%) mentioned collaborative or participative leadership as describing their style of leadership. Eleven participants (12%) cited servant leadership as the leadership style that best described their personal philosophy. Therefore, future trainings could include theory related to collaborative and servant leadership. Discussions of theory could feature practical strategies for success in higher education and the community college environment (Lawrence, 2017). This could include skills needed to successfully implement servant and collaborative leadership specifically based on theory. Because a discussion of skills or competencies is part of Conger's components of leadership development trainings, the fourth edition of the AACC competencies as it relates to mid-level leaders could be presented as the prevailing skills framework in the field for community college administrators.

After a discussion of skills is presented based on theory, development trainings could include findings from this survey of mid-level leaders. Trainings could focus on the top 10 skills identified by survey participants as crucial to success as a community college mid-level leader. Responses highlighted skills which could also be further reinforced and made relevant through case studies from the college's past successful projects over the past several years. Figure 53 below includes each of the top 10 leader competencies according to survey participants, along with a quote from the survey defining the skill and suggestions for reinforcing that skill in future trainings. In fact, the takeaways for training listed in Figure 53 could be used as themes for trainings since they are guidelines to help leaders master each competency.

Figure 53

Top 10 Skills from Qualitative Survey and Takeaways for Training

Skill and Definition	**Survey Participants' Takeaways for Training**
Communication "Leaders need to be able to communicate with all employees on a level that everyone has the same understanding of the goal."	• How to tailor messaging based on stakeholders, such as front line or executive staff, diverse ethnic or racial backgrounds, students versus staff • Key policies and jargon used commonly among Student Services offices, faculty, administrative staff, information transmitted to students via their student portal
Building Relationships "A sense of discerning what to communicate, when and to whom is key in building and maintaining trust and collaboration."	• Tips for developing supportive teammate relationships (Chapter 4, Figure 40): o "Connect with people on an individual level" o "Employ empathy and establish trust" o "Practice discretion when information is shared" o Support each other: "A team also expects their leader to advocate for them in meetings and to other leaders."

	○ "Knowing everyone's strengths, weaknesses and interests allows the leader to position everyone for success."
Listening "A good listener will hear even the things that aren't being said. A good listener asks probing questions to dive deeper into things."	• Suggestions for better listening (Chapter 4, Figure 41): ○ Stop Talking ○ Wait for Teammate to Finish their Thought ○ Ask Follow-Up Questions ○ Implement a True Open Door Policy
Collaboration "Gain input from involved parties and then review them in line with expectations and desired outcomes."	• How to develop relationships with colleagues within one's department, then identify pertinent stakeholders with whom to collaborate on future projects.
Flexibility "Adapting to change without lowering expectations."	• Case studies of departments on campus who successfully streamlined processes and improved work processes by embracing change.
Motivating Others "Genuine excitement for the subject material."	• Case studies of departments who were able to encourage colleagues. Examples could include departmental retreats, fellowship activities, games which increased teammates' "buy in" to the mission of the college.
Empathy "It is sometimes helpful to put yourself in someone else's shoes."	• Training on self-management, maintaining one's composure in "reactive moments." • Training on diversity, equity, and inclusion ○ Increase the number of DEI practitioners on campus
Accountability "When a leader holds themselves and others accountable, a sense of responsibility, trust, and commitment is formed. We will be more productive as a team and will deliver results more effectively."	• Case studies of major decisions made by other community colleges ○ Learning objectives: Simulate how to, "analyze the information and data available, weigh the tradeoffs of various options, and then make decisions."
Integrity	• Required orientation for managers outlining expectations for all staff members with direct reports.

"No matter the level, everyone (students, faculty, and staff alike) must have good reason to trust in their leaders, specifically that the leaders want the best for everyone concerned."	• Commonly requested policy and procedure training topics (Chapter 4, Figure 45):
	  ○ Managing and developing budgets
	  ○ Break restrictions and timesheet requirements for direct reports
	  ○ Human Resources policies related to leave benefits (maternity, bereavement, etc.)

Delegation
 	
"Leaders have to trust the experience and expertise of the people that work for them so that they can do the job of leading."
	• Training participants select a current collaborative project within their purview and create a timeline of who is involved and the projected timeframe for completing each task.
	  ○ Sample questions based on survey responses:
	  ▪ "What are your responsibilities as an individual?"
	  ▪ "What does your team need from you in order to fulfill their individual responsibilities?"
	  ▪ "When delegating, what is your timeline?"
	  ▪ "How long will it take for your team to complete their contributions?"
	  ▪ "Also allow time for organic relationship building, team members to drop in with questions, etc."

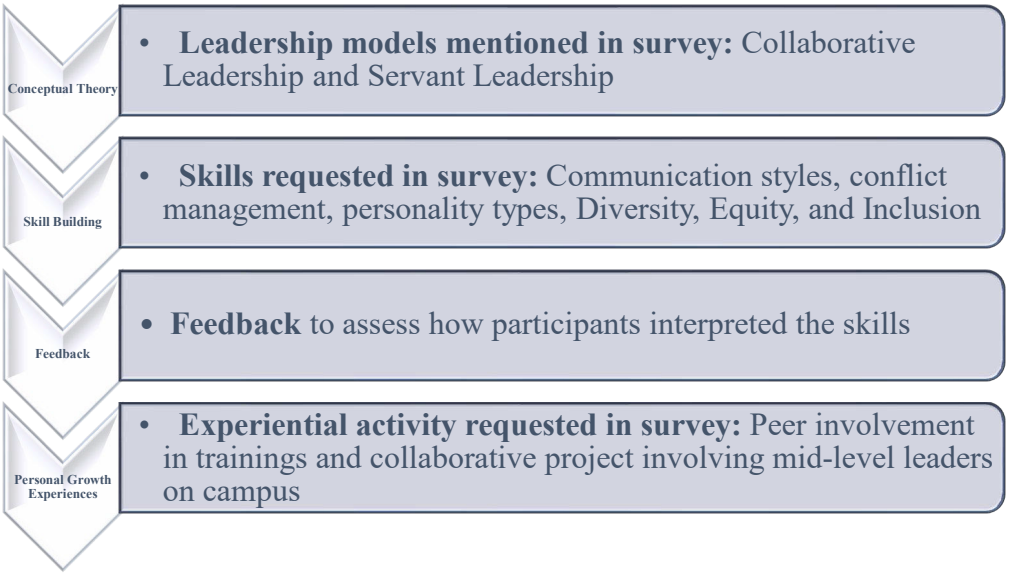
After the theory and skills are presented in trainings, Conger's (1992) framework stressed the importance of gaining feedback from training participants. This could be an opportunity to demonstrate how to request feedback using different styles of communication. For example, one survey respondent underscored the importance of being, "open to input/constructive criticism and get feedback from customers regularly to make sure you are delivering quality service." Survey respondents recommended that feedback be incorporated into future trainings. Recommendations throughout the survey stressed that training participants should be made to

understand that their opinions are an important part of keeping professional development experiences relevant. Any negative feedback received could be a point for training mid-level leaders on receiving both positive and negative feedback.

Lastly, Conger's framework recommended including personal growth experiences in professional development (1992). Several survey respondents suggested that development activities be geared towards collaboratively addressing a problem or completing a project. If any college departments have an issue where advice or help is needed, solving that problem as a team could be part of a workshop. Alternatively, mid-level leaders could be brought together as volunteer consultants in a professional development session to make recommendations for auditing a policy, since over 20 survey participants mentioned cumbersome processes as an issue that reduces effectiveness. Auditing processes to make sure they are up to date could be both a helpful service and an opportunity for mid-level leaders to practice their skills. Figure 54 below summarizes Conger's main elements of leadership trainings and input from survey respondents for each.

Figure 54

Conger's Key Components of Leadership Development and Correlation to Survey Responses



Taken from Conger, J.A. (1992). *Learning to lead: The art of transforming managers into leaders*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Bass (1990) suggested that development activities should incorporate both experience-based learning and structured behavioral monitoring. With regards to learning from experience, survey participants had a clear suggestion to make trainings relevant to practice. Twelve mid-level leaders (13%) who participated in the survey requested that future leadership development activities include mid-level leaders sharing their thoughts together. A survey participant noted that including peers would provide, “Opportunities for managers to get together from time to time to bounce ideas off one another, help each other on how to deal with a situation, etc.” A roundtable might be an option for colleges who are not able to provide real world problems for mid-level managers to resolve together. In a roundtable, leaders would share their experiences of how they completed projects and faced problems in their past.

Ideally, according to Bass (1990), leaders would be presented with a dilemma as part of a training session and more seasoned or experienced leaders would monitor the leaders' behavior. These seasoned leaders would provide feedback and advice during the activity, as well as a chance for the mid-level leader to ask questions. One article in *New Directions for Community Colleges* suggested including middle leaders in the college's strategic planning efforts and created a model for training development on that theme (McPhail & McPhail, 2020). Whatever the theme of the training, survey respondents requested that structured behavioral monitoring from more senior-level leaders continue after the training session itself. Twelve respondents requested a formal mentorship program for newer leaders at the college as a way to continue receiving valuable advice after formal training is completed. One participant described outcomes for the program by saying, "I would also love to have some kind of mentorship program where I as a mid-level leader can be paired with someone above my pay grade to learn, talk through scenarios, etc."

Connecting Personal Goals with Employee Development

Boyatzis (1993), the theorist who connected contingency theory to the workplace for mid-level leaders in the literature review of this dissertation, noted that leadership development is most effective when it correlates directly with leaders' personal and professional goals. When discussing the development of job skills and increasing performance, it is important to consider these objectives, be they mastery of work abilities, a search for learning and challenges, or fulfillment of one's purpose (Boyatzis, 1993). Identifying a leader's ambitions can help to identify what the individual will find interesting or challenging, causing them to gravitate towards effective choices and behaviors in the workplace (ibid). Leadership development

activities can more successfully improve worker performance if they help to not only improve job skills and teach leadership theory, but also connect to leaders' plans for their future (ibid).

Fortunately, several survey questions touched upon the job mobility goals of the mid-level leader participants in this study. Other questions asked what makes them passionate about working at a community college, which can be key to creating training agendas that connect with and inspire leaders. Figure 55 below shows the pertinent survey questions from this study which touched upon what respondents enjoy about their work as leaders, as well as their career goals. To the right are the top five responses taken as direct quotes from the survey.

Figure 55

Goal-Oriented Survey Questions and Top Responses

Survey Question	Top Responses
What do you enjoy most about your work at a community college?	"Helping students" "Interacting with students of diverse backgrounds" "Making college possible for everyone" "Helping others achieve their goals" "Connecting work to mission"
Could you share some of your aspirations on career advancement?	"I would like to reach the director level at some point during my career" "I would enjoy supervising a smaller group of 5 or less employees." "I want work/life balance more than I want to 'advance.'" "I would like the opportunity to work at an AVP or VP level"
What do you enjoy about being a leader?	"Mentoring others" "Finding new and innovative ways to help and serve others" "Helping people grow" "Work on a varied set of projects with a wide range of internal and external contacts" "Seeing the team succeed"

Recommendations for Future Research

This research study asked broad questions about leadership style, skills important for success, and what makes mid-level leaders passionate about working at a community college. Survey responses revealed clear findings related to respondents' preferred leadership styles, as well as the top skills that mid-level leaders find helpful for success. If this study is replicated and results in similar findings each time, validating the findings, those takeaways could be used to develop a framework to guide community college leaders at the middle level of their organization. Learning how emerging leaders develop may be a step towards identifying causal and practically relevant knowledge that could inform institutional policy in the future (Day, Riggio, Tan, & Conger, 2021).

More specifically, a follow-up study could focus on how mid-level leaders developed the key skills they cited in the first study. For example, survey or interview questions could ask for specific situations in which leaders displayed effective mastery of the skills, or problems that may have arisen due to deficiency in a skill. These responses could help to provide the practical learning experiences and case studies needed for truly relevant leadership trainings. Leaders could also be asked to describe their personal evolutionary process in developing top skills, both practical learning and any formal training they may have received. Survey questions could also touch upon the development of mid-level leaders' leadership styles, such as the personal and environmental factors present at that level of community colleges which affect a leader's style. In a similar way to the Eddy et al. study, both mid-level and senior-level staff members could be included in the study and their responses could be compared (2023).

A separate study focused on collecting mid-level leaders' feedback and perspectives on leadership development could inform experiential learning activities. In the study, researchers

could ask mid-level leaders to provide examples of collaborative or servant leadership in the field, the two most commonly cited leadership styles among this survey's participants. Such a qualitative study could ask participants to describe real-world dilemmas that they are confronting currently so that trainees can strategize how to solve the problem as part of a leadership workshop (Bass & Avolio, 1990). Participants could provide feedback on their preferred format for training or describe the design of past leadership trainings which were especially useful.

Alternatively, future studies might take a longitudinal approach, similar to an article written by Liu, Venkatesh, Murphy, & Riggio (2021) which explored the changing experiences of leaders as their skills develop over their lifetime. This could be a useful way to evaluate the effectiveness of leadership development programs implemented for mid-level leaders at the college by effectively tracking the progress and experiences of the training participants (Kwok, Shen, & Brown, 2021). A study that follows emerging leaders through their development process could help to capture the degree to which leaders felt engaged during formal trainings, and possibly the development of their identities as leaders (ibid). A long-term study that follows mid-level leaders over the course of their career could attempt to capture these day-to-day factors and self-development experiences which affect leaders' growth over time (ibid).

Conclusion

This chapter synthesized the responses from the qualitative survey with leadership development theory and recent research from leadership scholars to present takeaways for community college leaders and future research. A main goal of this chapter was to delineate an overall format and recommendations for leadership development trainings to meet the unique needs of mid-level community college leaders. Much of this chapter was shaped and informed by responses from mid-level leaders who gave their expert perspectives, both in this qualitative

survey and in other research. These viewpoints from mid-level leaders were also compared with leaders who participated in the research needed to develop the AACC's competencies documents, which included voices from all parts of their organization's hierarchy (AACC, 2022). Additional research on mid-level leaders may continue to illuminate the processes of personal leader development and ultimately guide success for community colleges.

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Appendix A:

Survey Questions and Origins in Literature

Survey Question	Origin
What do you enjoy most about your work at a community college?	Initial qualitative questions should introduce the respondent to the topic by setting the mood; direct personal questions can increase readiness for the interviewee to respond to future questions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).
What do you least enjoy about your work at a community college?	Initial qualitative questions should introduce the respondent to the topic by setting the mood; direct personal questions can increase readiness for the interviewee to respond to future questions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).
Are you interested in job mobility? Please explain.	A major theme of AACC competencies includes preparing future leaders for impending waves of CEO retirements due to urgent need (AACC, 2005; AACC, 2013; AACC, 2018; AACC, 2022; Tarker, 2019).
Could you share some of your aspirations on career advancement?	The choices and actions which come from the individual traits and needs of the leader are all key components of contingency theory (Zaccaro, Green, Dubrow, & Kolze, 2018).
How would you describe your own leadership style?	According to contingency theory, leader effectiveness depends on the leader's personality and their level of control over their workplace environment (Fiedler, 1981).
What do you enjoy about being a leader?	Per contingency theory, certain personalities respond to specific situations in a way that better fits the needs of the task at hand (Fiedler, 1981).
What challenges do leaders face at a community college?	Based on contingency theory, favorable work outcomes occur when the quality of leader-member relations, degree of clarity of tasks, and the authority of a leader's position are all at a high level (Fiedler, 1967).

What are the qualities of a great leader?	Goals of the AACC competencies included: creating a "how to" guide for community college administrators and also identifying the best behaviors to boost leader effectiveness (AACC, 2005; AACC, 2013; AACC, 2018; AACC, 2022; Ottenritter, 2012; Tarker, 2019).
What are some common mistakes that leaders make?	According to Conger's theory of leadership development, identifying weak areas to be improved upon, especially those related to personal growth and skills building, is a key component of training activities (Conger, 1992).
The last two years of the COVID-19 pandemic have changed the workplace at nearly all levels. How has your role as a leader changed during these past two years?	Pinpointing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on leaders was a main reason for the creation of the 4th edition of the AACC competencies (AACC, 2022). Per contingency theory, to effectively achieve their goals, leaders must be able to adjust their leadership style depending on the needs of the situation (Reed, 2019; Harrison, 2018).
What training opportunities do you think would improve your leadership skills?	Per contingency theory, training can clarify institutional goals and mission, which helps leaders evaluate whether performance is meeting the needs of the organization (Fiedler, 1981). Training clarifies the goal of tasks and helps leaders evaluate their team's success with task performance (ibid).
Please list three leadership competencies or skills that you find important to success as a mid-level leader. Also explain why you selected this skill.	In contingency theory, individual leader characteristics can become intertwined with situational characteristics to increase effective leadership behaviors and responsiveness to the varying situations found in the workplace (Zaccaro et al., 2018).
Please include any other skill sets that you would like to add, along with an explanation of why you think they are important.	To address the complexity that community college administrators experience, the AACC competencies documents ranged from the original 5 competencies to an average of 25 competencies per employment grouping, with 5 total employment groupings (AACC, 2005; AACC, 2013; AACC, 2018; AACC, 2022).

Appendix B:

Survey Protocol

Hello, my name is Katherine Gonzalez. I am a graduate student in the Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program at Franklin University. Thank you for taking part in this research study.

Goal of Study:

The purpose of this project is to develop training objectives to improve success for mid-level leaders at Sinclair College. I am inviting you to participate in my project to gain your expert input. The results of this study may contribute to employee development opportunities for mid-level professionals at Sinclair.

What am I being asked to do?

To participate in this project, you will be asked to fill out a 20-question, short answer survey. It will take between 10 and 20 minutes to complete. The survey includes questions like, "What do you enjoy most about your work at a community college?" and "What training opportunities do you think would improve your leadership skills at Sinclair?"

What are the risks and benefits of taking part in this study?

I believe there is little risk to you for participating in this research project. If you come stressed or uncomfortable with any survey question, you can skip a question or take a break. You can also stop taking the survey or you can withdraw from the project altogether.

Taking part in this study is your choice.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. You may stop participating at any time. If you stop being in the study, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits you would normally have. All survey responses are completely confidential.

Confidentiality and Privacy:

I will not ask you for any personal information, such as your name or address. Please do not include any personal information in your survey responses. I will not collect your email or IP address; the survey is completely anonymous. I will keep all study data on a secure, password-protected OneDrive document. Only my Franklin University dissertation chair and I will have access to the information. Other agencies that have legal permission have the right to review

research records. The Franklin University IRB has the right to review research records for this study.

Questions:

If you have any questions about this study, please email me at gonzal77@email.franklin.edu. You may also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Valerie Storey, at valerie.storey@franklin.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the Franklin University IRB Office at 614-947-6037 or irb@franklin.edu.

Section 1

To Access the Survey:

Please click the "I agree" option below to proceed and participate in this study. If you do not wish to participate, please close out your browser window.

1. Do you agree to participate in this study?
   I agree

   No, I do not agree and will close my browser now.

Section 2

First, we will start with some overall questions regarding your opinions on leadership at a community college.

2.) What do you enjoy most about your work at a community college?

3.) What do you least enjoy about your work at a community college?

4.) Are you interested in job mobility? Please explain.

5.) Could you share some of your aspirations on career advancement?

6.) How would you describe your own leadership style?

7.) What do you enjoy about being a leader?

8.) What challenges do leaders face at a community college?

9.) What are the qualities of a great leader?

10.) What are some common mistakes that leaders make?

11.) The last two years of the COVID-19 pandemic have changed the workplace at nearly all levels. How has your role as a leader changed during these past two years?

12.) What training opportunities do you think would improve your leadership skills at Sinclair?

Now, we'd like to ask for three or more leadership skills which you find to be most important.

13.) Please list one leadership competency or skill that you find important to success as a mid-level leader. Also explain why you selected this skill.

14.) Please list a second leadership competency or skill that you find important to success as a mid-level leader. Also explain why you selected this skill.

15.) Please list a third leadership competency or skill that you find important to success as a mid-level leader. Also explain why you selected this skill.

16.) Please include any other skill sets that you would like to add, along with an explanation of why you think they are important.

Section 3

Lastly, we'd like to ask a few more questions for classification purposes.

17.) Gender

a. Female

b. Male

c. Non-binary

d. Prefer not to say

18.) Age

a. 25 or younger

b. 26 – 35

c. 36 – 45

d. 46 – 55

e. 56 – 65

f. 65 or older

19.) Length of employment at the College.

a. 5 years or less

b. 6 – 10 years

c. 11 – 15 years

d. 16 -20 years

e. 21 years or longer

20.) If applicable, how long have you been a mid-level leader?

a. No direct reports

b. 5 years or less

c. 6 – 10 years

d. 11 – 15 years

e. 16 - 20 years

f. 21 years or longer

21.) How many direct reports do you have?

a. No direct reports

b. 5 reports or less

c. 6 – 10 reports

d. 11 – 15 reports

e. 16 – 20 reports

f. 21 or more

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey! Please close your browser window when ready.

Appendix C:

Survey Recruitment Email

Hello! My name is Katherine Gonzalez, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program at Franklin University. As part of my dissertation, I am conducting a survey involving community college mid-level leaders. The goal of this project is to develop training topics for mid-level staff professionals.

I am inviting you to participate in my project to gain your expert input as a mid-level staff leader.

Participation in this project consists of an anonymous online survey that takes about 15 minutes to complete. You will be asked for your thoughts on leadership skills needed for success at a community college. **There are no right or wrong answers and you will not be identified in any way.**

If you have questions about this research study that you would like to discuss before deciding whether or not to participate, please contact me at gonzal77@email.franklin.edu. If you decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to review an informed consent document (that provides more details about the project) at the start of the survey.

If you would like to participate in this study, please click this link: https://forms.office.com/r/1yM372D5ga

If you do not wish to participate, please delete this email.

Thank you for your consideration!

Katherine Gonzalez |Doctoral Candidate, EdD Program| Franklin University

(p) 937.252.9037| gonzal77@email.franklin.edu

Appendix D:

Executive Summary of Survey Responses

Survey Question	Top Five Responses
What do you enjoy most about your work at a community college?	• Helping Students • Interacting with Diverse Students • Creating Access to Education • Helping Others Meet their Goals • Furthering the College's Mission
What do you least enjoy about your work at a community college?	• Bureaucracy or Red Tape • Lack of Resources • It Is Overwhelming Doing Everything for Everyone • Outdated Systems and Policies • Lack of Development Opportunities
Are you interested in job mobility? Please explain.	• Yes (69% of Responses) • No (25% of Responses) • Maybe (6% of Responses)
Could you share some of your aspirations on career advancement?	• Would Like to Be a Department Director • Want to Leave the College • Want to Supervise a Small Group • Do Not Want to Sacrifice Work/Family Balance for Promotion • Would like to Become a Vice President
How would you describe your own leadership style?	• Collaborative Style • Motivating or Encouraging • Empathetic • Flexible • Leads By Example
What do you enjoy about being a leader?	• Mentoring Others • Innovating or Process Improvement • Helping People • Collaborating with Others • Succeeding
What challenges do leaders face at a community college?	• Lack of Resources • Bureaucracy or Red Tape • Outdated Systems and Policies • Overwhelming Number of Duties

	• Communicating Procedures and Information to Others
What are the qualities of a great leader?	• Being Flexible • Listening • Effectively Communicating with Others • Being Empathic • Motivating and Encouraging Others
What are some common mistakes that leaders make?	• Failure to Communicate • Micromanaging • Not Delegating • Making Decisions Without Being Fully Informed • Not Listening to Teammates
The last two years of the COVID-19 pandemic have changed the workplace at nearly all levels. How has your role as a leader changed during these past two years?	• I Have Become More Flexible/Adaptable • I Consider My Teammates' Personal Needs More Intentionally • I Changed My Communication Style • I Had to Innovate Processes • I Familiarized Myself with New Technology
What training opportunities do you think would improve your leadership skills?	• Institutional Policies and Procedures • Mandatory New Manager Orientation • Conflict Resolution • Communication Styles • Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
Please list three leadership competencies or skills that you find important to success as a mid-level leader. Also explain why you selected this skill.	• Communication • Building Relationships • Listening • Collaboration • Flexibility
Please include any other skill sets that you would like to add, along with an explanation of why you think they are important.	• Motivating Others • Empathy • Accountability • Integrity • Delegation