2015 CSCC Proposal

I: Presenter Information

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II: Title of Presentation

In search of sustainable solutions to the leadership void in two-year colleges: Leveraging the power and potential of faculty

III. Presentation Format: Research/Scholarly Paper

IV. Presentation Abstract

This qualitative study examined factors influencing faculty participation in leadership opportunities at a comprehensive Midwestern two-year college. Drawing upon a case study approach and rich interview data, a new theoretical model—the Faculty Leadership Life Cycle (FLLC)—was developed. The FLLC uncovers new theoretical and practical implications for maximizing faculty engagement in formal and informal leadership opportunities at two-year colleges, thus contributing to our knowledge on strategies to alleviate the leadership void at those institutions.

In search of sustainable solutions to the leadership void in two-year colleges: Leveraging the power and potential of faculty

Purpose and Significance of the Research

As far back as 2001, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) noted an urgent need to find qualified leaders to replace those retiring and to identify future leaders with skills and competencies to manage the rising demands on U.S. two-year colleges. Yet well over a decade later, the challenge remains. One potential solution to the leadership void is for community and technical college leaders to substantially increase faculty participation in formal and informal leadership opportunities.   Ultimately, "faculty have been and will be the most significant source of leadership talent for community colleges" (Cooper & Pagotto, 2003, p. 36). Faculty leadership has been identified as a leverage point in creating dynamic, innovative, and effective cultures within higher education institutions (Cooper & Pagotto, 2003; Eddy, 2010; Kezar et al., 2007; Shults, 2001) so essential for meeting today's challenges. However, no study has thoroughly examined what factors might contribute to faculty consideration of and participation in leadership opportunities in the first place. The aim of this study was to discover the motivating and limiting factors that encourage or hinder faculty from considering and participating in leadership opportunities. Future success of two-year colleges depends largely on sustainable solutions to the leadership gap. Gaining insights into faculty perspectives on leadership participation is critical before assessing possible organizational changes designed to capitalize on their leadership potential.

Prior Literature

Based on a comprehensive review of prior literature on leadership issues in two-year colleges, four themes emerged that informed this study. First, buoyed by a national study from the American Association of Community Colleges (2006), there is alignment and general agreement in the literature on critical leadership competencies for community college leaders (Amey, VanDerLinden & Brown, 2002; Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005; Hassan, 2010, McNair et al., 2011; Taylor & Killacky, 2010). Second, research supports the notion that existing faculty form a viable leadership candidate pool (AACC, 2006; Amey et al., 2002; Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005; Sanders, 2011; Scott-Skillman, 2007; Twombly & Townsend, 2008). Third, parallels from business and industry are drawn to support the notion of succession planning and promoting from within to address the looming talent gap (Collins, 2001; Cooper & Pagotto, 2005). Finally, despite studies related to internal leadership development, it appears that faculty voices are often ignored in current literature when it comes to those opportunities in community and technical colleges (Cooper & Pagotto, 2003; Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006; Kisker & Outcalt, 2005; Twombly & Townsend, 2008; Wible, 2013).

In summary, while prior literature is rich in identifying the needed competencies for future two-year college leaders, no study has thoroughly examined what factors might influence faculty participation in formal and informal leadership opportunities in the first place. This study aimed to inform this literature gap, uncover possible solutions to the leadership void, and offer transferable insights to benefit other institutions of higher education.

Conceptual Framework.

Interpretivist inquiry with pragmatist underpinnings surrounded by the construct of systems thinking formed the conceptual framework for this study. As the aim of this study was to investigate and uncover the meaning of the faculty experience—meaning created through their

experience as faculty and with leadership, college culture, and past experiences—an interpretive framework guided the work. Ultimately, the constructivist or interpretive approach does not attempt to prove which constructed reality is right, but instead seeks to make connections between all constructed realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Specifically, this research was guided by an interpretive framework based on pragmatism (Creswell, 2013), with the main outcome being focused on proposing practical, workable solutions to the leadership crisis. Senge's (1990) discipline of systems thinking dovetails nicely with interpretivism and was used as the third theoretical construct to guide this study.   The leadership challenge remains despite the long-standing academic and practical recognition of the problem, implementation of grow-your-own leadership programs and near universal consensus about what competencies are critical for higher education leadership (AACC, 2006). Systems thinking seeks deep and true understanding and seeks lasting, high- leverage change to recurring and chronic problems (Anderson & Johnson, 1997; Senge et al., 1994). Systems thinking also values the interaction between the parts, in this case the faculty participants, to form a comprehensive whole—in this case the emerging themes related to faculty motivations and barriers related to higher education leadership participation. Honoring each individual faculty story as important and unique is key, but it is the interactions between the participants, the researcher and the shared environment in which they work that merge to form recommendations for action.

Methods

Like the systems thinking theory that framed this study, qualitative research emphasizes seeing the whole rather than the parts, and stresses the importance and nature of interconnections (Anderson & Johnson, 1997) in the search for meaningful change. I applied an instrumental case study since the aim is to shed light on the broader issues of faculty leadership potential and interest (Stake, 2000). I employed this type of case study because, while I am interested specifically in one case, the ultimate goal was to link newfound insights to practical, applied solutions to the leadership problem across two-year colleges. The case study centered on full-time faculty at a comprehensive, multi-campus Midwestern technical college. A purposeful sampling strategy was used and base criteria identified upon which to loosely base the selections. I employed a chain referral strategy known as snowball sampling strategy, gaining referrals from each faculty interview on what other faculty might be information-rich cases (Creswell, 2013). Following these sampling strategies, I conducted 15 semi-structured personal interviews over a three-month period ranging from November 2013 through January 2014. While I used a common interview guide, I viewed each interview as an individual case, applying Small's (2009) case study logic in a modified way. In this way, each case generated insights and direction that informed future cases (Small, 2009), or future interviews. Small (2009) indicates that this process known as "sequential interviewing" is more powerful when seeking "to discover how and why practices or process" (p. 227) take place or certain conceptualizations of leadership exist. Several strategies to increase trustworthiness and credibility were utilized including constant reflexivity, member checking and peer review. I then used a systems-based analysis process to converge the data points into meaningful subthemes and themes upon which to base further analysis.

Results

Thematic diagrams were created based on the discovery of three major themes: conceptualization of leadership; personal view of and interest in leadership; and organizational

and positional factors. Each subtheme was categorized as either a positive, motivating factor or a negative, limiting factor as related to faculty leadership participation. While all the emergent themes and sub-themes were important, there appeared to be driving themes that recurred most often. Two positive drivers emerged relative to informal leadership participation. One was self-assurance relative to the AACC competencies thus increasing the confidence that faculty possessed the skills necessary to contribute via participation outside the teaching role. The second was the opportunity to practice skills or competencies gained in prior experience but were not currently being used such as strategic thinking, creativity, innovation, facilitation, or budgeting. There were no extensive limiting factors to informal leadership participation, but the two most frequent sub-themes were constraints of the current teaching position perceptions of organizational culture, namely organizational inertia.

A number of driving motivating factors emerged relative to formal leadership consideration. These included self-assurance relative to the AACC competencies; access to opportunities, specifically encouragement or invitation by a credible leader who made it clear why the faculty was being selected; and the desire for new challenge or professional growth. The driving limiting factors included frustration over a lack of recognition of skills by current leaders; lack of clarity on pathways or options; leaving the teaching position if accepting a formal leadership position; organizational inertia; and an unclear understanding or negative perceptions of formal leadership.

In both cases, an invitation to participate and support from a credible, respected leader who recognized faculty for their unique ability to contribute was a key factor. The overarching influencing factor on both formal and informal leadership participation was the number of years working and teaching at the college. Faculty agreed that as experience was gained, networks were established and a context of cultural understanding was developed over years at the college; informal leadership opportunities presented themselves more clearly and the new challenge of a move to administration were more seriously considered. (Due to space constraints, participant quotes that illustrate these findings are not presented here, but will be included in the full paper.)

Implications of the Findings

From the discovery of influencing factors and how they interacted with unique faculty experiences over time, a new model was proposed called the Faculty Leadership Life Cycle (FLLC). The value of the FLLC is to understand more fully how faculty move throughout their career and where on the progression there might be leverage or pivot points for leadership participation on an informal level, or perhaps a formal move to an administrative position. In addition, the FLLC assumes faculty are in a constant state of evolution and development. The FLLC does not represent a faculty's static movement through time, but rather represents a fluid journey of their participation in formal and informal leadership as they interact with the positive and negative factors revealed in this study. As one potential solution to the chronic leadership void in two-year colleges, faculty progression through the FLLC will unearth clues to organizational interventions that maximize faculty engagement in formal and informal leadership opportunities.

In this way, faculty are a viable solution in pursuit of future leaders to lessen the leadership void in community and technical colleges, a segment of higher education in the U.S. that continues to grow in significance.

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