A Growing Need for Collaborative & Participative Leadership

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1.0 Abstract.

This position paper details the current climate and challenges of higher education. It highlights the challenges and myriad of issues specifically facing community colleges. While there are many types of leadership, collaborative leadership plays an overwhelming role in enabling community colleges to be successful now and in the future. Meeting multiple missions, maintaining organizational survival, expanding its reach, and meeting diversity needs are all challenges that are best solved through collaborative and participative leadership. While this leadership approach isn't flawless, drawbacks and counter-arguments will also be identified.

2.0 Introduction & Background.

The need for the right leadership at community colleges is imperative now more than ever. Community colleges leaders face a myriad of issues, some old and some emerging. Meeting multiple community college missions; adapting to constantly changing job markets and emerging technologies; serving the needs of multiple stakeholders; retaining students; attracting new students; increasing enrollment; maintaining sufficient student services; and addressing the college readiness and remedial education crisis are just a few. Community college leaders must address, adapt, and identify solutions to all of the aforementioned problems with smaller budgets, financial restraints, and declines in funding. The right leadership is needed now more than ever. Of all the things to focus on, why leadership? "We are convinced that the weakest link in business, industry, and government today is leadership. It is not technology; it is not tools or equipment; it is not facilities; it is not systems and procedures; it is leadership. Leadership failure rates range from 40 to 60 percent costing organizations millions of dollars each year" (Manning & Curtis, p.4). Again, not only is leadership needed, but the right type of leadership is needed now more than ever. The right type of leadership is collaborative leadership. While this is not the only type of leadership needed, it plays a disproportionate role among them all.

Without the right leadership, any organization is capable of crumbling. Even the one's with the 'best tools', 'best equipment', 'best facilities', 'best procedures', and so forth. The climate in today's higher education requires collaborative leadership above all else. Collaborative leadership embraces entrepreneurial thinking, collaboration, as well as participative and empowering leadership practices. The traditional management and hierarchical practices of the past are no longer sufficient for today's complex, rapidly changing, and diverse climate that is higher education. Community colleges are unlike any other organization. They are

viewed as the 'nexus' of the community -- the middle piece of the puzzle that connects individuals, employers, social service organizations, high schools, four-year institutions, and most importantly the community. An organization as diverse and complex as this cannot depend on top-down management practices, authoritarian, or directive leadership styles. Their organizational survival depends on collaborative leadership. "The changing contexts that confront community colleges suggest that they may be well served if both practitioners and scholars consider new theories of leadership. The origins of these theories may vary, but they present different options for leadership orientations and practice that may be more appropriate to the complex contemporary community college rather than relying on the traditional bureaucratic theories of the mid-1900s and earlier" (Levin & Kater, p.139-140).

3.0 Problem Statement

Without a heightened emphasis on the use of collaborative and participative leadership among community college leaders--both current and emerging--organizational survival of community colleges is threatened.

4.0 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate unequivocally that collaborative leadership is imperative for the growth, survival, and prospering of community colleges.

5.0 Recommendations

Multiple Missions, Fiscal Constraints, & the Current Higher Education Climate

Of all institutions of higher education, community colleges may face the most daunting task of all. They're asked to meet multiple missions, support the local economy, help prepare a national workforce, increase enrollment, retain students, attract and retain good faculty, and much more. Without collaborative leadership, how is this possible? Lauren Grasmick, Timothy

gray Davies, and Clifford P. Harbour conducted a qualitative-based study with four current

community college presidents and three retired community college presidents. Their study used

grounded theory as the method to collect rich, in-depth interviews from the participants. The

central research question addressed was: 'how do community college presidents practice

participative leadership to develop a culture of participative governance?' In-depth interviews,

lasting anywhere from one and one-half hours to three and one-half hours, were conducted with

these seven respondents. These respondents are and were nationally recognized for their work as

participative leaders. The study concluded that the traditional top-down, leader-centered decision

making model for community colleges is no longer capable of leading lasting change and success

at community colleges. The study also concluded that an organization with this top-down

hierarchy may no longer be able to garner the required commitment and support from faculty,

staff, and its other constituencies. The findings of this research highlight the vitality of

understanding and implementing a participative and collaborative leadership approach in

community college settings. From the research emerged four key axial categories or,

"cornerstones", that were used to identify the core and underlying force of participative

leadership: the visioning process of leaders. These four axial categories and their corresponding

'10 practices of participative leadership', provide the framework to transform an institution into a

thriving, participatory organization unlocking the talents, energy, and capabilities of its

members. Grasmick, Davis, and Harbour note, "…our findings are consistent with the literature

that asserts a top down, hierarchical organization may no longer be capable of leading lasting

change at the community college. More specifically, such an organization may no longer be

capable of developing the necessary commitment from faculty and staff and other constituencies

to address the challenges of the American community college" (Grasmick, Davis, & Harbour, p. 77).

Collaborative and participative leadership is imperative for community colleges, many of whom have multiple missions and many of whom are facing chaos in the forms of declining enrollment, financial pressures, and significant industrial change.

Innovation, Partnership, & New Markets to Serve Students

Of all the things to help solve current and future issues at community colleges, why focus on collaborative leadership? Because collaborative and participative leadership breeds creativity, innovation, and new ways to serve and reach students. Community colleges with an awareness and emphasis on collaborative leadership means new markets, new students, new programs, and a more educated workforce among many other things. Looking back over the past 10-20 years so many new students and so many more students have been able to be served and reached as a result of collaborative leadership practices. Some of these students are in high school whom are the benefactors of collaboratively designed dual enrollment programs between the community college and local high schools. Some of these students are middle-aged working class whose plant or facility has just been closed, but through collaboration between grants, community colleges, and local CareerLink facilities they are able to have funding to be re-trained or pursue a new educational career. Some of these students may be college students attending four-year universities but due to sky-rocketing tuition, room, and board costs can no longer finish their degree at this institution. However, thanks to creative and collaboratively designed 2+2 partnership programs between community colleges and four-year universities, those students may be able to finish their Bachelor's degree from a four-year institution at a local community college sometimes even at a lower tuition rate. Finally, some of the students may be senior

citizens or recently retired community members looking to stay busy or stay connected in their

community. Thanks to partnerships and collaboration between community colleges and other

local facilities, perhaps these students are now able to take a discounted aerobics non-credit class

at a local YMCA, or enroll in a five-week non-credit painting class held at a local high school.

Collaborative and participative leadership can help solve and address many issues. It can

increase the scope and various types of students it serves as well. In Volume 15 of *Peer Review*,

Debra Humphreys speaks to many of these benefits. She states, "If we are to meet increasing

demands for a more highly educated populace while also maintaining the quality and navigating

changes in technology, funding patters, accountability frameworks, and the diversity of our

student bodies, we urgently need more effective and widespread collaborative leadership. Only

through collaborative leadership can we hope to…(3) develop more effective ways to actually

educate a far wider proportion of the society to meet twentieth-century demands. Whether our

current fiscal challenges really represent a 'new normal' or not, we must accelerate the use of

new forms of collaborative leadership to extend the advantages of a twenty-first century liberal

education to more students, and thereby, help fuel both an economic and a democratic recover"

(Humphreys, p. 2).

In this issue of *Peer Review*, Humphrey's study was compiled through four national

surveys of employers (AAC&U 2007, 2008, 2010, and 2013) which focused on specific skills

needed for new college graduates to succeed in the twenty-first-century global economy. Her

findings also pointed out that collaborative leadership has been used inconsistently throughout

the last few decades; however, when used effectively and intentionally, collaborative leadership

results in meaningful relationships in the community, increases in student retention rates, and

better prepared college graduates (p. 3). A few examples of collaborative leadership would be

community-based research, credited internships, and service-learning opportunities.

Collaborative leadership leads to innovation, entrepreneurial thinking, and cross-sector

connections – all of which lend to higher student achievement, student retention, and completion

rates, as well as, new academic programs and new market niches to serve students. Humphrey's

notes, "Beyond these long-standing examples of *internal* collaboration, are there new

collaborations we can and should be developing? For example, how can higher education leaders

collaborate far more closely with business and nonprofit leaders to build understanding of what

quality undergraduate education really must entail in the twenty-first century and, even more

powerfully, develop more opportunities for current students to apply what they are learning in

real-world settings with guidance from both educators and workplace or community mentors?

How can educational leaders work much more closely with policy makers—including system

heads and state higher education executive officers as well as legislators at both state and federal

levels—to craft sensible policies that advance multiple goals for greater efficiencies, increased

graduation rates, and quality learning outcomes for more students?" (p. 3).

Collaborative and participative leadership is vital to creating, innovating, and serving

new students.

Collaborative Leadership & Organizational Survival

Organizational survival is atop any organization's strategic objectives and missions. And

why wouldn't it be? What organization's mission or strategic direction involves forecasting ways

in which the organization can go bankrupt or obsolete? Higher education and community

colleges are just like any other industry or any other business. Only the community college is in

the business of serving students. That is their specialty. Thus, the strategic direction, vision, and

mission any good community college would be: how do we continue to serve existing students, new students, and our community all the while remaining financial profitable and sustainable?

In *Understanding Community Colleges,* John Levin and Susan Kater write, "As suggested by both resource dependency theory and institutional theory, all organizations compete for economic survival and social fitness. Their history suggests that community colleges will continue to seek presumed advantages within economic trends and changing labor markets, while continuing their embrace of a fungible, comprehensive mission (Meier, 2008). Multiple Missions and multiple identities are inherent in the organizational and social design of community colleges" (p. 16). In *Resource Dependence Theory: Past and Future,* Gerald Davis and J. Adam Cobb note, "The basic theory might be summarized by a piece of advice to top managers: 'Choose the least-constraining device to govern relations with your exchange partners that will allow you to minimize uncertainty and dependence and maximize your autonomy'" (p. 6). Another word for autonomy is self-sufficiency, or, 'survival'.

In order for community colleges to tweak, expand, and create new strategic initiatives to reach students, they must be collaborative. Community college leaders must be participative and collaborative in order for this effort to succeed and, ultimately, for their college to survive. Collaborative leadership involves entrepreneurial thinking, participative practices, and sometimes even failing in new ventures. Debra Humphreys writes, "We also are probably too cautious in actually acting on data before the full analysis is complete. Outside of higher education, there is far more willingness to 'make adjustments on the fly', as Hecht puts it. Academic leaders, in particular, have a crucial role to play in enabling faculty members and student affairs professionals to take risks and redesign curricula and student experiences. As Jose' Antonio Bowen put it in a presentation at AAC&U's 2013 annual meeting, academic deans

must be in the business of 'curating risks'. Data-driven decision making can include significant

structural changes based on years of data tracking. It can also, however, involve trying out a new

approach based on very preliminary data—knowing that it might not work and/or that it is likely

to require modification over a period of time. It requires new forms of collaborative leadership

exercised by those in such areas as institutional research, outcomes assessment, teaching and

learning centers, and enrollment management" (Humphreys, p. 4).

Organizational survival requires collaborative leadership. In the journal article,

Competencies for Community College Leaders published by the American Association of

Community Colleges, collaboration is listed as one of the six core competencies of community

college leaders identified in their study. The findings of the study suggest that the respondents,

who make up a significant percentage of community college leaders, unanimously identify six

core competencies of successful community college leaders that must be established as the

framework of community college leadership programs. The study was conducted in 2004 as a

survey electronically distributed to all participants in the AACC leadership summits as well as to

all members of the Leading Forward National Advisory Panel. Out of 125 surveys, the response

rate was 76%, or, a response from 95 participants. All of the 95 respondents indicated that each

of the six competencies were either "very" or "extremely" essential to effective leadership at the

community college level (Ottenritter).

Complex, challenging, and even prosperous times requires collaborative leadership. Even

during times of prosperity and success, community colleges still remain one of the most

challenging, complex organizations fighting for organizational survival. Collaboration and

participative leadership are required at all times.

Collaborative Leadership & Diversity

Another compelling reason for why collaborative and participative leadership is crucial going forward in community colleges is diversity. Our country, our schools, our communities are increasingly diverse. Diversity practitioner Joe Gerstandt points out that in 2008, according to the bureau of labor statistics, 70% of all new entrants into the workforce were women and people of color (Gerstandt YouTube video). Gerstandt points out not only this demographic shift in the workforce, but also in the consumer base. The workforce and consumer base is always changing. Traditional ways of thinking and problem solving for organizations and community colleges will no longer suffice. In the YouTube video, Gerstandt says, "Innovation happens at intersections…when you bring 'differences' together…different cultures, different disciplines, different industries…find it and bring it together. This fuels innovation and organizational survival" (Gerstandt YouTube video).

Collaborative leaders harness diversity. Diversity inclusion and cognitive diversity breeds better problem solving and innovation. As Gerstandt notes, 'conformity kills'. Xinxiao Yang also makes note of this increasing diversity and demographic shift: "Demographic shifts and changing immigration patterns are the characteristics of current American society (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). The question in culture and diversity is not long whether American universities and other organizations want diversity of whether should they accommodate people from diversified cultural backgrounds, for cultural diversity are clearly the present and the future (Smith, 2009)…therefore, how higher education engage in diversity population has profound national and global implications and effects" (Yang, p. 3).

In a mixed methods study involving qualitative, in-depth interviews from six California community college chancellors, presidents, and superintendents/presidents who have been in

their current role for at least 10 years, David Poole's study reiterates and reinforces the fact that community college leadership in the 21st century must be collaborative, participative, and entrepreneurial. It must be follower-centered, not leader-centered. Leaders must invest in their people. Leaders must invest in their community. High performing community colleges are those with leaders who invest in the community and, in return, the community invests back into the college. The partnership between the two becomes embedded and ingrained. This is of particular importance as it relates to diversity and the increasingly diverse communities community colleges reside in (Poole).

6.0 Acknowledgement of Counter-Arguments

Collaborative and participative leadership takes time. It likely will not yield short-term, immediate results; although it certainly could and certainly has. It is a healthy, long-term practice embedded into the organizational culture that takes time to develop. Some community colleges simply do not have this time. They're in a financial crisis that requires immediate attention, immediate moves, and immediate results.

Collaborative and participative leadership also requires the right type of leader – a transformational leader with exceptional communication skills, adept relationship building skills, and above all else, integrity. Truthfully, these leaders are hard to come by. They may be out there, but they are hard to find. It takes a certain type of person to lead an organization both internally and externally in a collaborative and participative manner, one in which unlocks the potential in all whom are involved. All organizations and all community colleges don't readily have a leader like this available. Thus, the collaborative and participative leadership practices may be impeded.

Organizational change and employee turnover are other short-falls of this approach. Again, this type of leadership requires the right people in the right places. Unfortunately, some key personnel change jobs; some retire; others become stay-at-home parents. Organizational change and employee turnover are realities for many community colleges. This type of leadership rises and falls on the personnel involved. When key people leave, there are sure to be effects.

Collaborative and participative leadership requires trust and sound judgment--both internally and externally. While the leader's intentions may be good, it's hard to fully know and control the intentions of those whom you're partnering with – local politicians, key community members, other four-year institutions, and so forth. This type of leadership requires good trust and judgment, and without it can often burn an organization or leave them in a very challenging and threatening situation.

7.0 Conclusion

As community colleges become even more complex and more diverse, collaborative and participative leadership are needed now more than ever. Collaborative leadership empowers, motivates, engages, and unlocks potential and capabilities in others – both internally and externally. In an organization that has so many moving pieces, so many different missions, and so many people depending on it, there is no other better type of leadership needed than collaborative leadership. Community college leaders now more than ever will need to become collaborative, entrepreneurial, and transformational leaders. The survival of many community colleges will rise and fall on their leadership. With so many other potential solutions and options that could be called upon, why leadership? Because as authors George Manning and Kent Curtis stated earlier: "We are convinced that the weakest link in business, industry, and government

today is leadership. It is not technology; it is not tools or equipment; it is not facilities; it is not systems and procedures; it is leadership. Leadership failure rates range from 40 to 60 percent costing organizations millions of dollars each year" (Manning & Curtis, p. 4). This is why, above all else, we look to collaborative and participative leadership to be the cornerstone and foundation of a successful community college in changing times.

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