

**Leadership, loss, and healing:
A study of women community college leaders who left the presidency**

by

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DEDICATION

With Love to

Jerry

Jonah and Lucy

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to extend research on female community college presidents by (a) describing and examining the experiences of women who have experienced difficult leadership positions that resulted in departures from community college presidencies; and (b) exploring how these women have made meaning from this experience. Three female community college presidents who had experienced a difficult leadership experience that resulted in leaving the presidency were interviewed to learn about how they viewed their leadership experiences, described what they had learned about leadership, explained about presidential relationships with governing boards, and constructed meaning as a result of leaving a presidency.

Using a constructivist framework and feminist methodology, the study data were first analyzed for each president and presented as an individual case study. Next the data were re-analyzed collectively to make interpretations about the shared experiences of all three presidents. The results of the study resulted in six themes. Leadership: (a) transformational-feminist leadership; Loss: (b) challenging situations with board members, (c) dealing with power struggles, (d) commitment to the college; and Healing: (e) spirituality and reflection, (f) continually creating meaning. In addition to describing six troublesome situations that presidents can face when dealing with governing boards and individual board members, the president's career-long leadership experiences, including some difficulties, suggested a style of leadership adapted from existing transformational and feminist leadership approaches. The Transformational-Feminist, with qualifiers, Leadership Model combines the two approaches and proposes limitations to the model's elements suggested by the emergent understanding that resulted from studying leaders who had difficult experiences.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Understanding the community college presidency is, at best, a complex undertaking. When one attempts to understand the impact of being a female president, the task becomes even more complicated” (Vaughan, 1989a, p. 25). Women are making strides toward occupying more of the presidents’ offices in community colleges. In 2006, 29 percent of community college presidents were women (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). While small in proportion to male counterparts, in 1986 only six percent of the community college presidents were women (Ross & Green, 1998). For about the last decade and a half, the number of women in the community college presidency was appearing to make great progress in reaching parity, but their access to the executive office has slowed to one percent growth since 2001 (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007).

Limited numbers of women as chief executive officers (CEO) of higher education institutions is not unique to community colleges. In contrast, community colleges have placed women in presidencies at a rate higher than other types of higher education institutions. By comparison, the American Council on Education (2007) reported only 23 percent of college and university presidents were women. In the three-year time frame, 1995-1998, 34 percent of the community college presidents hired were female, but only 25 percent of presidents hired in all sectors of higher education were women (Brown, Van Ummersen & Sturnick, 2001; Shults, 2001). In 1998, this resulted in a total of 148 female community college presidents and 97 female baccalaureate college presidents leading U.S. higher education institutions (Brown et al., 2001).

DiCroce (1995) considers why women are making strides toward the presidency at community colleges at greater rates than other higher education institutions:

The point is that two-year colleges appear to be at the forefront in placing women in their presidencies. The question is why. On the one hand, one might expect the community college to be the pace-setter in hiring women presidents. Since its founding, it has been hailed as the “people’s college,” “democracy’s college,” and “opportunity’s college.” With women over half its student body, it demonstrates a strong commitment to the values of open access, diversity, and inclusiveness. On the other hand, the steady rising number of women presidents in the community college may simply be a result of the institution’s lower hierarchical status in academe. Put less diplomatically, the community college is at the bottom of the power rung anyway; why not leave the messy business of women CEOs to it? (p. 80)

Others place a less skeptical perspective on women’s rise to the community college presidency and the resulting impact on increasing the number of women as chief executive officers in other types of higher education institutions. Two suggestions offer that (a) community colleges are serving as “model incubators for the advancement of women leaders” (Stephenson, 2001, p. 193) and (b) there is a greater proportion of women to men attending graduate programs focusing on community college leadership (Gillett-Karam, 2001).

The institutional governing board of directors has responsibility for recruiting and hiring community college presidents when vacancies occur (J. Brown, 1982; O’Banion, 1989; Widmer & Houchin, 2000). Hence the governing board and its orientation for accepting diversity in leadership roles plays a major factor in hiring a woman as its president

(Vaughan & Weisman, 1998). Concern about institutional “fit” affects governing boards when reviewing candidates for presidential positions (Kanter, 1977; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998). Fear over hiring a president who will not make connections with the college community because of differences in gender or ethnicity results in a lack of diversity in leadership. Consequently, “current community college trustees tend to mirror the demographic characteristics of current community college presidents. Approximately 87 percent of the trustees are Caucasian and approximately 67 percent are male” (Vaughan & Weisman, 1998, pp. 111-112; see also Shults, 2001).

Although “fit” may be a factor that may be difficult to overcome, women can prepare themselves to work in institutions more accepting of diversity in leadership by developing a knowledge about the other qualities trustees are looking for in a president. Much can be learned to assist in achieving equity in the president’s office by studying women who are current or former community college presidents and reviewing their experiences. The focus of this study will be the experiences of women who have experienced a difficult leadership position that resulted in departure from a community college presidency and how they have made meaning from this experience, and to learn how these experiences have influenced how they view leadership.

Statement of the Problem

A study of female community college presidents’ experiences is important because even though the community college presidency has been well studied (Eddy & Cox, 2008; Gillett-Karam, 2001; Pierce & Pedersen, 1997; Roueche, Baker, & Rose, 1989; Stout-Stewart, 2005; Vaughan, 1986, 1989b; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998), the studies including women tend to focus on traits and comparisons rather than examinations of the women’s

experiences from their points-of-view. Past studies including female community college presidents tend to center on either advice for ensuring a successful presidential tenure or descriptive statistics. Examples of these studies include comparison with male community college presidents (Vaughan & Weisman, 1998), preparation for a presidential position (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Winship & Amey, 1992), leadership characteristics and style (Gillett-Karam, 2001; Stout-Stewart, 2005; Vaughan, 1989a; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998), and behaviors necessary to being an effective president (Evans, 2001; DiCroce, 1995; Stout-Stewart, 2005). While these studies are informative about the general nature of the female community college presidency, they lack depth in understanding the complexity of the presidential experience for women. In addition, research on female presidents' experiences with the community college governing boards is absent from the literature.

One way to expand our knowledge and understanding of the female community college presidency is to study the experiences of female community college presidents who have left their positions as a result of a difficult leadership experience.

Purpose Statement

In this study, research on female community college presidents will be extended by (a) describing and examining the experiences of women who have experienced difficult leadership positions that resulted in departures from community college presidencies; and (b) exploring how these women have made meaning from their experiences.

The research questions that will guide this study are:

1. How do the female community college presidents who have experienced difficult leadership experiences that resulted in departure from their positions view their leadership experiences and describe what they have learned about leadership?

2. How do they describe and view their departures from the presidency?
3. How do they describe and explain their relationships with their governing boards?
4. How do they construct meaning as a result of leaving a presidency? What implication does leaving presidential positions have for their future goals and plans?

Significance of Study

Views of the community college presidency will be enhanced by studying the presidency through the experiences of female leaders. By examining a difficult leadership experience and how meaning was created for the participants, we may learn about the ways women understand the implications of their presidential and leadership experiences. When female leaders who leave a position as a result of difficult leadership circumstances are studied, we may learn more about the ways presidents and governing boards can develop and maintain a successful relationship.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation is divided into nine chapters. Chapter two gives background information on past studies of female community college presidents and research on community college president and governing board relations. Research methods are described in chapter three. An explanation of sample identification, data collection, data analysis, and ensuring research trustworthiness and authenticity are included. Chapters four through eight present the results of the study. Chapter four introduces the results; chapters five, six, and seven offer a discussion of each of the president's individual experiences in the form of case study narratives; and chapter eight interprets the shared experiences of the presidents.

Chapter nine closes the dissertation with conclusions, recommendations for practice and research, and my reflections about the project.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to review the research relevant to the issue of female community college presidents and their leadership experiences. The first section discusses literature related to women's leadership. Specific information about female community college presidents including characteristics of female community college presidents, a comparison with male presidents, and the factors that affect women as they prepare for and seek out presidencies follows. The final section examines the literature related to community college presidents and governing boards including general governing board responsibilities, issues affecting the relationship between president and board, and factors impacting presidential termination and resignation.

Women's Leadership

"Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth" (Burns, 1978, p. 1; Astin & Leland, 1991; Rosenbach & Taylor, 1984). Leadership's elusiveness may be one reason researchers continue to study it. Traditional views of leadership have shaped the way we understand and define leadership. Bennis & Nanus (1985) identified more than 350 meanings for the word leadership. While many researchers are trying to create an all-inclusive definition, "a pluralistic culture can have no single acceptable definition of leadership or measure of effectiveness" (Bensimon, Neumann, & Birnbaum, 1989, p. 70). Bass (1990) concurs, "the search for the one and only proper and true definition of leadership seems to be fruitless, since the appropriate choice of definition should depend on the methodological and substantive aspects of leadership in which one is interested" (p. 18). The purpose of this research, therefore, is not to develop a definition of

leadership, but rather to add to our knowledge about women's leadership experience through examining women who have experienced a difficult leadership position. For the purposes of this study, the concept of leadership will be viewed as “the ability to influence, shape, and embed values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors consistent with increased commitment to the unique mission of the community college” (Roueche et al., 1989, p. 34). Difficult leadership, by extension, will mean experiencing circumstances that impede a leader’s ability to influence, shape, and embed values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors effectively within the community college.

Despite the fact that history books have neglected leadership by women, women "have always been leaders" (Shrewsbury, 1989, p. 327). Women have been instrumental in community development, health reform, and educational changes. For example, "it was women's groups that furnished schoolrooms, that started libraries, [and] that pushed for sanitation laws" (Shrewsbury, 1989, p. 327). Also, for centuries women have led businesses, generally small and family-owned, by inheriting them from a parent or after the death of a spouse (Bass, 1990).

Research on Women's Leadership

Despite women's leadership contributions, questions remain about whether women's leadership experiences have been adequately represented by past leadership research (Hollander, 1987). As recently as 1974 citations on women and sex roles were excluded from Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership Theory and Research (Heller, 1982).

Discussion about women's representation in leadership research mainly centers on the male focus that has resulted in women's exclusion from past leadership research. As a result of male focused leadership research, few women have been subjects for leadership research

(Bunch, 1991; Hollander & Yoder, 1984). In the past most leadership research expressed a belief that men's experiences were the best measures for leadership (Hart, 1982) because generally men held the prominent leadership positions such as presidents of businesses and industries, heads of national and state governments, and officers in the military. As a consequence, leadership became identified as a "masculine concept" (Heller, 1982; Hollander & Yoder, 1984, p. 234). A theory of leadership even emerged called the "Great Man" theory (Burns, 1978) which by its title alone excludes women.

The studies on leadership that have included women either "have focused on differences in the traits and leadership styles of men and women" (Astin & Leland, 1991, p. 3; e.g. Eagly, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2003), the "most visible spokeswomen" (Bunch, 1991, p. xi) such as women in politics or women business leaders, or the "stereotyped expectations imposed on women with respect to their leadership ability" (Astin & Leland, 1991, p. 3). In other words, much of the previous research on women has compared and contrasted female leaders with male leaders or women leaders with who they were expected to be as leaders, in the eyes of the researcher, instead of describing and exploring women's leadership experiences as a concept of leadership.

Aspects of Women's Leadership

Some leadership researchers have suggested leaders should adopt the ways many women already lead (Astin & Leland, 1991; Shrewsbury, 1989). Some of the aspects associated with women's leadership by researchers of leadership and social science include: commitment (Bennett & Shayner, 1988), affiliation and relationships (Bennett & Shayner, 1988; Delworth & Seeman, 1984; Gelwick, 1985; Gilligan, 1982; Shrewsbury, 1989), cooperation and internal competition rather than external competition (Astin & Leland, 1991;

Gilligan, 1982; Helgesen, 1990), interdependence (Bennett & Shayner, 1988; Gilligan, 1982; Shrewsbury, 1989), participation and collaboration (Chin, 2004; Pearson, Shavlik, & Touchton, 1989; Rosener, 1991; Shrewsbury, 1989), and empowerment (Astin & Leland, 1991; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Denmark, 1993; Jablonski, 1996; Rosener, 1991; Sagaria, 1988). These aspects of women's leadership do not necessarily describe all—or only—women.

Women's leadership experiences also can be illustrated by three models of leadership that emphasize inclusion and empowerment: (a) generative leadership, (b) web of inclusion leadership, and (c) feminist leadership.

Generative Leadership.

Generative leadership is a cooperative form of leadership in which all participants take responsibility for the creation and implementation of the group's objectives (Sagaria, 1988). Goals of the group are achieved by the leader creating and supporting an environment where the members feel encouraged and confident to actively participate in the leadership of the group (Sagaria, 1988; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1988).

There are two ways the generative leader attempts to foster the participant's leadership experience: (a) by providing situations that encourage and support a person's "grow[th] and develop[ment]" (Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1988, p. 16) and (b) by creating and implementing collaborative priorities (Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1988). For example, a leader demonstrating generative leadership would foster activities and events that would benefit all involved and would allow all members to take responsibility for the leadership of the group. Finally, generative leaders support and foster the leadership ability of the group members by empowering them to "share their experience and take collective risks for the good of others"

(Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1988, p. 16). For example, the leader might encourage the members who have expertise in budgeting and finance to work together to create a plan for fund raising.

Web of Inclusion Leadership.

The web of inclusion model of leadership focuses on the relationships between leaders and followers. Similar to generative leadership, the web of inclusion leadership model encourages leadership development within a group's members. The model's distinction from generative leadership, however, is the position the leader takes within an organization's structure. The leader views herself in the center of a web rather than at the top of a hierarchy (Helgesen, 1990). The leader is joined with all members and, therefore, supports and is supported by those around her. "In the web construction, the figurehead is the *heart* rather than the *head*; and so does not need layers and ranks below to reinforce status. Authority comes from connection *to* the people around them rather than distance *from* those below; this in itself helps to foster a team approach" (Helgesen, 1990, p. 55). This also indicates a greater focus on the group than the individual (Helgesen, 1990). In a business, a web of inclusion leader may structure the staff so there are many opportunities for interaction and input from everyone including secretaries and new employees. She may also position her office in the middle of the building rather than on the top floor to surround herself with members of the company.

Feminist Leadership.

Likewise, feminist leadership emphasizes the nonhierarchical feature of leadership where all participants work together with the figurehead leader who aids the cooperative members to achieve shared aspirations (Astin & Leland, 1991). This model was created from

their comprehensive qualitative study of seventy-seven women engaged in feminist social change during the 1960's and 1970's, and is founded upon three feminist theoretical issues:

(1) "The social construction of reality," meaning what is believed about the concept of leadership is prejudiced by the way people view all aspects of their collective lives.

Women's absence from past leadership models requires that their inclusion is necessary for new realities of leadership to emerge (Astin & Leland, 1991, p. 7).

(2) "Interdependence," by recognizing the interconnections of people then a natural lens to view leadership is "as a process of collective effort rather than as something one person does in a vacuum" (Astin & Leland, 1991, p. 8).

(3) "Power as energy, not control," means understanding how power in leadership is not about being in command over others but involving others to share in it (Astin & Leland, 1991, p. 8).

By constructing the model within feminist theory and testing it with women's experiences, Helen Astin and Carole Leland (1991) offer a "promising conceptual model for the study of leadership" (p. 11). This model is distinguished from other more recent perspectives on feminist leadership where similar constructs exist, but there is a greater emphasis on the leader acting as a feminist. Feminist psychologists have recently proposed value in this area of study (Chin, 2004; Madden, 2005). "Although the theories and models on feminism and leadership exist, there has been little study of the intersection of the two. The literature on feminist leadership is scant. Few have defined it and fewer still have researched it" (Chin, 2004 p. 1).

Women Community College Presidents

Articles about women community college presidents are not necessarily only recent or rare. In 1975, Thurston surveyed nine “junior college” presidents to describe women as CEOs; one year later, four female presidents described their experiences as community college presidents (Howe, Joachim Moore, Keehan & Thurston, 1976), and a quarter century later seven current and former female community college presidents mirrored the study of their fore-mothers (Blevins, 2001). Despite a thirty-five-year history of research on female community college presidents, the literature has generally fallen into four broad areas: (a) general characteristics of female president’s leadership, (b) comparing male and female presidents, (c) suggestions for ensuring a successful tenure as president, and (d) perspectives on women advancing to the presidency.

Leadership Style and Experience

Literature addressing female community college presidents’ leadership includes both general observations on all presidential leadership and specific notions about women’s leadership. Roueche et al. (1989) suggests that presidents can learn to become outstanding leaders, but cautions:

The secret [to successful leadership] lies in leaders’ recognition that leadership style is developmental, a leader’s goal is to apply and polish a full range of skills and attributes in a performance repertoire. Those who wish to lead must be willing to risk developing new leadership skills and, after evaluating their own performances, discover what works and what does not. (p. 4)

In addition to developing leadership skills, offering an organizational vision through transformational leadership is a necessary for success as a president (Bensimon et al., 1989;

Gillett-Karam, 1989; Roueche et al., 1989). “Smart CEOs also look toward tomorrow and decline to spend their professional lives putting out brush fires. Vision and leadership toward tomorrow are of paramount importance to moving institutions forward” (Giannini, 2001, p. 207).

Roueche et al. (1989) “defined transformational leadership in the community college as, ‘the ability of the community college CEO to influence the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of others by working with and through them in order to accomplish the college’s mission and purpose’” (p. 11). To illustrate this definition five transformational leadership themes were developed as a result of their interviews with 50 male and female community college CEOs who had been identified by their peers as “the very best leaders they knew” (p. 12). “Transformational Leaders:

1. Influence: “believe in teamwork and shared decision-making. They have a bias for action, and they empower others to act. They try to develop a collaborative situation that is not dependent on any one individual for success.
2. People orientation: They value people, both as members of the team and as individuals. They respect individual differences and value the opinions of others. They reward work well done. Students are a focal point of their efforts.
3. Motivation: They understand motivation. They have high expectations of others and inspire them to develop their creative and problem-solving skills.
4. Values: They have a strong personal value system. They value consistency, integrity, commitment to student learning, and openness. They model the conduct they expect of others.
5. Vision: They have a vision of what their college can become. They are willing to take risks and commit their colleges to new directions that incorporate the needs of their communities” (Roueche et al., 1989, p. 12-13).

To complement their study, Rosemary Gillett-Karam (1989) took the data from all of the 21 women and a sample of 21 men who were respondents from the original study to see if there

were gender differences in transformational leadership. The findings indicated several strong characteristics of transformational leadership for both gender groups. When the 34 individual items were analyzed, four characteristics were identified as specifically feminine characteristics: “(a) Vision: Takes appropriate risks to bring about change, (b) Influence: Is able to cause followers to solve problems and work together, (c) People: Demonstrates respect and caring for individual differences, (d) Values: Builds openness and trust through personal and professional behavior” (p. 240). The study noted “women of the study did have the behaviors and attributes essential to effective leadership and that gender was not significant to leadership” (Gillett-Karam, 1989, p. 261).

DiCroce (1995) encourages female presidents to embrace women’s leadership and not be threatened by the challenges to it by discussing several frameworks related to the leadership characteristics of female presidents: (a) Helgesen’s (1990) Web of Inclusion concept, (b) Aburdene and Naisbitt’s (1992) description of women’s leadership reflecting women’s values, (c) Gillett-Karam’s (1989, 1994) “feminine behaviors,” and (d) Bolman & Deal’s (1991) model for “integrated leadership.” Furthermore, Giannini (2001) suggests “women leaders need to start exercising, using, and taking their ‘women’s intuition’ seriously. Intuition allows females to see the big picture and to develop visions of seeing their organization as a vehicle for bringing learning and change into society” (p. 205).

Specific observations on skills necessary to be an effective president are also covered in the literature (Stout-Stewart, 2005). “Female leaders must demonstrate that they have the skills and abilities to operate in an empowered manner” (Giannini, 2001, p. 208). Moreover successful leadership is described as using an ever-changing variety of leadership skills to ensure greater success (Eaton, 1989; Evans, 2001; Stout-Stewart, 2005); and establishing

credibility, assuring commitment, demonstrating consistency, and valuing communication (Wallin, 1992). In addition, female presidents need to understand how to work effectively within and begin to change gendered organizations (Eddy & Cox, 2008).

Furthermore, transforming higher education institutions toward advancement requires leadership skills as a change agent (DiCroce, 1995; Evans, 2001, Giannini, 2001; Gillett-Karam, 1989).

Responding to external demands requires that today's higher education leaders accept the word "change" as an everyday operative word that sets the stage for required cooperation in order to attack the problem. . . . In the hierarchy of higher education, leaders must constantly work to change and improve the system, not just become a part of it. (Giannini, 2001, p. 207)

In order to effect change related specifically to women's issues at the community college, DiCroce (1995) proposes five measures for women community college presidents to take: (a) break down institutional gender stereotypes, (b) "penetrate institution's power structure and redefine its sense of power" (p. 85), (c) use the power granted to the president's office to change policy that is tied to gender, (d) begin conversations related to gender issues so colleagues are more aware and willing to discuss it, and (e) get involved in dialogue outside of the higher education institution so public policy can be impacted.

Comparing and Contrasting Male and Female Presidents

In addition to discussing leadership traits necessary for successful presidencies, several studies compare and contrast men and women as community college presidents. Topics include leadership style (Gillett-Karam, 1989; Twombly, 1995; Stout-Stewart, 2005; Winship & Amey, 1992), barriers to attaining a presidency (Winship & Amey, 1992), career

trajectories (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Amey, VanDerLinden & Brown, 2002; Ross & Green, 1998; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998; Winship & Amey, 1992), and significant accomplishments as president (Winship & Amey, 1992).

Demographic characteristics for women who have attained a presidency have several other differences with their male counterparts. In a 1996 national study of community college presidents, Vaughan and Weisman (1998) found: (a) that a greater percentage of female presidents are minority (24%) than men (12%), (b) women presidents were younger than male presidents even though they were approximately 3 years older than men when they began their first presidency, (c) men had spent twice as many years in their current presidency as women, (d) women reported spending a few more hours per week in presidential responsibilities than men, and (e) women tended to rate the president position as “high stress” and “high risk” at a greater percent than men.

Advice to Ensure a Successful Presidency

Beyond descriptions of female community college presidential characteristics, advice for ensuring a successful presidency is a common theme in the literature. Several perspectives on key responsibilities in the presidential position have been offered to current and aspiring female presidents. Stephenson (2001) discusses four critical issues women leaders should be prepared to handle in a presidential position: (a) staffing, because it is a “pivotal act that determines the direction of community colleges” (p. 196); (b) funding, as a means of accountability and value to the public; (c) students, because “we first must understand the gaps between our colleges’ instructional programs and the needs of our communities’ work force. Because the only reason your college, or indeed any school, is in business is to produce individuals who not only can function as adults in contemporary

society, but also can function as adults in progress of that society” (p. 198); and (d) work force development, as it relates to the college’s responsibility to training workers who can meet the needs of the future.

While DiCroce (1995) promoted pursuing institutional change to women presidents, Guthrie (2001) warned aspiring presidents of several misconceptions surrounding presidential power and responsibilities. She debunked the myths and offers the following lessons: (a) power is shared and should be used appropriately; (b) presidents have limited influence in directing the institution especially when legislators, trustees, alumni, and the media are involved; (c) political skills are necessary for success as a president; (d) many constituents can be difficult to work with and it is often difficult to say “no” to individuals without alienating them; (e) fund raising is a major portion of the job; and (f) a significant amount of time is spent on resolving issues.

Finally, several other topics related to women community college presidents are present in the literature including (a) the role of spouses to female community college presidents (Smith, 2001), (b) the presidential assistant position and its impact on female presidents (Addy, 2001), (c) the marginalization of women president’s accomplishments (Twombly, 1995), (d) the role of confidants for women presidents (Winship & Amey, 1992), (e) the scrutiny a female president experiences when beginning and ending a presidency (Mulder, 2001), and (f) the effective behaviors and approaches women have for leadership needed in the future (Evans, 2001; Stout-Stewart, 2005)

Preparing for the Presidency

A woman's pathway to assuming a community college presidency may be affected by several different factors: her own personal and professional characteristics, the role that others play, and the nature of the governing boards who hire the president.

Personal and Professional Characteristics

Several characteristics are understood to be advantageous for a woman aspiring to a presidency. Holding an academic terminal degree is a tangible credential that is important not only to securing a presidency, but also to gaining access to the positions that will lead to a presidency (Taylor, 1981; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998; Winship & Amey, 1992).

Furthermore developing the ability to create and promote a vision (Giannini 2001; Roueche et al., 1989; Stephenson, 2001) and working effectively with teams (Giannini, 2001; Roueche et al., 1989) are helpful qualities for aspiring presidents. Pierce and Pedersen (1997) also suggest personal adaptability, role flexibility, and sound judgment are qualities that anyone seeking a community college presidency should possess. In short, Stephenson (2001) charged women leaders to “develop a compelling vision, exercise appropriate power, insist on authenticity, nurture entrepreneurship, and work at transforming our colleges in the service of our communities” (p. 200).

Purposeful Career Planning

Indeed personal and professional characteristics which are viewed as important for leadership are critical to securing a presidency, but strategic career development is also essential. Acquiring a variety of experiences (Winship & Amey, 1992) and “establishing oneself as a leader within one's community college” (Vaughan & Weisman, 1998, p. 114) are also important factors in preparing for a presidency.

Even the growth in previous administrative experience in positions other than president suggests a realization that the role of community college president, while perhaps still “first among equals,” in fact has multiple and conflicting responsibilities for which management, administration, and leadership skills gained through particular and extended experiences is important. (Amey et al., 2002, p. 578)

Position pathing (Winship & Amey, 1992) is a process of using formal and informal opportunities both to develop leadership and management skills and to engage in purposeful career planning to obtain positions that prepare individuals for presidencies. Structured leadership development programs are one mechanism for preparing women for advanced management opportunities to enhance skills, provide networking opportunities, and gain experience especially when a candidate has had limited direct, upper-level administrative positions (Ebbers, Gallisath, Rockel, & Coyan, 2000; Taylor, 1981; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998).

Moreover while governing boards tend to prefer candidates with previous presidential experience (Amey et al., 2002; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998), other formal administrative experiences lead to presidencies—most notably a position with academic administration responsibilities such as chief academic officer or dean of instruction (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Ross & Green, 1998; Taylor, 1981; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998).

Mentoring Relationships

In addition to personal leadership development and career planning, other individuals can play a significant role in a woman’s professional advancement. Mentoring relationships and personal support systems are very important aspects in a successful progression toward a presidency (Taylor, 1981; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998; Winship & Amey, 1992). Mentoring

“is a proactive strategy for developing successful female and minority leaders” (Vaughan & Weisman, 1998 p. 116).

Supervisors can play a role by “providing increasingly responsible work experiences . . . to expand the emerging leaders’ administrative and leadership experience” (Vaughan & Weisman, 1998, p. 119). Moreover, current community college presidents play an important role in two ways: (a) educating and influencing their own governing boards to be open to diversity in future institutional leadership positions and (b) using personal networks to nominate qualified women for open presidential positions (Vaughan & Weisman, 1998).

Presidents and Governing Boards

A review of the research and literature related to relationships between governing boards and chief executives found no studies in higher education, non-profit organization, or business literature specifically addresses gender (male or female) and CEO-board relations as the primary research. The only exception is secondary education where a few studies have used female superintendents and school boards as the core topic (Beekley, 1999; Pavan, 1999; Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996; Tallerico, Burstyn, & Poole, 1993). To be sure, gender issues have been discussed within the context of a few of the studies on executives and governing boards (e.g. Fisher, 1991; Kanter, 1977; Vaughan & Weisman, 1997a, 1997b; Weisman & Vaughan, 1997) and other articles focusing on women’s leadership experiences have addressed relationships with governing boards as a subtopic (Brown et al., 2001), but the dearth of literature is noteworthy. The literature discussed heretofore will illustrate a need for research about women’s presidential leadership experiences with governing boards.

This section is organized thematically around the following areas: (a) general governing board information, (b) individual trustee members, (c) president and governing

board relations, and (d) presidential termination and resignation. When available, issues related specifically to women's experiences are discussed within the research themes.

Governing Board Overview

Public higher education and corporate governing boards exhibit both similarities and differences. Both are organized with a chairperson and subcommittees to oversee the operation of the organization (Wood, 1983), both are concerned about serving constituencies (Freedman, 2004; Wood, 1983), and both are obligated to maintaining fiduciary responsibility (Freedman, 2004). They differ, however, in other aspects: (a) corporate governance prefers one person serving as both the CEO and board chairperson (Carey & Ogden, 2000) whereas in higher education the president and board chair are separate individuals, (b) education is governed by lay-persons usually without an education background while experienced corporate leaders govern industry (Wood, 1983), (c) higher education trustees are generally unpaid volunteers (Wood, 1983), and (d) the ultimate corporate goal is financial profit for shareholders (Freedman, 2004) while the purpose of higher education is to serve the greater community by educating its citizens.

Community College Governance

The public community college system in the United States boasts 6,000 board members serving on 600 boards of trustees who are either appointed to state boards or elected to local boards (American Association of Community Colleges, 2005; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Vaughan & Weisman, 1997a). "The idea of a lay governing board is an old concept in American education, and public education has used elected boards to reflect the collective will and wisdom of the people since earliest times" (Cohen & Brawer, 2003 p. 123). Each board works within the scope of responsibilities outlined in state code or local

by-laws (Brown, 1982), and three general functions apply (a) offering strategic vision for the institution, (b) setting organizational policy, and (c) hiring the chief executive officer.

Strategic Vision-Setting Function.

The board and president work collaboratively to identify a strategic mission for the institution (Brown et al., 2001; Freedman, 2004; Tweeten, 2002; Wood, 1983). Boards of all types of organizations (both education and non-profit) are encouraged to actively set institutional direction to reflect the needs of their constituencies rather than assigning that responsibility to the executive (Tweeten, 2002). Long-term vision developed by the board is essential to institutional vitality (Freedman, 2004; Wood, 1983).

Policy-Setting Function.

The policy-setting function of all governing boards is the hallmark of board responsibility (Carver, 1990; Desjardins & Hoff, 2001; Fisher, 1984; Golub, 2004; Vaughan & Weisman, 1997a). Often, however, the lines of governance and management are blurred between chief executives and boards. Micromanagement by a board decreases organizational effectiveness (Carver, 1990), and creates strained relationships between leaders and governing boards in all types of organizations—K-12 schools (Danzberger, 1994), corporations (Carey & Ogden, 2000), and higher education (Desjardins & Hoff, 2001; Freedman, 2004). Specifically, micromanagement by college governing boards undermines the “stature and authority” of the presidential position with faculty, students, and staff (Fisher, 1991, p. 61).

The American Council on Education’s Office of Women in Higher Education (ACE/OWHE) sponsored a series of roundtable discussions about presidential leadership experiences with female higher education presidents in 1998-1999 (Brown et al., 2001). To

minimize board micromanagement, the ACE/OWHE participants encouraged female college presidents to outline the president's specific responsibilities and review the governing board's role early in their tenure by engaging trustees in board orientation and development programs (Brown et al., 2001).

Hiring Function.

Managing board of director encroachment into administrative territory presents interesting challenges for presidents and CEOs since, in addition to strategic visioning and policy implementation, the other major board responsibility is hiring the organization's executive (Brown et al., 2001; O'Banion, 1989). Higher education governing boards commonly identify several skills and characteristics of ideal community college executive candidates.

Qualities that trustees look for in presidents include understanding the mission and being able to translate that understanding into a vision for the institution, having the leadership skills to help the college achieve that vision, having effective communication skills, having knowledge of the community and the relationship between the college and the community, and having experience within the community college field. (Vaughan & Weisman, 1998, p. 114)

In addition, higher education trustees generally prefer candidates with previous presidential experience (Amey et al., 2002; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998). Furthermore, marital status affects college and university presidential hiring. Many governing boards prefer married candidates (Brown et al., 2001). This can be particularly troublesome not only for single female and lesbian candidates facing discrimination (Brown et al., 2001), but also for married women. Female presidents whose partner is unwilling or uninterested in

playing the role Kanter (1977) termed “corporate husband” may face a disapproving board (see also Brown et al., 2001; Smith, 2001).

Individual Trustees

Governing board members represent diverse personal and professional characteristics. According to ACCT data, trustees generally live in the communities in which they govern and are professionals, business owners, and managers. More than that, they act as community leaders in their role as trustee. Board members are responsible for ensuring that their college is serving the needs of the community and for adopting, following, and enforcing standards of conduct that respect the public trust. (Shults, 2001, p. 8)

General expectations about all types of boards of directors stipulate that an individual board member’s interests do not override the shared interests of the board; therefore organizational authority lies only with the collective board (Potter & Phelan, 2008; Shults, 2001). In addition, trustees are expected to contribute financially to the institution (Fisher, 1984) and to maintain ethical conduct (Henry & Roskens, 1990).

Individual board members can play a role in influencing overall board and executive relationships. Mountford (2004) identified that an individual’s motivation for board membership and his or her perceptions of power may have an effect on superintendent and school board relations. Likewise, egocentric trustees interested in power and prestige may influence the relationship between presidents and higher education boards (Brown, 1982; Davis, 2001; Fisher, 1984; Potter & Phelan, 2008). Occasionally, a trustee, known as a “rogue trustee,” acts inappropriately by “run[ning] roughshod over the norms and standards of behavior expected of public officials . . . trample over the ideas and cautions . . . place

their self-interests over the interests of the college . . . violate written and unwritten codes of conduct . . .”(O’Banion, 2009, p. 479; Potter & Phelan, 2008). Rogue trustees can be very difficult for a president to manage.

Presidents are cautioned to avoid involvement in conflicts between individual board members (Fisher, 1984). The board chair is responsible for supervising board behavior (O’Banion, 1989) and should be called upon to deal with unruly board members.

Furthermore the ACE/OWHE participants advised women presidents in two additional areas related to dealing with board members. They cautioned that (a) “having a number of women on the board, including woman board chair; doesn’t guarantee a problem-free relationship” and (b) board members with business experience may be very concerned about finances, so “a proactive president will demonstrate good financial ability” (Brown et al., 2001, p. 8). Executives are wise to understand the impact an individual trustee plays in the executive and board relationship while still recognizing that the executive is responsible only to the full board.

President and Governing Board Relations

Once a governing board has hired an executive, building a strong working relationship between the two is essential for both institutional and executive success (Vaughan, 1989b; Vaughan & Weisman, 1997, 1998; Zwemer, 1985). Board effectiveness expert John Carver (1990) summarizes:

No single relationship in the organization is as important as that between the board and [the organization’s] chief executive officer. Probably no single relationship is as easily misconstrued or has such dire potential consequences. That relationship, well conceived, can set the stage for effective governance and management. (p. 109)

A strong relationship between governing board and president is particularly important for a college or university's success. In order to ensure institutional effectiveness, trustees and presidents should collaborate (Potter & Phelan, 2008; Shults, 2001), maintain trust (Boggs, 1995; Boggs & Smith, 1997; Potter & Phelan, 2008), develop a positive relationship (Myran, 2003; Potter & Phelan, 2008), work toward a common goal of excellence (Piland, 1994), and create a vision together (Vaughan & Weisman, 1997a). "Board-president relations are critical to productivity and to the well being of the institution; the more harmonious those relations are, the more the institution will grow and prosper" (Tatum, 1985, p. 15).

Presidential Responsibilities

Developing an effective relationship with the board of directors is identified as the executive's responsibility. Corporate and education CEOs must develop skills in board leadership (Herman & Heimovics, 1990). Although college presidents have reported being ill-equipped to work with trustees when they began the position (Boggs, 2003; Shults, 2001), they soon realize "understanding the college from the board's perspective" (Vaughan & Weisman, 1998, p. 114; Potter & Phelan, 2008) and establishing the relationship-building process from the beginning (Tatum, 1985) are critical to framing their rapport with the board. The relationship development should begin even as early as the search process. Governing boards should communicate specific performance expectations to presidential candidates (Neff, 1992). Moreover the board's perception of contract negotiations with the president sets a tone for developing the relationship (Brown et al., 2001).

Presidents also create positive board relations in numerous ways: (a) by training and orienting the board to its responsibilities (Brown et al., 2001; Davis, 2001; Freedman, 2004; Vaughan, 1986), (b) by meeting individually with board members (Fisher, 1984), (c) by

partnering with the board chair (Piland, 1994), and (d) by communicating college issues and concerns frequently (Brown et al., 2001; Potter & Phelan, 2008). Both secondary and post-secondary leaders report that developing board relationships takes much time and great effort (Pavan, 1999; Vaughan, 1989b; Vaughan & Weisman, 1997a). The ACE/OWHE participants recommended that female presidents should “allocate considerable time to cultivating board relationships—even if this means rearranging other leadership priorities and schedules” (Brown et al., 2001, p. 9).

Effective working relationships between leaders and trustees are not without conflict. Some tensions can create positive outcomes such as when the board serves as a “friendly critic” (Vaughan & Weisman, 1997a) or “causes administrators to think of things that have not been thought of earlier” (Tatum, 1985, p. 19). Yet other disagreements can be difficult to manage like when either the president or the trustees blur role boundaries (Carver, 1990), when a president needs to correct a trustee mistake (Fisher, 1984), or when conflict becomes public fodder (Vaughan & Weisman, 1997a, 1998). Resolving conflict issues in education is similar to managing disagreements in industry. “Uncertainties in the relationship between the president and the trustees in the board rooms of higher education are part of a pattern found elsewhere in society” (Wood, 1985, p. 19).

When trustee relations are effective, presidents are able to influence their governing boards in many aspects of decision-making (Vaughan & Weisman, 1997a) including implementing policy recommendations (Davis, 1992, Myran, 2003), planning for institutional financing and viability (Millett, 1978), and setting college strategic vision (Vaughan & Weisman, 1997a). In advising the board of directors the president balances both internal and external constituencies’ expectations. These are related to both the academic

interests of the faculty and the community-serving interests of the board (Millett, 1978). Guthrie (2001) notes that presidents exert limited influence in directing the institution especially when legislators, trustees, alumni, and the media are involved. Presidential charisma, however, developed through faculty, staff, and student support coupled with admiration by community members contributes significantly to the president's influential power with the board of directors (Fisher, 1984). Taylor (1987) lists several additional ways presidents influence governing boards: "spending time communicating with trustees, controlling board agendas and background information, influencing the selection and development of trustees, motivating trustees' behavior to the desired ends, [and] establishing strong relationships with faculty and other constituents" (p. 97).

Characteristics and Issues Affecting Board-President Relationships

Several authors have identified important areas related to enhancing the relationship between governing boards and executives (Petersen & Short, 2001; Piland, 1994; Polk, LaCombe, & Goddard, 1976; Potter & Phelan, 2008; Weisman & Vaughan, 1997a). The human nature of these relationships cannot be ignored (Piland, 1994). "It is important that trustees and presidents remember that their relationship rests upon human values, attitudes, and prejudices as well as upon performance" (Vaughan & Weisman, 1997a p. 53).

Desjardins and Hoff (2001) list ten suggestions for "leading edge" presidents to implement in order to establish effective board relations. Herman and Heimovics (1990) identify five "board-regarding leadership behaviors." And Potter & Phelan (2008) provide eight "principles of good board and president relations." When recommendations by these authors and others are distilled, the following themes emerge as contributors to establishing

successful president and board relationships: accountability, trust, communication, support, confidence and respect, and ethics.

Accountability.

The issue of accountability involves both presidential accountability to the governing board's strategic goals and personal accountability for individual actions. Carver (1990) explains the executive is accountable to the board of directors for "(1) achievement of Ends policies and (2) non-violation of Executive Limitations policies" (p. 117). In other words, the president is responsible for accomplishing the overarching organizational goals the board has set and must not overstep established boundaries. Personal accountability holds the executive responsible for his or her actions while attaining the mutually established organizational goals (Carver, 1990, 2002; Davis, 1992; Tweeten, 2002).

Managing the accountability issue involves regular evaluation between the CEO and board. Ideally this means examining the performance both of the executive and of the governing board (Davis, 1992; Fisher, 1991; Tweeten, 2002). Individual evaluations of presidents serve not only to provide feedback on work performance but also to offer him or her feelings of employment protection (Clarke, 1999; Davis, 1992; Widmer & Houchin, 2000).

From a president's point of view, an annual evaluation is a great protection. She needs to know whether the board is satisfied with her performance . . . and she especially needs to know whether individual members of the board are critical of any of her specific actions. She needs warnings if her performance is deemed deficient, as well as suggestions as to how to remedy her deficiencies. (Freedman, 2004, p. 20)

Trust.

Trust is the umbrella issue impacting all others in the president and trustee relationship (Myran, 2003, Vaughan & Weisman, 1997a, 1997b). It plays an important role in both presidential success (Carver, 2002; Tatum, 1985) and institutional achievement (Brown, 1982; Nielsen & Newton, 1997). Conflict between executive and board is understandable (Vaughan & Weisman, 1997a), but “agreeing to disagree and still maintaining a respectful and trusting relationship demonstrates the maturity of the relationship” (Weisman & Goldbaum, 2004, p. 125). Furthermore “maintaining trust and support is a delicate balancing act requiring much skill, commitment, and hard work on the part of each party” (Vaughan & Weisman, p. 53) because it can quickly turn to mistrust (Carver, 2002; Weisman & Goldbaum, 2004; Vaughan, 1986; Vaughan & Weisman, 1997a, 1998). Carver (2002) cautions both management and governance to recognize the organizational cost when mistrust permeates the relationship.

Under conditions of mistrust, the human toll is high. Board members and executives alike become unhappy. Most of the warmth and excitement goes out of their activities related to the organization, since it just isn't fun either to govern or to manage under such a cloud. The board's ability to govern becomes hampered when it cannot accept management's information or goodwill. (p. 445)

Carver also recommends organizations should focus on sustaining good governance as a way to protect the trusting relationship.

Women executives face a special challenge in establishing and maintaining trust with their governing boards. Kanter (1977) found that differences in communication styles and comfort-levels between men and women impacted the way men exhibited trust toward

women. Moreover, these differences may have led some female presidents to ignore signals “that they were in trouble with their boards or other constituencies until it was too late” (Brown et al., 2001, p. 11).

Communication.

Effective communication is critical to maintaining a successful, trusting relationship between president and board (Vaughan & Weisman, 1998). In addition, successful communication patterns indicate effective leadership skills (Barrett, 2004; Johnson, 1993; Wallin, 1992). Exhibiting effective communication skills is necessary for executives when dealing with organizational conflict and institutional stress (Alton, 1982; Johnson, 1993), sharing the institution’s mission to the public (Vaughan & Weisman, 1997a), and making organizational decisions (Desjardins & Hoff, 2001).

“Interaction in the workplace can be productively viewed as social practice in action. Interacting participants are constantly negotiating meaning, and in the process reproducing or challenging the larger social structure within which they operate” (Holmes, Burns, Marra, Stubbe & Vine, 2004, p. 415). Kanter’s (1977) study found women leaders may encounter difficulties within the social structure when working with men because “it was easier [for men] to talk to those of one’s kind who had shared experiences—more certain, more accurate, more predictable. Less time could be spent concentrating on subtle meanings, and more time . . . on task” (p. 58). Gender differences in communication style may impact women presidents’ interaction with mostly male governing boards because communication is “accepted and easier . . . between ‘socially homogenous’” (p. 58) individuals. Moreover, to males, other males are viewed as more successful communicators (Johnson, 1993) and the

male vocal register is equated with a different “power level” than the female vocal register (Barrett, 2004).

To overcome challenges of gender communication, successful board and president relationships rely on information sharing (Tweeten, 2002). The responsibility for informing the board rests squarely with the president (Brown, 1982; Fisher, 1984; Vaughan & Weisman, 1997a; Weisman & Goldbaum, 2004). “In general, board members get far more information than they can use, but they need better information than they get. And when they get information, the next problem is ‘What does *that* mean?’” (Brown, 1982, p. 11). The president must help the board decipher the meaning and implications of the information it receives. Information presented to the board is critical for decision-making (Vaughan & Weisman, 1997a) and “shared leadership” (Weisman & Goldbaum, 2004).

Support, Confidence, and Respect.

In addition to communication effectiveness, the manner in which a governing board demonstrates its confidence in and support of the president is important to a trusting, successful relationship. Expressing confidence in an executive indicates a faith in his or her leadership ability. This confidence is coupled with respect to demonstrate governing board support (Brown, 1982; Fisher, 1984; Freedman, 2004; Zwemer, 1985).

A lack of support indicates “the bond between board and president will quickly dissolve” (O’Banion, 1989, p. 2). This may cause a loss of faith by faculty and staff in the president which can create conflict (Fisher, 1991). The ACE/OWHE participants advised women presidents against assuming that their boards will automatically support them. They further suggested that female presidents should “develop a network of powerful ‘explainers,’ allies who can offer solid advice, not merely moral support . . . [and] to lean upon the

community when they are in trouble” (Brown et al., 2001, p. 10), that is, when support from the board seems to be waning.

Indeed, boards will make efforts to support the president in order to retain an outstanding leader for their organization (Fisher, 1991; O’Banion, 1989; Widmer & Houchin, 2000). The board chair is “in a position to be an important source of support in the professional life of a president” (Freedman, 2004, p. 22), but a president should also recognize that the board’s collective responsibility for evaluating his or her performance. This creates an interesting dilemma to consider when the president is expecting significant emotional support (Wood, 1985).

Ethics.

Paramount to trust in CEO and trustee relations is the issue of integrity. “Boards have every right to demand ethical conduct of their presidents, based on established principles and expectations” (Moriarty, 1992, p. 57). Key to preserving an ethical relationship is a commitment to honesty by both the executive and the individual board member (Carver, 1990; Golub, 2004; Moriarty, 1992; Vaughan & Weisman, 1997a). In short, the president never surprises the board by keeping secrets or omitting information (Fisher, 1984; Vaughan & Weisman, 1997a; Whisler, 1988).

Presidential Termination and Resignation

When governing board and president relationships fail to establish and sustain trust, communication, support and confidence, or ethics, the result is usually presidential termination or resignation. In the corporate world, executives are often fired for poor company fiscal performance (Puffer & Weintrop, 1991; Wiersema, 2002), but education leaders face a less quantifiable rationale for termination. Unethical and illegal behavior

warrants an immediate dismissal (Widmer & Houchin, 2000), yet conflict over roles and responsibilities (Alton, 1982), poor handling of an institutional crisis (Brown et al., 2001; Wood, 1985), and mismatch in institutional vision between president and board due to trustee turnover (Alsbury, 2003; Boggs & Smith, 1997; Brown et al., 2001) provide governing boards additional justification for termination. Occasionally boards “resolve differences with presidents by the simple expedient of firing rather than confronting differences in open, intelligent discussion” (Gleazer, 1985, p. 48). Regardless of reason or method, boards and presidents often view the firing as a failure (Brown et al., 2001; Ward, Bishop & Sonnenfeld, 1999; Whisler, 1988).

While termination is an option for boards, resignation is an option for executives when relations become unmanageable. Presidents are encouraged to make their own decisions about leaving a position (Brown et al., 2001; Fisher, 1984; Vaughan, 1989b; Vaughan & Weisman, 1997a). Similar relationship reasons are cited by presidents when resigning as those listed above by trustees including poor communication (Alton, 1982), unclear expectations (Tweeten, 2002), and board mismanagement (Boggs & Smith, 1997; Pavan, 1999). Women presidents participating in the ACE/OWHE study also indicated additional reasons for leaving a CEO position including “a desire to lead a different type of institution, a concern for more balance in one’s personal life, and the need to ‘stay fresh’” (Brown et al., 2001, p. 10).

Regardless of reasons for severing ties between leaders and boards, both should make preparations for next steps. Even when relations are strong, boards should maintain succession plans so institutional productivity is not interrupted by an unexpected presidential departure (Footlick, 2000; Marchese, 2001; Vaughan, 1986). The ACE/OWHE respondents

advised female presidents to keep records of difficult situations managed and lists of successful accomplishments to provide documentation in the event of termination (Brown et al., 2001).

Conclusion

This chapter has identified a multitude of themes in the literature surrounding women's leadership, female community college presidents, and the issue of governing board and president working relationships. While studies have explored both descriptions of responsibilities and roles and offered advice for maintaining a successful relationship, the research has neglected the matter of female executives' leadership experiences under difficult circumstances and in relation to functioning with boards of directors.

Few studies exist examining the executive-trustee relationship from the presidential perspective (Vaughan, 1986; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998). These research questions offer prime opportunity for expanding the knowledge about women in higher education presidencies and their leadership experiences. Although the numbers of female presidents do not hold parity to their male counterparts,

we may expect for years to come the appointment of women to college presidencies will be a one-by-one matter and that each one who makes it to the president's office will be considered by trustees, faculty, staff, alumni and communities to be on trial to see if she can prove her ability to do the job. (Taylor, 1981, p. 2)

Because there is a need for research on female community college presidents beyond demographic descriptions and words of advice, a study of the experiences of women who have experienced a difficult leadership position which resulted in leaving the community college presidency provides more information about women's presidential experiences and

their relationships with governing boards, thereby extending our knowledge about women community college leaders.

The following chapter explains the research methods used in this study. It includes a rationale for selecting qualitative inquiry, information about the study's design, and a discussion of the procedures used to ensure trustworthy and authentic research.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The literature review presented in the previous chapter discussing both the experiences of women in leadership positions—particularly community college presidencies—and the relationship between higher education presidents and their governing boards demonstrates a dearth of existing research addressing issues surrounding female community college presidents including their leadership experiences and their relationships with their governing boards. This study addresses a dimension of this topic by (a) describing and examining the experiences of women who have experienced difficult leadership positions that resulted in departures from community college presidencies; and (b) exploring how these women have made meaning from this experience.

Qualitative research methods were used to describe, examine, and explore the respondents' presidential experiences. This chapter provides justification for using qualitative research methods, describes the theoretical framework of constructivism and feminist methodology used to frame the research, presents information about data sources, explains data collection and analysis techniques, and describes means to ensure research trustworthiness and authenticity.

Why Use Qualitative Methods?

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 3).

There were several reasons for using qualitative methods in this study. First, my research questions sought descriptions, motivations, influences, and experiences. These issues were best addressed by giving the presidents the opportunity to tell their own stories. For the purposes of this research, it was better to examine the issues from the presidents' points of view (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Merriam, 1991). The community college presidents told their stories of difficult leadership so they could explain how they constructed meaning from departing a community college presidency as a result and described the implications this experience had on their lives by using their own voices as data sources.

Second, I was more concerned with the "how and why" of women's difficult leadership experiences in a community college presidency than the "what and how many" (Merriam, 1991, p. 9). In other words, examining how women created meaning from their difficult leadership experiences which resulted in departure from a community college presidency offered insights into how these women developed an understanding of their leadership identity and how the implications applied to both their own future leadership experiences and how they may apply to other women's leadership experiences. Moreover, numerical representations would not generate the appropriate data to answer the research purpose of using description and examination to understand the experiences of the women.

Third, I was also looking for depth of understanding rather than breadth of knowledge for generalizations (Merriam, 1991) about the subject of women community college presidents' experiences. This meant that looking deep into the individual women's presidential experience uncovered aspects of leadership and governing board relations that could not be discovered by studying the apparent and the obvious. The presidents'

perceptions and motivations regarding leadership and trustee relations added to our knowledge about women's community college presidency experiences.

Constructivist Paradigm

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) describe qualitative researchers as “philosophers” by explaining that the personal perspective a researcher maintains in terms of how he or she views the world related to understanding what is knowing (epistemology) and understanding what is being (ontology) directs the actions of research (see also Crotty, 2003). “All research is interpretive, guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied” (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 26). With that in mind, the guiding philosophical/theoretical paradigm was constructivism. In brief, the constructivist framework considers multiple and individually-based realities that are constructed through socialization processes and personal experiences (Crotty, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Furthermore, a person constructs meaning distinctively from others and as such that meaning has value. Individually distinctive meanings, likewise, deserve equal value and respect (Crotty, 2003). Because of the individually-driven nature of constructivism, one person's meaning is neither more nor less worthy than another's.

My research goal was to understand how the community college presidents had made meaning through their lived experience and personal point of view; particularly related to experiencing a difficult leadership position. To that end, I worked with the presidents to identify and explain how a personal meaning of their experience was constructed and to shed some light on how their words and behaviors represented those meanings (Schwandt, 1998). This study sought to create knowledge and truth rather than discover it (Schwandt, 1998). In other words, the act of self-reflection on the experience in conjunction with the purposeful

interaction with the researcher served to generate a sense of understanding and meaning about the experience. In constructivism, meaning is not a hidden resource to be mined rather the act of research coalesces to construct ideas, build perspectives, and develop concepts (Crotty, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Schwandt, 1998).

Feminist Methodology

In light of the fact that the presidents are women and the research questions address women's experience; this study also used a feminist methodology in which to look at the reality of the presidents' lived experience. "Giving voice to women's perspectives means identifying the ways in which women create meaning and experience life from their particular position in the social hierarchy" (Riger, 1992, p. 734). Researchers generally accept that there are numerous feminist methodologies (Bloom, 1998; Devault, 1999). I have selected Bloom's (1998) concepts as a framework for this study. She illustrated five issues of feminist methodology for consideration.

1. The Social Construction of Gender: This issue suggests including women research subjects is an important feminist tenet in "overturn[ing] patriarchal domination in order to create social change" (Bloom, 1998, p. 139). By focusing this study on the experiences of only women who have experienced difficult leadership, women's experiences are at the forefront rather than minimized by or eliminated from leadership research.

2. The Study of Women's Diverse Lives and Personal Narratives: This issue reminds feminist researchers of the value that women's different experiences offer as research data. Through personal narratives women respondents:

illuminate the course of a life over time and the relationship between the individual and society; they demonstrate how women negotiate their "exceptional" gender status

both in their daily lives and over the course of a lifetime; and they make possible the examination of the links between the evolution of subjectivity and its shifts and changes and the development of female identity. (Bloom, 1998, p. 146)

The participating presidents in this study shared their differing personal narratives that illustrated how they both viewed their leadership experiences under difficult circumstances and described the totality of their entire leadership careers.

3. The Contexts of the Research Questions: “For feminist researchers, the need to know is based on a need to understand the forces that shape women’s lives and a need to discover ways for women to transform and have authority over their own lives” (Bloom, 1998, p. 147). The research purposes and questions in this study focused on describing, examining, and exploring the presidents’ leadership experiences. They were intended to not only elicit answers to questions that I had developed about their leadership experiences but also to create new questions that the presidents asked of themselves about their experiences.

4. The Critical Self-Reflections of the Researcher: This issue is related to the researcher understanding her own position and perspective and how they influence the research relationship. It allows the researcher to be “scrutinized” along with the respondent (Bloom, 1998, p. 148). I attempted to describe myself and my experiences as a researcher within the dissertation, and to be reflective on both the successes and challenges I experienced while working on this project.

5. Feminist Research Relationships: “To let go of high expectations for identification and sisterly rapport may liberate feminist methodology from setting unrealistic regulative ideals for intersubjective personal interactions” (Bloom, 1998, p. 152). This issue proposes realism in understanding how a researcher and respondent may either make a

personal connection or how they may not, but that it is not a reflection on a researcher's success as a feminist researcher if the latter occurs. In this study, I developed an interpersonal connection with the presidents, but had no expectations that the relationship would extend beyond the research project.

Data Sources

In qualitative research data are words and are collected and analyzed by means of a human instrument—the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The respondents—female community college presidents—served as my main data source. Permission to use human subjects for this research was approved by the Iowa State University Institutional Review Board (Appendix A). I also used the president's vitae to learn additional details and background about their experiences.

Respondents

In order to identify the female community college presidents who served as data sources for the study, I used what Patton (1990) calls "purposeful sampling" (p.169) which means selecting a sample from which the most knowledge about the research questions can be gained. In this case, "extreme or deviant case sampling" was employed to identify respondents who "are rich in information because they are unusual or special in some way" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). This was achieved by determining criteria which were relevant to the research purposes and then selecting data sources that fit those criteria. The criteria used in this study included women who:

1. Were current or former public, community college presidents. Public community colleges have similar governing board structures and missions. Public governing board members are usually either elected or appointed citizens charged with overseeing the

community college on behalf of the public. Former presidents of two-year proprietary institutions were excluded since they are often governed by a corporation which may have a different mission such as generating a profit, and therefore different expectations for leadership.

2. Departed a presidential position within four years of data collection. The timing of the research was recent enough to yield vivid recollections of the experiences, emotions, and events, yet offered enough time to have passed that they had an opportunity for reflection. This also provided a similar time-frame for all presidents from the time of departure to the time of research.

3. Agreed to participate in a focus group with other similarly-experienced presidents. Giving the women an opportunity to share experiences led to deeper meanings and additional generation of insights into the experience for the participants.

4. Were willing to devote the time necessary for data collection and analysis.

Three presidents were selected who met these criteria. This number was appropriate since this study was not intended to generalize from the data sources to a larger population, but, rather to uncover meanings, lessons, and experiences of female community college presidents who have left their positions because of a leadership difficulty.

Due to the sensitive nature of the study, access to the presidents would have been very difficult without the assistance of a gatekeeper. My major professor, Larry Ebbers, was professionally connected to the presidents so was able to pave the way for me to make initial contact with them to ask for their participation.

The data collection was conducted over twelve months, so allowed the presidents an opportunity to think about their experiences over a period of time. The data analysis and

writing of results took three years, so the periodic member checking offered long-term opportunity to express new meanings that arose as a result of the research experience.

Documents

Each president provided me with a copy of her current vitae. Reviewing their professional careers, education, and professional interests minimized the need to cover the material in the interviews and created an opportunity to review their experiences collectively for similarities and differences. Because of confidentiality concerns no additional documents were used in this research.

Data Collection and Analysis

In a constructivist inquiry several aspects of the researcher-respondent relationship influence data collection and analysis including the notion of *creating* findings in contrast with *discovering* them, and the impact of the dialogic interaction on the individual respondent's construction of meaning (Crotty, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Schwandt, 1998). This interaction between researcher and respondent results in "distill[ing] a consensus construction that is more informed and sophisticated than" either researcher or respondent could create alone (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 207). The emphasis on the value of the researcher-respondent relationship within the constructivist paradigm indicates a need for data collection and analysis to occur both concurrently and at the conclusion of data collection. Simultaneous collection and analysis promoted the opportunity to develop further interview questions, clarified any ambiguous responses from the presidents, and offered emerging directions to pursue further (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data Collection

Data was collected by means of interviews and document analysis.

Interviews

The purpose of the interviews was to obtain the participants' descriptions and perceptions of their presidential experiences. An invitational phone conversation informed the participants there would be two individual interviews lasting from sixty to ninety minutes, there would be one group interview with all of the participants lasting two hours, and they would be asked to construct interpretations of the interviews and resultant meaning with me. Each president signed an Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) and was told the purposes and objectives of the research so she could make an informed decision about her participation in the study.

The presidents were ensured anonymity, so identifying information was promised to be eliminated from the final report. As the report was nearing completion, during the final round of member checking, additional concerns about anonymity from the presidents emerged. I worked closely with them to ensure they were comfortable with how they were portrayed in the study. This resulted in deeper masking of their identities and elimination of some of the vivid details of their experiences. I am confident; however, these changes have neither affected the results of the study nor impacted the richness of their stories. This is discussed further in Chapter 9.

The individual interview locations took place in a setting of the presidents' choosing because I wanted to talk to them about their experiences within an environment they felt comfortable. We met in restaurants, hotel rooms, and their offices. The group interview involved all presidents. Two of the presidents were in person with me and the third joined by teleconference because she had become ill and was unable to travel. It occurred between the first and second individual interviews. The group interview offered the presidents an

opportunity to discuss questions and issues together. This was important because it allowed the presidents to react to each others' comments and construct new perspectives. The group interview also served to further explore emerging themes that had developed from the previous individual interviews.

I used semi-structured interviews. This means I asked all participants the same questions, but I did not limit myself to *only* the predetermined questions (Merriam, 1991). In other words, I developed a standard list of questions for each interview, but as the presidents answered, new questions and issues to pursue arose. At times, for each of the presidents I followed a slightly different line of questioning. This was done to fully explore the issues about their experiences the presidents raised. The research questions informed the interview questions.

1. How do the female community college presidents who have experienced difficult leadership positions that resulted in departure from community college presidencies view their leadership experiences and describe what they have learned about leadership?
2. How do they describe and view their departures from the presidency?
3. How do they describe and explain their relationships with their governing board?
4. How do they construct meaning as a result of leaving a presidency? What implication does leaving presidential positions have for their future goals and plans?

Additional interview questions emerged from the issues that emerged in the interviews and the promising constructs developed with the presidents. Throughout the interview process the presidents were given an opportunity to suggest interview questions that should be asked

and to comment on anything they felt they had not had an opportunity to fully discuss. The protocol for each of the three interviews is located in Appendix C.

I tape recorded all interviews in order to provide a transcription of the interview. I was able to acquire complete tapes for all but one of the interviews because a technical problem made the recording of the answers to some of the questions disjointed and incomplete. The president was gracious, however, and agreed to answer the incomplete questions again via a phone call.

After the interviews, I listened to each tape again and wrote notes to summarize their responses as well as to record my own thoughts and interpretations. I used these summaries to develop interview questions for the following round of interviews. I hired a professional to transcribe the interviews, so I also listened to the tapes again to ensure accuracy in the transcripts and to provide an opportunity to write notes and reflections about the interviews. In the end I listened to each of the interviews at least three times.

Documents

For each document I took notes as I read. This allowed me to summarize its contents and to gain insights about the president's experiences.

Data Analysis

As indicated above, constructivist inquiry promotes a shared development of the conclusions and meanings that emerge between the researcher and respondent.

The act of inquiry begins with issues and/or concerns of participants and unfolds through a "dialectic" of iteration, analysis, critique, reiteration, reanalysis, and so on that leads eventually to a joint (among inquirer and respondents) construction of a case (i.e. findings or outcomes). (Schwandt, 1998, p. 243)

In preparation for joint discussions on the findings and outcomes, I used the "constant comparative method" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 339) to analyze the data. Analysis was accomplished by identifying the smallest piece of data (a "unit") whose meaning was relevant to the research and could stand on its own (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 344). Units were identified by reading the interview transcripts. The six individual interviews, focus group interview, and three transcript member checking interviews yielded 1221 units of data.

The units were separated and printed on note cards. Units were placed in categories by comparing each unit for its similarity to, or difference from, the other units. (Merriam, 1988; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In other words, the first unit in the pile of note cards was read and placed, then the second unit was read to determine if it is similar to or different from the previous unit. If it was similar it was placed on the same pile, and if it was different a new pile was started. This process continued until all units were placed in a pile. The piles became categories. After the first set was completed the procedure repeated itself. The procedure occurred three times for each of the individual presidents and another three times when the data for all of the presidents were reanalyzed collectively. Ultimately, discrete categories emerge which were then identified as the meaningful themes of the study.

In order to identify how both an individual president and the collective group of presidents made meaning of their experience, I employed a data analysis process which Borshuk (2004) adapted from Maxwell's (1992) typology of validity in qualitative research. "Maxwell paralleled the issue of validity of qualitative findings to different levels of understanding, the first four of which were descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, and internal generalizability" (Borshuk, 2004, p. 307).

First, “descriptive validity refers to gaining an accurate account of behavioral events” (Borshuk, 2004, p. 307). This involved treating each president’s individual interviews as a single set of data. The data were not analyzed in comparison with the other presidents rather they focused on descriptions of the individual president’s lived experience. In this way, I looked for internally consistent themes.

Next, interpretive validity relates the individual respondent’s data to the research questions. This led to an individual interpretation of meaning and creating understanding of the experience. Maxwell (1992) elaborates this point “I include intention, cognition, affect, belief, evaluation, and anything else that could be encompassed by what is broadly termed the ‘participants’ perspective, as well as communicative meaning in a narrower sense” (p. 288). The president’s constructions were coded and categorized using their own words.

Theoretical validity follows and refers to applying the theoretical developments that emerged during the research. This “goes beyond concrete descriptions and interpretation and explicitly addresses the theoretical constructions that the researcher brings to, or develops during the study” (Maxwell, 1992, p. 291). This step involved explaining the constructed meaning by relating the emerging categories to existing literature.

Finally, internal generalizability attempts to merge all of the individual respondent’s data. The categories were again compared with the research questions and condensed into the emerging themes (Borshuk, 2004). Looking at the data in this manner offered the opportunity for the presidents to not only look at their own narrative and meaning, but also contrast it with the meaning made by the collective group. This multilayered analysis resulted in additional meaning constructed for the presidents which echoes constructivism in that it continues to evolve and modify meaning for the participants. “We invent concepts,

models, and schemes to make sense of our experience and, further, we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience (Schwandt, 1998, p. 237).

Ensuring Trustworthy and Authentic Research

Attention to trustworthiness is necessary in order to demonstrate that the results of the research are "worth paying attention to" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 290) and the research findings, outcomes and interpretations can be trusted. Elements of trustworthiness in qualitative research include: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although critics cite: "their parallelism to positivist criteria makes them suspect" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 214), they remain useful as a guide for thorough and ethical research. In addition, Guba & Lincoln (1989) offer another set of criteria called authenticity as a way of judging the quality of an inquiry. Authenticity involves:

Criteria of fairness, ontological authenticity (enlarges personal constructions),
educative authenticity (leads to improved understanding of constructions of others),
catalytic authenticity (stimulates to action), and tactical authenticity (empowers
action). (p. 213)

Manning (1997) provides a plan for assuring authenticity in constructivist inquiry, but warns against using all of these "choices as objective criteria implemented across contexts in a detached, positivist manner. As guides, these questions and considerations should only be applied contextually" (p. 1). I selected the most appropriate fundamentals of trustworthiness and authenticity for this study and discuss them in detail in the following paragraphs.

Trustworthiness: Credibility

Credibility means the findings of the study adequately represent the truth about the respondents' experiences. In other words, the themes and conclusions identified are credible

to the presidents. Criteria used in this study to ensure credibility were: triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Triangulation.

This means using "multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 305) to collect data. In this research different respondents were interviewed about the same issues and topics in their presidencies to determine how they described and examined their difficult leadership experiences.

Peer Debriefing.

The focus of peer debriefing is to stay true to my research purposes and to check developing constructions and themes. I worked with several peers throughout this project who were familiar with qualitative research. We discussed the exciting and troublesome aspects of conducting this study. My peers also critiqued and confirmed my methods, and analysis.

Member Checking.

Member checking was used to ensure the accuracy of the interpretations constructed from the presidents' comments. Member checking was a continual process that occurred throughout the study. At the end of each interview I asked two questions of the presidents: (a) what questions should have been asked, but weren't? This allowed the respondent to inform me of areas she felt were important to discuss about her presidential experience that I may not have identified. And (b) is there anything I should know that you have not had a chance to tell me? This gave the president the opportunity to share further information about a topic that she felt was left incomplete. It also allowed her to comment on other related issues we had not pursued.

In addition, I invited the presidents to read the transcripts of their individual interviews to note any additional thoughts, generate additional topics to pursue, and develop emerging themes. I tape recorded the conversations we had about their reactions to their transcripts. In each of the conversations, the presidents both offered clarification they believed was important to understanding a comment they had made and they discussed additional insight they had gained about their experiences as a result of reading the transcripts. This information was also included as data sources and analyzed.

Also, as mentioned above, the presidents were invited to participate and contribute to the study's findings. The presidents and I created the interpretations of the study together. Member checking includes the presidents in the research not only as pieces of data, but also as contributors to the research methods.

Thorough member checking, including respondent review of field notes, working hypotheses, and case study drafts, means that the researcher is accountable to those sharing their words, lives, and experiences. As such, member checking is more than assuring that the researcher "got it right." It is about representing those lives, including the contradictory perspectives, in all their complexity. Member checking is part of the collaborative process of negotiated outcomes that assures that the themes emerging throughout the study arise from the respondents. (Manning, 1997, p. 5)

The member checking protocol followed for this study is included in Appendix C.

Trustworthiness: Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability to apply the results of the research to other settings. While it is impossible to generalize in qualitative research, I have provided as detailed of a description about the setting and circumstances as possible so readers can

determine the applicability of my findings to their own situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is not the researcher's position to determine usefulness of the study in other contexts, only to provide the details necessary to make it an option.

Trustworthiness: Dependability and Confirmability

These terms refer to the credibility of the research process (i.e. what is the consistency of the research process?) and the credibility of the findings of the research (i.e. can my data and interpretations be confirmed by someone else?). To meet the criteria of dependability and confirmability, I kept an audit trail. The audit trail shows evidence for everything done and found in the data. An audit trail ensures credibility of processes and findings because it will allow another researcher to follow the research path to confirm the findings of the study. This ensures the credibility of the findings and interpretations. Due to the highly sensitive nature of the study, however, the presidents have requested and I have agreed that the raw data materials be kept confidential.

Fairness Authenticity

Fairness refers to presenting all assemblies of understanding including the principles that make up their framework (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). Fairness is particularly related to the multiplicity of voices. “Voice and how it is communicated through dialogue is essential in constructive inquiry because the practitioners of that methodology make no claims about an objective reality expressed through one normative voice (Manning, 1997, p. 4). In addition to informed consent, member checking, and peer debriefing discussed above, the fairness criteria also involve:

1. Prolonged engagement, where enough time was spent in the study to “establish trusting relationships, and when enough has been seen to get a full range of meanings”

(Manning, 1997, p. 5). The commitment to a multi-year study accompanied by multiple interviews with the presidents assisted in developing the researcher-respondent relationship.

2. Persistent observation, which refers to depth of the study and allows “the intensity necessary to sift through the data to determine which themes [are] important” (Manning, 1997, p. 5). President interviews continued until the issues were explored fully in order to construct a complete picture of the meaning of the experience.

3. Reflexivity, meaning “the researcher’s perspectives . . . cannot be ignored on the assumption that they will not influence the study” (Manning, 1997, p. 5). I discussed with the presidents my own biases and perspectives as they related to the research study including, but not limited to any social, cultural, experiential, or theoretical lenses that may have influenced my role. Also, I presented a several reflexive statements in the final report so readers of the research can understand those issues about me as the researcher as well.

Ontological Authenticity

Ontological authenticity refers to the impact of participation in the study on the respondents. In other words, did the presidents gain a greater understanding and personal growth as a result of the research experience? (Kvale, 1995). Aspects included in ontological authenticity:

1. Dialogical conversations alter the traditional informational interview to become more like an open, honest conversation. “Being witness to another’s life, listening to stories, and chronicling joy and pain do not involve mastering techniques to achieve methodological proficiency. Trust and respect are central components of learning to share ethically another’s life” (Manning, 1997, p. 7). The use of semi-structured interviews served as a guide to the conversations between me and the presidents.

2. Openness of purpose indicates “the goals of both the respondents and researcher need to be discussed in a conversation among equals” (Manning, 1997, p. 7). I worked collaboratively with the presidents to negotiate the details of the research study.

3. Emic perspective ensures that the respondents’ point of view is used in uncovering and construing meaning rather than the researcher’s (Manning, 1997). I engaged the presidents by using their direct quotes in the final report and working with them to co-construct the findings.

4. Caring and trustful researcher-respondent relationship means that “constructivist researchers must assure respondents that obtaining their perspective and story, not confirming an existing theory, is the goal of the inquiry” (Manning, 1997, p. 7). I maintained my personal commitment to the research project, encouraged collaboration with the presidents, and made sure they knew that they are the owners of their stories; and therefore the data.

Educative Authenticity

Educative authenticity refers to the participant increasing her awareness of others as a result of creating complicated constructions through the research process. One way to achieve this was through an internal audit where the presidents clarified the emerging themes from the final case report (Manning, 1997, p. 8). In this manner, each president was able to understand how her experience related with the other participants.

Catalytic Authenticity

Catalytic authenticity promotes change and action and should involve the participants and others in applying it to practice.

Constructivist research cannot only be an intellectual exercise, but must be worthwhile to, among others, the respondents who shared their knowledge, stakeholders, practitioners, and other researchers constructivist research advocate[s] that findings be distributed in such a way that those involved in the research benefit from the discovery process. (Manning, 1997, p. 8)

Collaborating with the presidents, I committed to identifying ways to make the final report accessible and available so others may benefit from the findings.

Tactical Authenticity

Tactical authenticity reminds researchers “that the respondents’ meaning is not his or hers for the taking” (Manning, 1997, p. 9). This includes working with the participants on uses of both the data and the interpretations while maintaining commitment to participant confidentiality. “Past practices of taking data without accountability from those who owned it are incongruent with the paradigmatic underpinnings of constructivist inquiry” (Manning, 1997, p. 10).

Delimitations

This study was limited to three women who had experienced a difficult leadership situation that led to their subsequent departure from the community college presidency. They were identified because access to them was achieved through the connection my major professor, Larry Ebbers, had with them through professional community college networks. They agreed to participate in the study because Dr. Ebbers’ respect and reputation within the national community college field gave me legitimacy as a researcher since I was his student. It would have been likely the presidents may have never agreed to share their experiences if

not for this connection. As such this research is bound by the access that was available through the professional network of my major professor.

Limitations

There are several limitations of this study:

1. The data was collected and analyzed through the lens of my experience as a woman in a community college leadership role, so my impressions and perceptions were likely influenced by this.
2. This is a sensitive and complex topic. Not many people would be forthcoming about their difficult leadership experiences, especially those that led to a departure. While it might be perceived the study could have been about irritated individuals who were griping about their experiences, it was evident these women had spent much time in personal reflection, and any concerns they raised in the study were supported by other research.
3. Because anonymity was promised by the researcher and expected by the respondents, it will be difficult for other researchers to check the dependability or confirmability of the research findings.
4. Ensuring confidentiality limits the level of details that could be shared about their experiences. The quotes included have been edited, in collaboration with the presidents to ensure this confidentiality—although the meaning and intent of the statements remained.
5. These presidents were all white. I was unable to gain access to presidents from other races. Moreover, this study includes the experiences of only three women. It would

be unwise to assume the interpretations are true for all women in similar circumstances.

6. The presidents knew each other through professional networks.
7. This study did not examine the perspectives of the other individuals who were involved in the president's difficult leadership experiences such as college employees or governing board members. In addition, it did not examine the campus climate or culture.

This chapter has explained the research inquiry methods and methodology. The following five chapters present the results of the study. The first chapter (Chapter 4) introduces the results and describes the format of their presentation; the next three chapters (Chapters 5-7) illustrate each of the president's individual experiences as a case study narrative; and the fifth chapter (Chapter 8) interprets the shared experiences of all three of the presidents.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The results of this study are presented in four chapters. The first three chapters provide a narrative of each individual president and her leadership experience and the fourth chapter interprets the experiences common to all of the presidents. The individual chapters are presented first to provide a context for understanding the common experiences. Each president and her story are described in as much detail as possible in order to provide a rich context. Her own words are presented in italics and used to illustrate the findings.

In order to maintain the promise of anonymity to the presidents, pseudonyms are used and facts that may reveal individual identities are altered or omitted. No doubt, the safety of anonymity allowed the presidents to feel more comfortable with the research process and likely resulted in richer data. After preliminary drafts of the case studies were completed they were sent to each president for review and confirmation of findings. All presidents shared a concern about their anonymity, so I worked closely with each one to ensure she was comfortable that her identity had been protected and with how her story was represented. In the end, most of the specific details of the difficult leadership experiences and events that led to their departures were masked or removed, but the results of the study remained consistent and have not been compromised by this action.

As previously explained, each president was interviewed twice individually and once in a group with the other presidents. To provide time for reflection months separated the interview contacts so occasionally stories were shared more than once but each time with deeper analysis by the president. Questions were asked to elicit the president's explanation of the circumstances surrounding her departure from the presidency and her observations on

leadership as a result of the experience. It became quickly apparent that the presidents' telling of their experiences shared two common aspects. First, their answers to my questions were enmeshed in the depth of their personal leadership experiences and the breadth of their exposure to and interactions with other women community college leaders. Second, none of the presidents depicted a linear story where one incident led to another that eventually led to the departure; rather they each illustrated an amalgamation of examples and incidences they believed had likely led to leaving their positions. One president later described it as: "*many powerful and rushing rivers creating too much white water for navigation.*" I anticipate these two shared aspects will serve to both disappoint and enlighten the reader. A reader hoping for some "juicy" details will be disappointed because the details have been masked, but may also be enlightened by a different way of viewing leadership through the experience of someone who has had difficulty and then shared their gift of knowledge with others.

Being a woman in a major leadership role has inevitably shaped my reflections and influenced my comments and assumptions about their stories. As a result I have focused on capturing the essence of their experiences and am presenting them in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven as an individual case study for each president which are presented and organized as they best made sense to me. The fundamental meaning of their experiences emerged in three areas: Leadership, Loss, and Healing and so divide each narrative chapter. The Leadership section describes the respondent's career path to the presidency, her experiences as a president, and a presentation of the distinctive features of her leadership style. The Loss section discusses the circumstances related to her departure including her relationship with governing board members and describes any distinguishing issues related to her exit from the presidency. The Healing section discusses her post-departure experiences, her reflections on

the departure, and her most salient learning about the presidency. It must be cautioned that it was challenging to create parallel presentations of each president's experience, so while similarities exist in many of the headings and subheadings, the content is unique to each experience. Occasionally I have included an analytical comment to assist in presenting the case.

Following the case studies is a thematic examination and interpretation of their collective experiences. Chapter Eight discusses the findings of the study in terms of themes that emerged during data analysis. As described in Chapter Three, each president's interview data were re-analyzed collectively and common themes emerged. These common themes are described in the subheadings included in the chapter. Once again the presidents' own words are used to exemplify the findings. An interpretation of each theme closes each section, and the chapter concludes with an overall summary of the findings.

CHAPTER 5

PRESIDENT LUCILLE JEROME

Introduction

This chapter describes the experience of Dr. Lucille Jerome who retired from the community college presidency after having a decade long successful relationship with many individual board members when several new board members joined who had personal agendas that were meant to take issue with her leadership and several past college decisions. In addition, several other circumstances emerged which resulted in the governing board's increased involvement in college operations. The chapter addresses three broad areas of President Jerome's story. First, it describes her leadership style and experiences; second, it examines the loss she experienced as a result of her difficult leadership experience; and third, it explores the healing she experienced as she identified the lessons she has learned.

Leadership

Dr. Lucille Jerome was president at a large community college district with several campuses for about a decade. Her career path is a series of progressively higher administrative positions including experiences as a high school teacher; volunteer work with disadvantaged populations; several student services, continuing education, and academic affairs administrative positions; a district vice presidency; and an interim presidency. Her involvement also includes serving on numerous local, state, national, and international boards, and like many community college presidents she had presented at national conferences and written numerous publications.

Pathway to a Presidency

Although President Jerome was well prepared academically and professionally to attain a presidency the process was lengthy as she was a finalist and interviewed more than ten times. During her journey to the CEO position a college presidential search consultant shared with her how governing boards did not think she could “do the job.” Part of their concerns, the consultant said, was President Jerome did not seem tough enough.

Boards thought I couldn't command respect. A: I was a woman, B: I was soft. I am soft. Sure, look at me. I'm soft. I have a soft voice. I know I have a soft voice. I'm very feminine. I have no desire to be anything but feminine and soft. It's my core.

Although little could be changed about her vocal intonation, President Jerome recognized early that moving into higher administrative positions required personal adaptations.

I did a lot of changing all the way up the line in order to fit into the role of a particular job or place. For example, I had to learn to keep my head down and keep my mouth shut until I understood the situation around me.

Over time she felt like she could be more true to her core identity and personality.

In my interviews to be president I made a decision to be who I am, so that I would be selected for who I truly was. I felt much freer to be myself because I felt boards had picked me for who I was.

Gender Discrimination

Besides leadership style adjustments gender discrimination influenced her career path. She described an incident early in her career when she had applied for a dean position but the college hired a male candidate with lesser qualifications. The president of the college approached her because he believed she would have had a legitimate discrimination case but

President Jerome chose not to pursue it. She described how at the time she explained her rationale to the president of the college saying to him:

When a woman does that [files a discrimination lawsuit] it becomes her career. It changes your whole life. I said, 'I don't want to do that. I just want to be a good administrator, good leader, and I'll just take the lump.'

Later in her career, at a college where she was an internal candidate for the presidency, she was told by a faculty member that the college was not prepared to have a woman as leader. Along the way, however, President Jerome chose not to “give energy” to the sexism she faced.

The Presidential Experience

When she attained an offer for a presidential position she potentially had two colleges to choose from. She preferred the college needing a little improvement rather than selecting the college that was “*technically proficient*” but unlike her ultimate choice it lacked an institutional spirit that appealed to her. Lucille Jerome felt great anticipation as she began her presidency, and she believed the opportunity was going to be a positive experience.

I felt confident. I felt supported. I felt like this was going to be a success.

As a new president, Dr. Jerome faced a couple of important issues that needed addressing. She identified some factions within the community that mistrusted the college, and she determined that the institution suffered from internal discord within itself. To respond to the external issues she began developing good will within the community by speaking about the college to service organizations and Chambers of Commerce across the community college service area.

These conversations made a great difference in helping the community understand the college.

She also realized the concerns about the college that had been raised by community stakeholders and the local media in the past had not been answered, so she researched the issues and presented data to respond.

I found data that would answer the question for the year the questions were asked and the data for the same question when I arrived.

After that she produced an annual report card to communicate with stakeholders about how the college had performed the previous year in relation to its goals.

To address the internal issues she focused on two areas: a) building relationships both between college employees and the president's office and among all college staff throughout the district; and b) implementing a process for decision making with organizational development tools on which she had received extensive training and which she had experienced success using in previous leadership positions. Dr. Jerome realized "*everybody wanted stability*" because the college had hired nine presidents in twenty years. She also recognized the individual campuses believed they did not receive the recognition within the district that they deserved, and they did not trust the district administration. To attend to the internal disharmony she visited each of the campuses to let them share their frustrations and concerns.

Each campus assumed that they were better than the other campuses, yet they felt that they were not given the recognition they deserved.

Over time the college was able to solve the internal and external issues and advanced to experience success under President Jerome's leadership. They passed a ballot measure

that provided additional financial resources to the college; they improved existing facilities and built many new buildings; they began focusing on learning and student success; they improved faculty relations and engagement; they created programs to address the needs of underserved populations; they developed many new career programs to meet community needs; and they created several initiatives in areas agreed upon by the entire college.

Features of Leadership

Dr. Jerome shared how she believed a central component to her presidency was the concept of maintaining a unified community college district as opposed to a divergence of individual campuses.

It was a constant effort on my part to help college staff and the board of trustees to think of the college as a whole and to think about the fact that if any part of the college was weak it weakened the whole college.

Despite the programmatic and infrastructure improvements, President Jerome described her greatest contribution to the college as facilitating a change of culture toward inclusive decision making. As a result of the campus visits she made upon her arrival to the college, President Jerome learned that individual campus administrators believed most of the past major college decisions had been made by the president's staff. In fitting with her past organizational development training and inclusive leadership philosophy she created a district-wide decision making group.

My goal was to get as many people from all the campuses together to make decisions together, to work together, and to learn from each other. . . . They came to represent their campus. They'd get the agenda plenty of time in advance so they could talk with their campus [about the issues]. . . . After the meeting their job was to go back and

talk about how the decision got made, what the decisions was, why it got made, and how their input had influenced [the decision].

In addition to district-wide decisions she also believed individual program and department employees were best equipped to make local campus decisions.

Every group made decisions in areas where they had control. . . . We did many things around process, around inclusion, around decision making, around creativity, around program development.

President Jerome also felt the college should be transparent about the decisions that had been made by making them public. Furthermore, she was pleased the faculty became active in decision-making groups beyond the faculty-only issues, and she emphasized the use of data in decision making.

When you come with data it is so compelling. People cannot turn you down. . . . My goal was to bring as much data and information to everybody as possible.

She emphasized consensus in decision making by stressing to faculty and staff that they had to resolve issues in a way everyone could accept.

The college made decisions that everyone could live with. It is impossible to get everyone to agree on completely everything.

She further illustrated her commitment to consensus decision making by sharing a definition she liked from Harlan Cleveland: “Consensus is not the same as unanimous consent.

Consensus means moving by a no-objection procedure—the acquiescence of those who care about the decision protected by those who don’t.” Dr. Jerome gave an example of a time when a decision needed to be made about prioritizing funding among campus projects.

Although she knew one campus needed to receive precedence, she also understood for

numerous reasons there would be resistance from the administrative team, so she talked privately with the campus dean and asked her to defer to second priority. The dean agreed, so the subsequent funding decisions occurred with minimal dissent.

While she emphasized her commitment to inclusive decision making, President Jerome also recognized that leaders inevitably have to make some decisions alone. During her entire presidency there were very few decisions Dr. Jerome made alone. Those decisions were related to issues where there was resistance at the college to national initiatives that were both needed and requested by the local community.

I made only a few decisions by myself. I had input, I consulted, and then made the decision. The rest of the decisions were made consensually.

Furthermore, President Jerome explained how most of the decisions she made alone were those tied closely to her personal values and relationships. Throughout our conversations she used terms like “good values,” “gutsy,” “right decision,” and “right thing to do” when describing some of her decisions. She also stressed that making “a right decision has been the theme for me.”

Loss

Despite positive impressions about her leadership, a number of conditions led to Dr. Jerome retiring from the presidency. A confluence of circumstances resulted in her departure which was centered on responding to the personal agendas of some new board members and dealing with administrators who pressed their own agendas through new relationships with board members.

Working with Governing Board Members

Dr. Jerome described feeling supported by and having a strong relationship with the board of directors during most of her presidency. Until her final year in the position, she expressed her feelings about working with the governing board as fantastic.

These were wonderful boards. We had respect for one another and worked well together with mutual respect.

She described how at the beginning of her presidency she laid the groundwork for her positive relationships with the board of directors when she accepted their invitation to collaborate with them as a facilitator of their strategic planning retreat. At this retreat she used many of her leadership tools to help the governing board develop a direction for the college which she could implement as president. In addition to participating in retreats, Dr. Jerome also employed the strategies many college presidents use to build relationships with governing board members such as meeting with them individually, participating in informal dinners and social events, and assisting with offering professional development opportunities for her and the trustees like bringing board development consultants to campus.

She was pleased with the working relationship she had developed with the governing board members because the trustees reported to her they were comfortable with the direction of the college. As a result of this confidence in the advancement of the community college and since many of the trustees who hired Dr. Jerome had been on the board for a number of years, they began to resign from their positions. During her tenure, President Jerome worked with almost twenty different board members, and she described how the new board members, who were elected to represent a specific geographic area within the community college

boundaries, participated in an orientation meeting with the governing board chair and the president.

The board chair and I took the advice of a board consultant to sponsor an orientation meeting with the new board members. Together, the board chair and I would orient the new members to the college's approach to policy and board leadership and help them understand their responsibility to the college as a whole and how to hold the college in trust.

President Jerome indicated how prior to her arrival, the governing board had been one that, as they admitted to her, meddled in college affairs. Shortly after her arrival, the board adopted a governing approach which was designed to diminish their interference in the daily operations and focus their attention on broader issues. In brief, this meant the board limited its role to setting policy, provided a vision for the organization, outlined expectations of the president, and maintained a strong connection with the local community. The board's approach entrusted the president to administer their policies and implement their vision as she saw fit. Throughout most of Dr. Jerome's presidency, she reported, the board distanced itself from the day to day operations of the college. For example, the board did not get involved in personnel decisions or day to day check writing, so the president was not expected to report to them on such issues. President Jerome understood her role within this governance structure and took her leadership responsibilities *"seriously and literally."*

She observed how some new board members had a difficult time adjusting to the community college's governance role for trustees. Sometimes they came onto the board as community leaders who had been actively involved in the operations of other organizations because those organizations were either entirely or mostly run by volunteer board members.

President Jerome described how she and the board chair worked with the new board members to help them understand this governance approach.

So many people have served on non-profit boards where you had to do everything. You have to raise the money. You have to help the organization with the bookwork. You have to be their legal advice. And then some new board members come to a college with extensive staff to do this work. It's hard for some new board members to understand that it is the staff's responsibility.

Dealing with Individual Agendas

Furthermore, new board members would sometimes join the board with a personal agenda. Sometimes the agenda was for new programs or facilities at their local campus but sometimes the agenda was to take issue with a decision the college had made in the past about personnel. So Dr. Jerome and the board chair worked together to identify the individual motivations and goals of each board member so they could understand what the trustees needed and how they could work with them to achieve mutual success. For a number of years this strategy was effective in developing relationships with new board members until the board acquired several new directors at once.

The board members that hired me had been on the board for fifteen, twenty years and they wanted to move on to other commitments in their lives. Even though I hated to see them go, they told me that things were going well and they needed to move on to those new commitments. Typically they left one by one, and they helped to find new board members to replace themselves. But this particular year several new board members joined at once.

When these new trustees joined the governing board, President Jerome was initially unaware of their individual agendas. She later discovered, however, that a couple of the new board members disagreed with personnel decisions that had been made in the past about former employees with whom they had a relationship. Although the personnel decisions were made by those former employees' supervisors in consultation with the human resources department, President Jerome had supported the results. As it turned out, these new board members held President Jerome responsible. Dr. Jerome acknowledged how at the time she did not fully understand the depth of the board members' underlying motivations.

It never occurred to me until afterward that the board members were on the board because they were trying to overturn a personnel decision.

Furthermore, she described that during this time, as each new trustee with his or her focus on the campus geographically located within their constituency joined the governing board, it was more and more difficult to lead in a way that would keep the college unified for the entire college district.

I found it really challenging to help the board members understand we needed to continue focusing on the college as a whole. It was important to find common ground within the district so we could keep up our important work.

President Jerome now realizes that regardless of her logic and rationale for maintaining a unified college-wide focus she could not persuade the new board members to maintain it because they had already shifted to a campus focus.

Moreover, as President Jerome was trying to build relationships with the new board members, she experienced leadership difficulty because the board as a whole was moving in

a direction away from the president leading the college and moving more toward the board guiding the day to day activities of the institution.

For all those years the board really wanted me to be the college leader. And then, we had the new people come on at once who wanted to be the leader, and it took me time to understand that.

She now understands the governing board members who hired her had wanted her to be the community college's leader, but as the composition of board membership changed some new board members wanted an active role in the operational functions of the college. This created difficulties for President Jerome's leadership because for most of her tenure she was accustomed to a clearly defined structure of duties for the president and for the governing board. Meaning the board's role was to set the vision, make college policies, ensure the college's connection with the community, and outline expectations for the president while her role as president was to implement the board's expectations and lead the college's operational functions. This model had been very successful until some new members joined the governing board with a contradictory notion of how the governance structure should operate.

Another issue Dr. Jerome identified as problematic for her leadership experience was how some members of the administrative team had developed relationships with some of the governing board members and then used those relationships to advance their campuses' agendas.

Although the board had established a policy of only working directly with the president, Dr. Jerome had expanded the access board members had to the administrative team and vice versa early in her presidency. For example, she said the administrators began

participating in board meetings and board dinners because these interactions between the two groups were helpful for the administrators to understand governing board decisions.

Positive results occurred from these types of activities because the administrators, by observing first-hand the board discussions, gained a better understanding of the process the board members used to arrive at their decisions.

Dr. Jerome indicated this type of involvement was quite successful until late in her presidency when some of the new board members began trying to be more involved in college operations by initiating connections with their local campus dean.

When a few administrators realized President Jerome was having difficulty with the governing board members who wanted expanded access to the college operations, she reported they began to take advantage of the situation to advance their own agendas. In particular, Dr. Jerome said, they expressed to these board members their disagreement with some of the college's decisions that she had advocated for.

And when some of the staff saw I didn't have the full support of the board, and they had this access to board members they began expressing their disagreement with certain decisions.

President Jerome reported that a few of the board members listened to these administrators when they shared how they disagreed with some of the decisions that had been made. Not only did this begin to create difficulties in Dr. Jerome's relationships with the new board members, but also it began to create a rift in her relationship with a few of the administrators who thought she was making too many decisions by herself.

Because Dr. Jerome believed so firmly in engaging the staff in college decisions as indicated above, she spent considerable time after she left the presidency thinking about what

the administrators might have perceived about the decisions she had made alone. As a result, she identified only a couple of specific instances where she believed this perception was true, but she also explained how she felt compelled as the president to respond to the requests of the local community especially after the college's decision making bodies had ample time to consider the issue and respond to it. What's more, as the leader, she believed it was her responsibility to make a decision that would unclog the bottleneck that she said can often happen when a decision making process gets jammed such as the participants reaching an impasse because factions disagree about the best option or because the parties fail to see the urgency in responding to an issue.

One of the decisions the administrators were upset about pertained to President Jerome's expectation that the college begin improving its response to workforce needs. The decision making group she had tasked with this issue had spent several years discussing it but had minimized it as a priority, so when she believed she had exhausted all options to encourage them to respond to this issue, President Jerome made the decision.

Most of the committee understood where I was coming from, but one of the administrators believed it was a directive from me rather than what I believed which was that it was a directive from our communities.

Although she believed this was within her presidential prerogative, she understands how some of the college administrators may have perceived it as outside the scope of the established college decision making structures.

Even though the college staff and faculty said they understood that there would be decisions that I had to make as president, it happened so rarely that they really didn't

know how to accept it when I did make a decision on my own. It was during those rare times they felt like I was being controlling.

The college employees had come to expect involvement in all decisions, so when she wavered from that process, albeit rarely, she may have encountered credibility problems with some of the administrators. The administrators then began speaking more openly with some of the new governing board members about their frustrations with President Jerome's leadership. Bringing together the administrators who had personal agendas with the new governing board members who had different personal agendas began to create difficulties for Dr. Jerome's presidential leadership.

Leaving the Presidency

President Jerome said she knew when she entered the presidency she might not have the perspective to know when it was time to move on, so she requested her staff to give her insight by asking them to help her identify when it was time to leave. She said to them,

I'm not going to know when it's time to leave. You need to tell me.

In the end no one came forward, but she speculated how feelings of personal vulnerability may have prevented them from approaching her about it. She also admitted she felt betrayed by "*some of the staff that I had trusted*" when they began undermining her with the board.

President Jerome acknowledged she now realizes there were several indications her leadership may not have been the best fit for the college any longer. As illustrated above, the most apparent sign was how some new board members and some administrators, each with very different agendas, ended up coalescing to make President Jerome's leadership difficult.

Commitment to the College

For some time, though, President Jerome said her dedication to the community college influenced her desire to solve her leadership troubles. Over time she has come to understand that the complexity of the situation made that very difficult.

When these things started to happen I should have said that this is no longer the right place for me. I no longer have all of the board members who really believe in the things I believe in. There's been a shift in power among the administrators, and it's time for me to go. But I kept trying to make it work.

In the end Dr. Lucille Jerome left her difficult leadership position by retiring from the presidency.

Healing

President Jerome described how she participated in a variety of experiences to heal from the difficult leadership experience. She occupied herself in new professional and volunteer leadership positions, she spent time engaging in both formal and informal reflection activities, and she identified several lessons she learned to apply to future situations.

Post-Departure Experiences

President Jerome credited spending time with some of her dearest friends and receiving their support as important to helping her mend from the experience.

I moved through the sadness I felt from leaving the college with people who loved me.

Although Dr. Jerome indicated she felt very satisfied about her career thus far, she acknowledged she was “*not finished*” with her professional life. While she confessed that in

the early months she did not know what her next career move would be, she said it was clear to her that she was not interested in pursuing another presidency.

People tell me I should apply for other presidencies or take acting presidency positions. I just say, 'No, I've done that.' I was there. It was an important thing for me to do. I made an important contribution. I feel good about my contributions, and now it is important for me to evolve in this other direction.

Instead Dr. Jerome has focused her new professional life on the types of positions and projects reflecting her ideals.

Everything I'm doing is really integrated with what I believe in and with my life-long values. These are things that I've been interested in but had no idea I would be able to pursue.

She enjoys using her leadership tools and experiences as a basis for projects related to higher education. She has also joined the board of directors for a non-profit organization because not only is she passionate about the mission of this organization but also the act of assisting them has provided an outlet for her to practice her leadership skills in a new role as their board chair. She has become committed to them because she wants to help them receive the “attention, recognition, and money they deserve.”

Meaning through Reflection

Furthermore, she healed from the difficult leadership experience with the aid of her personal spirituality and reflection. President Jerome commented that spiritual reading and reflection have always been central to creating a personal understanding of her life experiences. She explained how reflection helps her explore the significance of events in her life, so she can work to transform herself.

To focus on the transformational benefits of reflection she had focused conversations with a trusted professional colleague. Together they explored her leadership experiences and endeavored to make meaning of them. She indicated conversations with this colleague helped her evaluate the circumstances surrounding her departure from the presidency and advance her understanding of her reaction to it. Another reflective tool she used was taking extensive notes during the conversations and then reviewing them later to find additional meaning.

My conversations with this person would include raising questions about what had happened at the college and helping me reflect on the answers I had developed.

Likewise, President Jerome had participated in a few personal development retreats where she has had an opportunity to share some her difficult leadership experiences. She believed she has received some “*wonderful insights*” from retreat participants.

Similar to reading, conversations, retreats, and note taking, Dr. Jerome found opportunities for reflection through music and art. She has often enjoyed the arts as a way to decompress from her leadership challenges. She told about a time during her presidency when she had experienced a particularly tiring and stressful day and how going to an evening college event she had expected would be exhausting turned out to be reinvigorating when she was able to thoroughly enjoy the performance of a talented musician. Likewise, during the early days after she left the presidency she visited an exhibition of Rodin’s “Gates of Hell.”

The statues were all of grief and sadness and pain and anxiety, and every one of those statues helped me express what was going on inside me. I went to the exhibit twice. It just helped me get in touch with all of those feelings in myself, and I’m sure it was a cleansing experience for me.

Despite the difficulties she faced that resulted in her retirement, Dr. Jerome did not regret her presidential leadership experience.

I feel really good about my time as a president. I feel good about the stands I took at the college—even the ones that caused me problems. I still feel very good about those decisions because I hear from folks that are there that the college is having wonderful results.

In essence, Dr. Jerome concluded the junction of multiple, complex issues and trying to manage relationships with several individuals who had personal agendas became too difficult to overcome making her departure inevitable.

There were just too many things converging all at once. I couldn't possibly have resolved it. It was time to move on.

She had also determined even if she had handled individual aspects of the experience differently, the outcome would have been the same in the end. Ultimately, however, she retired from her position because she believed the governing board was influenced by several new members with ulterior agendas to reject their governance approach and begin asserting themselves in the administrative functions of the college.

They actually overturned their policy about working directly through the president and the president works with the institution. They changed that policy.

Lessons Learned

President Jerome believed she learned many leadership lessons through her healing process. She said her reflections led to a deeper understanding of herself as a leader and broader notions about community college presidential leadership in general.

One key area of learning for President Jerome was the importance of being attentive to relationships with board members. Maintaining vigilance to the priorities, motivations, and subtle changes in individual board members is important to proactively adapting a president's leadership style to meet their expectations and preserve a strong relationship with them. Dr. Jerome recognized she could have been more aware of how her own board members were responding to her leadership style and the decisions she was making for the college.

I have learned the importance of paying attention to the shifts, the sometimes imperceptible shifts and sometimes seismic shifts that happen when working with governing board members.

Moreover, she identified how being more deferential to trustees may influence how they treat a president and view her leadership. Dr. Jerome noted leaders need to consider deflecting positive attention and accolades away from themselves and toward the board members.

Another critical feature Dr. Jerome learned about working effectively with governing board members is informing them about the rationale for the decisions a president makes. She determined had she given the board more information at the time she was making some critical but controversial decisions, it may have been easier for them to have supported and defended her when a negative reaction to those decisions presented itself from various constituent groups and new board members.

If I had taken certain things to the board—even as information, and even though it seemed incongruent with our governance model—and they had been recorded in the minutes they would have had a greater understanding about some of the decisions I made.

Furthermore, Dr. Jerome realized additional communication might have better protected her, but also accepted that information sharing about daily college operations from the president to the board was contrary to the governance approach her college was structured under.

There were things that I didn't necessarily talk to the board about because they were internal.

The sudden shift away from its governance structure by the board near the end of Dr. Jerome's presidency and little documentation left the previous decisions she had made open to examination with no documentation at the board level to support them. She also realized the decisions she made under the most scrutiny by board members were those involving past personnel issues because some former college employees had developed relationships with some new board members. It became apparent the new board members were going to seek retribution for the past personnel decisions.

In addition, President Jerome confirmed her understanding of the importance of developing and maintaining relationships and how that was central to her leadership approach.

Relationships are fragile. We used to always say that you might have a good relationship with the faculty but their focus is, 'what did you do for me today?' And it is not just true of faculty. It's true of most people.

Dr. Jerome believed throughout most of her presidency she had strong relationships with her administrative team especially because her leadership involved shared power and inclusive decision making processes.

I felt surrounded by staff that I trusted and supported and we almost always made decisions that we all agreed on. In the end, one of the factors that made my leadership experience challenging was something we disagreed on.

Upon reflection, she also realized sometimes a president can have trouble with administrators if they try to push their own agendas. This may be especially true if those administrators take advantage of an opportunity to promote their agendas by developing relationships with board members who are also creating leadership difficulties for the president by advancing their own agendas. In other words, personal agendas can be very powerful motivators for individuals. Sometimes several individuals with divergent agendas can find common ground to make leadership experiences challenging for the president.

She also has concluded involving many people in the decision making processes, while maintaining it is the preferred way to lead a college, can give an erroneous impression to some administrative staff that their opinions on decisions were always welcomed and weighed equally. President Jerome acknowledged the reality is that sometimes the president had to make decisions without input or sometimes with her own evaluation of the input. Dr. Jerome has determined if she had communicated this reality more regularly with the administrators, then they might have been more understanding when the rare times arose when she had to make decisions on her own.

Dr. Jerome also realized how deeply she was affected by the difficult presidency and how it may have even shaken her confidence for awhile. She summarized this discovery after she had read the transcripts of our interviews by observing:

The stories I tell describe my thinking and feeling of being sad, experiencing terrible grief, and anger, and resentment, and frustration. And underneath a lot of it the

feeling that somehow I hadn't risen to the issues that presented themselves. As I reflect on that, I did my best with the circumstances presented to me.

In the end, however, President Jerome confirmed her belief in being true to her core identity as a leader.

What I've come to understand about my true self is that it's an inner wisdom and an inner existence that we're all born with, and that we tend to deform in order to fit in. When we are true to that self, when we can really be centered and grounded and be present in that self, that we are much more effective as human beings.

Conclusion

This chapter described the leadership story of Lucille Jerome, a veteran community college president, who retired from her position after the individual agendas of some new board members and college administrators created leadership difficulties for her. It examined what she lost as a result of her exit and how engaging in substantive reflection on the experience helped her heal. The next chapter studies the case of Colleen Riches, who also retired from her community college presidency.

CHAPTER 6

PRESIDENT COLLEEN RICHES

Introduction

This chapter describes the experience of Dr. Colleen Riches, who retired from the community college presidency after more than a decade of success when a couple of individual agendas created a difficult leadership situation. Like the previous chapter this case study addresses three broad areas of President Riches's story. First, it illustrates her leadership style and experiences; second, it studies the loss she experienced as a result of her leadership challenges; and third, it examines the healing she experienced as she identified the lessons she has learned.

Leadership

Dr. Colleen Riches was president at a large multi-college district for over a decade. Her career began as a community college faculty member. She advanced to her first presidency after performing various administrative leadership positions including directing the academic support program; serving as an academic division chair; managing cabinet level positions in continuing education and external relations; and serving as a campus provost for a large community college district. She was in her third presidential role when she experienced her difficult leadership situation. Her community college and civic involvement included serving on numerous local, state, national, and international boards, and like many community college presidents she had presented at national conferences and written numerous publications.

Pathway to a Presidency

President Riches described herself as someone who had been identified early in her career by former supervisors and mentors as someone “*with the potential*” to be a successful higher education administrator. She explained how an administrator at the college where she was teaching asked her to collaborate with a colleague to design a new academic support program for the district. Dr. Riches referred to this administrator as a mentor because he took an interest in her leadership development. President Riches recalled this mentor offering her leadership advice by mentioning to her how she was not taking enough credit for the success of some of her joint projects. What’s more, she remembered how he recognized in her an aptitude for professional success.

I think what he saw was a young, talented professional who always wanted to do the best job possible.

Likewise, Dr. Riches shared how she realized others also viewed her as a competent leader when she was asked to lead an important college strategic initiative.

People at the college said, ‘If you want this to get done on time and effectively to reach a successful conclusion, [Colleen] is the person to lead it.’

Furthermore, she recalled her mentor offering her career advice by encouraging her to consider a profession in community colleges. He “*planted the seed*” in Dr. Riches to pursue leadership roles when he encouraged her to move from teaching to administration. This combination of faith and encouragement in her leadership abilities helped her, as a young administrator, to realize her career goal was to become a community college president.

President Riches described being deliberate in managing her career path so she was gaining the necessary experiences that would help her reach and succeed in her goal of being

a community college president. Not only did she advance herself by taking positions with progressively more responsibility, but also she participated in formal leadership development activities like conferences and workshops designed to help aspiring leaders to develop the necessary skills for executive positions. She became a consultant evaluator for one of the regional accrediting bodies and learned much from her visits to other community colleges across the country. Dr. Riches described feeling privileged to learn leadership from some successful administrators and to gain access to many of the early prominent community college women leaders. She recalled what a thrill it was to meet leaders like Judith Eaton, Helena Howe, Carolyn Desjardins and Mildred Bulpit when she attended meetings where they were presenting.

Having access to some of the senior women presidents—and there weren't many—was extremely helpful to my professional development. Listening to them discuss their perspectives and experiences helped shape my vision and my thoughts of leadership. I feel blessed to have had these opportunities early in my career.

Along her career pathway Dr. Riches had job opportunities outside of higher education, but she described her belief in the community college as central to her career goal.

It was the mission of the community college that I really related to and believed in. Sure, I could have made more money in private industry and perhaps traveled more around the world, but I needed to be part of something that makes a difference in people's lives and strengthens communities. That for me was best achieved by being in the community college movement.

Gender Discrimination

President Riches faced some instances of gender discrimination while advancing to the community college presidency. She described one experience where she was the only woman participating in an accreditation visit to a college in a southern state. The chair of the team did not give her equal responsibilities as the male members of the team. It was only after she proved herself on the first day and a male member demonstrated his ineptitude that the chair gave her additional tasks from the other member. Dr. Riches described another situation earlier in her career where she participated in a search committee and had witnessed some of the other members of the committee view the promotion of equally qualified male and female candidates differently.

Some males on the committee looked at a male applicant and said, 'He's ready for this next level of responsibility.' But for a woman applicant with the same background they said, 'She hasn't done the job yet so she should get more experience before she is ready for this position.' In some cases, members would question the credibility of the accomplishments of the women candidates but not the males.

Dr. Riches also indicated she had realized women may have to overcome some prejudices related specifically to entering the community college presidency. One issue she mentioned was how some governing board members perceive the leadership style of many women as less effective because it does not match with their traditional, hierarchical view of leadership of command and control.

If governing boards have only observed autocratic leaders who rule through fear and control, these boards may have a difficult time accepting women who want to share power, engage others in leadership, and achieve effective results through

collaboration and respect. Or the boards may think they want such a leader but then discover they don't know how to relate to this collaborative style of leadership. It is very different to lead from respect than from fear.

Another point President Riches made was how some board members and college staff may be uncomfortable with a president simply because she is a woman. She described how early in her career it was rare for most college staff to have ever reported to a woman. Most had worked with women as secretaries or faculty members but rarely as the dean or vice president. Hence it was a huge step to report to a woman president.

Despite understanding these challenges women face concerning their leadership approach, President Riches has chosen to reject the traditional command and control leadership model. She shared how, in particular, she believed in minimizing the concept of promoting an adversarial or competition-focused culture within an organization.

Some of my male higher education and business and industry colleagues will consistently use military metaphors like 'rallying the troops' or 'fighting an enemy.' I wonder why we can't do things without having to have an enemy. Why can't it be about being the absolute best that we can be?' But it seems like some of my executive male friends believe the best thing to bring folks together is creating an internal war or warring against somebody else.

The Presidential Experience

President Riches reached her goal when she became a community college president at a medium-sized community college, advanced to a larger community college district and then accepted her last presidency of a multi college district. In all three instances she was the first female president in the institution's history. She expressed pride and satisfaction in the

accomplishments the colleges had achieved under her tenure. Although during the interviews she did not promote many examples of success the colleges had achieved to illustrate her presidential experiences, her vitae outlined many accomplishments under her leadership including financial strength, new buildings, staff development and a college-wide focus on student learning.

President Riches, instead, shared several observations she had made about the community college presidency in general. First, she believed no single leadership style is most effective for all presidents; rather diverse approaches are useful and best fitted according to the institutional setting and college culture.

Can all leaders be effective in every organization? No. I do think different colleges call for different people with different styles. . . . I think it's too simplistic when we say, 'All good presidents are servant leaders, or they are situational leaders, or they are visionary leaders.' I think we try to box things too easily. There must be an appropriate fit between the president, the board and the college as to where it is in its cultural development.

Second, she stressed the importance of keeping the status associated with the position in perspective by noting the effect she had seen the role have on other presidents.

The presidential position can distort reality about its importance and can go to a person's head.

She explained how she had seen leaders who were aspiring to a presidency who may have believed the role was one revered by others or full of privileges. In these cases she suspected those leaders may not have a full understanding of the duties and responsibilities of the position including the stewardship to the public.

I think some people enter the presidency without realizing how complex the role is or how long it takes to change a college culture or the amount of time and energy that must be invested to succeed for the long haul.

Third, while it is a position of responsibility, Dr. Riches stressed being in the presidential role should not define the individual in the position.

It's a position of trust. It's a position of service. It's a position of opportunity. But it's not who you are as an individual. It's a role that you're fulfilling. You have a responsibility to live it with integrity and remain true to yourself. You should have interests and time outside the role of president. This will keep you balanced and add joy to your life.

Features of Leadership

It was apparent President Riches had contemplated how she viewed herself as a leader. She described many experiences she had over the years that shaped her approach which is based on being visionary, engaging faculty and staff in college leadership and decision making through communication, and providing staff leadership development opportunities.

Dr. Riches described her belief that a leader can play a key role in “*shaping the culture and direction*” of the organization.

Some people have disagreed with me on this, but I truly believe you can change the culture of an organization to make it better.

She shared that one way to accomplish “*systemic changes*” is to create a team approach for moving the college forward.

My natural leadership style is based on working together. . . . I've been described as inclusive and interested in creating multi-cultural environments that are welcoming to diverse beliefs.

Dr. Riches expressed her belief in group decision making but stressed the importance of explaining how input will be used. An early experience showed her about the appropriate use of staff contributions in decision making when she saw the reaction from employees when a former supervisor asked staff their opinions on an issue after he had already made the decision. Despite the contrary feedback he received, he acted upon his initial decision which sent a clear message to his staff that their input was irrelevant.

I learned an early management lesson that you don't go out and ask people what they want or how they feel about an issue if you're not intending to consider their feedback. And you need to tell employees upfront how a decision is being made and by whom.

She also explained how she valued “*maintaining strong communication*” through honest and direct interactions.

I tend to be pretty direct. I would rather be respectful, kind, and direct than duplicitous. I am not naïve and know sometimes you have to work behind the scenes, but for the most part I strive to be transparent and give people the reasons for the actions we need to take.

In addition, President Riches emphasized how important she felt it was that staff has an opportunity to develop their personal leadership skills.

In education the only thing you have to give students are your interactions with them—your knowledge, your service. Hence it is very important that each of us

recognizes our own abilities and tries to be the best we can be to serve our students and our communities. We need to be life long learners ourselves to interact with and model behavior for our students and our communities.

Dr. Riches shared how she has been described by others as *an “astute thinker, a quick study and an excellent synthesizer of information.”* In addition, she indicated her awareness that with her agile, quick mind, she needs to slow down at times so that others will be engaged in the dialogue. She is also appreciative that introverted thinkers need situations where they can move away from the “group think” and process data and then come back at another time to share their insights. She strives to create situations in which both introverted and extroverted thinkers can equally contribute and gain from one another. In summary, President Riches is a *“complex, humane, caring, focused, energetic”* leader who believes in moving an organization forward through the collective effort of everyone involved.

Loss

In spite of a long and successful tenure at the helm of a strong community college, a convergence of complex conditions led to President Riches retiring from the presidency. Although the specific details of her departure are confidential, Dr. Riches shared how she faced leadership difficulties in working with some trustees to understand their role within the governance structure rather than college operations, how important it was for students and communities that policy decisions be made in the best interest of those served and not singular agendas, how a few diverse individual agendas contributed to the situations leading to her retirement, and how her strong dedication to promoting and advancing the community college made leaving her presidency difficult.

Working with Governing Board Members

President Riches described employing many of the same techniques to build relationships with board members she knew other college presidents typically used such as becoming acquainted with them individually, traveling to meetings together, and building rapport through regular communication. She also stressed her belief in the importance of bringing recognition to board members.

Most board members receive little or no compensation for the hours they contribute to the college. The majority of them want to serve effectively and contribute to their communities. Yes, a few have personal agendas which often includes using the community college trustee position as a “stepping stone” to fulfill other political ambitions. But most board members want to give back to their college and their communities. Hence it is important to let the broader community know of the board’s accomplishments and their service. The president can help board members be invited to important community events and receive recognition for their service.

Dr. Riches expressed a strong confidence in policy governance which delineated the board’s duty for developing the college’s strategic vision and goals from the administration’s responsibility for implementing those initiatives and reporting results.

Being an observer of other presidents and boards, and having served in multiple presidencies, I developed a clear and consistent understanding of the difference of the board’s policy role versus the president’s strategic operational role. Unlike some management books, I do believe the board should be engaged in setting the vision, values, and goals of the college district. The president and staff facilitate that planning process and provide board members with environmental scans and

processes that allow the trustees to hear community feedback regarding the successes and opportunities of the college. The challenge comes when board members have only served on operational boards like a city council or community board. It is always easier to decide which car to purchase than it is to set the course for new programs or restrict prior offerings due to changes in the environment. Hence, the board needs opportunities to develop the talents of its members in the art and science of governance. They need systems and reporting mechanisms in place that provide them with accurate, timely information to make policy not operational decisions. They need to trust the staff to operate the college district and this can often be achieved through reports on identified performance indicators.

Dr. Riches acknowledged how helping some board members understand their function could be challenging. She explained how sometimes board members have never held a high level leadership or board position.

Most board members are well-developed for their role and have a clear understanding of the policy role versus the operational role, but some people come into a policy governance role without previous experience.

In order to educate board members on their duties, President Riches indicated training through workshops and retreats was useful. She realized, however, that some of the board members were not receptive to learning about how the board role and the administrative role worked together to advance the college.

One of the key leadership difficulties Dr. Riches grappled with was the role a president should play if and when a board is reluctant to make a decision needed for the college district. She described how this becomes even more problematic when the board

chair is inexperienced and other members want to “*get along*” or are intimidated by an outspoken member other than the chair.

What do you do as president when the board needs to make a decision, like early retirement policy or code of ethics, and is unable to bring the issue to closure? What do you do when the board chair is inexperienced and has a high need to be liked and a few other board members are untrusting of employees or have personal agendas that conflict with the best interest of the college’s mission? If the board chair or another board member can’t move the decision—either for or against—what should the president do? Will it be benign neglect if the issue just dies a long slow death? Or will the lack of a decision cause stagnation or worse for the college? What becomes the role of the president? Do you just let it go? Do you step in? And if you step in what may be the consequences for the president later on?

Additionally, she realized the times when a president is compelled to push the governing board to make a particular decision may be important for the advancement of the college, but have the potential to impact her rapport with some governing board members. Moreover, President Riches described how some board members feel like they are a “*rubber stamp*” if they follow the president’s recommendations or don’t criticize staff in open forums. Others want to demonstrate strong, effective leadership but may lack the skills and experience to do so. Sometimes boards are fractured into disparate groups and focus on their own infighting rather than the needs of the college. Some elected board members feel they only represent the interest group that elected them. She wondered about the appropriate role of the president in trying to assist the board and help it fulfill its statutory duties. Dr. Riches

indicated she had ideas, but they may not always have been in sync with some individual board members. She did understand, however, that's when friction can ensue.

There were some occasions when I had to step in. Every time I stepped in I thought it was good for the overall success of the college but what was the cost of that decision on my relationship with some board members? I believe if the president has to assume the role of an ineffective board chair, it can create negative perceptions in the long run. The board needs to manage itself and the president needs to give clear, honest, relevant data which can be used by the board to make its decisions.

Dealing with Individual Agendas

In addition, President Riches identified how an individual's personal agenda can contribute to a president's difficult leadership experiences. Moreover, she said that unrelated individual agendas can merge to create a troubling situation for a president.

Dr. Riches described having a very positive and successful relationship with most of the board members she had worked with throughout her career, but she also realized an occasional board member would join the board focused on a particular issue. She indicated many times the issues were related to faculty and staff concerns or to the board member's personal advancement. President Riches also explained how often when new board members joined with individual agendas it impeded the strategic direction that had been established for the college. Over the years she had dealt with and heard from other presidents about a myriad of individual board members' issues: taking a pro faculty and anti administration stance; wanting to fire a college employee without due cause; limiting the communication channels between the board members and president; communicating with staff about college issues and not informing the president; using the governing board position for professional

advancement or employment of family members or friends. Working with an elected board that had little stability over the years contributed to the difficulty President Riches faced in keeping the governing board moving in the same direction for the college.

President Riches indicated it was a particularly difficult experience when a trustee joined the governing board with an agenda to overhaul the college, including its leadership. During the period she worked with this board member, President Riches explained how the board member would often offer a contrary position to the administration's recommendations during board meetings. Furthermore, this trustee was very charismatic which served to make the assertions presented convincing even when they were inaccurate and outlandish.

Well, that's the worst kind of situation to be in when you have a board who defers its overall leadership to one individual board member.

Many times President Riches chose not to address comments made by the board member but if the inaccuracies were likely to lead the board into making a decision that could harm the college, she felt compelled to correct the information.

It was a difficult situation. This board member would often offer information as if it was factual. The person would state, 'I've done my independent study and I find—.' The conclusions were generally counter to everything that had been factually accurate and presented by administration to the board. No data would be presented by the board member but the way the individual presented conclusions would make it appear as if data had been gathered and the conclusion plausible. This would cause the president and administration to either present conflicting information again, try to engage the dissonant member into the data presented, or allow disinformation to stand and potentially affect a board's decision. This situation created a morale

problem for staff who felt distrusted by the board as a whole since the individual was allowed to make unfounded statements that were not corrected by other board members.

This set up President Riches as appearing to correct this board member. She knew a negative view of her was developing but did not deem she had a choice to ignore the inaccuracies because the college would be adversely affected if decisions were made on misinformation.

At the same time as this trustee was pushing an agenda to change the leadership, another trustee was promoting a different agenda. President Riches believed this trustee was trying to gain personal power by attempting to manipulate the governing board behind the scenes. In addition to difficult experiences with the board members' agendas, President Riches also illustrated challenges with an administrator who had an agenda of career advancement. When the administrator was unsuccessful with this goal, this person used multiple opportunities to undermine Dr. Riches's leadership. One of those opportunities was developing a close connection with the board member who was trying to gain personal power. Moreover, the union was promoting an expansion of benefits that management and the board had rejected for nearly a decade because of the financial impact on the college. Eventually, the board member who wanted a change in college leadership began advancing the union's position.

President Riches soon realized the multiple agendas, while each unique, were merging in such a way as to make her leadership experience very difficult, so she decided to retire.

There were several agendas that came together and moved things in a way that I would not have anticipated.

Commitment to the College

From her early days in administration Dr. Riches knew she wanted to be involved in enhancing an organization. She saw her role as leader as being committed to improving the college and attributed her views on organizational development as connected to the work of Carol Gilligan (1982).

You can relate this to Carol Gilligan's studies where many women presidents want to make connections. We want to build. We want to make sure that the whole culture changes and grows.

President Riches reflected how her interest in making substantive change within the community college was a long process.

At [the community college] it took longer to cause the culture to change. I think people would document that we really did change the culture of [the community college], but it was long and that was one of the things that kept me there so long.

Furthermore she described how she had spent her presidency focused on working toward the betterment of the college by working long hours.

I don't think there would be anybody in [the college community] that wouldn't say that I worked really hard and sacrificed a lot of personal life for that institution, for that community.

In general, she also speculated how an interest in building relationships within the college coupled with a desire to help an organization grow and succeed may result in a

woman leader, at the expense of her personal career, staying in her position longer than a man.

After establishing a relationship with the institution a woman, perhaps, feels more wedded to that institution and wants to stick with it to see the long term gains. As opposed to thinking, 'I've done a couple of good things; I'm now going on to the next level.'

When she commented on her own experience, Dr. Riches noted how she was focused on the growth of her college so she only considered one other position, but as she explored that opportunity further she realized she was still “wedded to” advancing her college district.

For me, it was always about how do we continue to build the organization? How do we make the culture one of respect for one another and diverse constituents? How do we deliver on our vision of excellence and help communities build economic strength in addition to educated citizens?

Her priority to improve her college and her personal loyalty toward reaching those goals contributed to the sense of rejection and hurt she felt when she realized a departure from the presidency was imminent. While she was negotiating her exit, Dr. Riches was uncertain whether she should defend herself or whether she should depart quietly because she hated the idea of fighting against the organization she had spent so many years being devoted to. Some trusted friends, however, helped her see she could defend herself without hurting the college.

I fight for principles. I fight for an organization. I have not, from my perspective, been a strong fighter for myself. So it probably would have been easier for me to

walk away and not make a fight, but I withdrew from that position when I had good friends who said, 'You have done absolutely nothing inappropriate.'

Throughout the difficult leadership experience, President Riches maintained a façade so details about her situation would not negatively influence the public's view of the community college. She described trying to “*put on the best face*” and “*act as if everything is okay*” to accomplish this feat.

In the end, President Riches concluded her dedication to long term growth for the college may have contributed to her leadership difficulties.

I truly believe that people can only be effective in a given organization a certain amount of time. I don't know what that certain amount of time is, it probably varies with each institution, but I truly think I stayed at [the college] a year or two too long.

Healing

President Riches healed from her difficult leadership experience through the support of family and friends and engaging in personal reflection. She has also learned from the challenging situation and has applied it to future leadership experiences.

Post-Departure Experiences

President Riches received support from family and friends as she experienced this difficult transition. She described feeling affirmed at her going away party when her children spoke publicly about the contributions she had made toward the betterment of the college and the communities served. Similarly, her close friends both supported her emotionally and helped her be “*tough.*”

In addition to the support and love I felt from my family, I feel fortunate that I had developed some strong friendships that became my support base during this time.

She also noted how during these difficult circumstances she developed new friendships. Dr. Riches described feeling “*very spiritually linked*” to these new friends who gave her support and a different way of reacting to and reflecting on the experience. In addition, despite having difficulty with some members of the board, other board members continued to support her and validated her leadership.

They told me they viewed my leadership of the college and my direction to achieve the vision as critical for the institution. They further stated that they had their own board work to do before hiring a new president, but that I should always remember the value-added that my tenure gave to the college district and the communities served.

Dr. Riches described experiencing many emotional reactions to her retirement from the presidency including hurt, betrayal, and loss. She felt hurt not only by the departure from her position but also because it felt like her personal sacrifice and investment in the college was minimized by some board members and some staff despite the public recognition of college excellence. She realized, however, she could not dwell in her wounded feelings.

Although you can feel betrayed, you just say, ‘That’s over,’ and you move beyond, and that’s what I’ve chosen to do.

Besides feeling hurt, President Riches also initially questioned if there was something different she should have done regarding the board members’ personal agendas. She wondered how she had missed the growing alliances that caused her to retire from the college.

Your initial reaction is, what else should I have done? How could I have handled the situations differently? What did I not see? Why did I trust someone unworthy of my

trust? How do I continue to believe in people and yet not trust someone again who is untrustworthy?

But Dr. Riches quickly began to look at her presidency in its entirety rather than just the difficult conditions resulting in her departure.

It wasn't a failed presidency. When you use objective criteria like student success, increased enrollments, money raised through grants and by the foundation, staff development opportunities for all staff, enhanced visibility in the communities served, and improved reputation it's real clear that during my leadership, by working with lots of people, we brought the community college district to a very successful place. So that's not a failed presidency. It's a contribution and another of life's lessons.

In reflection, President Riches discussed how she took responsibility for her role in the departure by indicating she had spent time thinking about how she could have handled the difficulties she faced differently.

Not in any way do I want my statements to infer that I think that the issues were all other people. I take clear responsibility for my role in working with the board and staff. In reflection, I do believe there are some things that I could have done differently and some instances when I should have waited for others to take leadership, or not. Work is about continuous improvement and all of us can do better and should learn from the experiences we have. I am a life long learner and will always strive to do my best, which for me is a high degree of excellence.

Meaning through Reflection

President Riches shared that she engaged in reflection to create meaning from her difficult leadership experience. She described her personal reflection as an ongoing process that considers a wide point of view.

I try to make meaning out of the totality of experiences. I don't take an isolated event and then wonder what it meant. I look at the individual events by trying to put them into the broader perspective.

During the time after her difficult leadership experience she participated in a week-long retreat where she learned to use spiritual teachings to reveal new knowledge about her experiences. In addition, she had conversations with some “*trusted people*” from the college to see if her observations were consistent with theirs about the incidents. And she also used exercise to promote a better mind and body connection.

I go through periods of time when I exercise almost daily to periods of time when I don't. I think exercising is a time when I can reflect and think. It feels good to work up a sweat and clear the “cobwebs” from the brain.

President Riches indicated she engaged in continual reflection on current events and past experiences.

I believe I have insights everyday. Some of those I can act on and some I say, ‘Okay, now what do you do with it?’ It's a constant awareness about self-growth, understanding, and looking at experiences that you're engaged in.

Lessons Learned

President Riches indicated she believes effective leadership is influenced by a deep self understanding.

I have this belief that we can be more effective leaders by better knowing ourselves. . . . If you know your strengths and your weaknesses you're going to be a more effective leader because you can balance the organization with people who have strengths to complement your weaker areas.

While she endeavors to improve her leadership, President Riches realistically admitted she will always have areas to work on.

There are areas of my leadership that I do not think are as effective as I wish they would be so I'm constantly striving to improve them. Of course for me an "A" is not enough. It needs to be an "A+; top of the class." With so many talented presidents and community college staff across this nation, I have a lot of people to learn from and some decades ahead to apply even better leadership skills in new venues or retirement activities.

Similarly, Dr. Riches suggested a leader should be more aware of her intuition because it may indicate a potential problem before she has all of the information to confirm it.

We need to trust our gut more. If it doesn't feel right there's probably something going on that you should be paying attention to.

In addition to understanding how this difficult leadership situation served to improve her own leadership skills, Dr. Riches had identified a couple of areas related to working effectively with governing board members. First, she suggested a leader should understand how one board member's agenda can build momentum to influence the entire governing board.

Sometimes people are going to choose to go in a certain direction because they have their own belief, their own agenda, or their own issues that may not be in sync with the rest of the board, but sometimes an individual agenda can turn a whole board around.

Second, President Riches mentioned how it can be difficult for a leader to know how to address the situation if she sees a charismatic trustee gaining individual power over the joint power of the entire governing board.

How do you deal with a board member who has his or her own agenda? And how do you deal with a board that allows that person to have influence over the rest? If no one else takes action, what role should the president play?

Conclusion

Despite leaving the community college presidency under a difficult leadership circumstance, Dr. Riches has continued with her leadership career. In the immediate aftermath she struggled with knowing her next career move.

I didn't know if I wanted to be a president again. But then I realized I had a lot to offer other organizations or other colleges. I decided to focus on selecting an organization that had a unified vision and a collegial board who understood the respective roles of administration and governing bodies.

After a short retirement, President Riches decided she had too much talent, energy, and passion for community colleges to “sit on the sidelines,” so she is currently engaged in her fourth successful presidency at another college and is thankful this leadership challenge gave her additional experiences for her own use and to share with other current and future community college presidents.

I feel grateful that what others might perceive as a failure has truly been a learning experience that has allowed me to learn something and to experience a new leadership opportunity. Life is a blessing. It is our individual responsibility to use our talents for the betterment of our fellow travelers on the road of life.

This chapter described the leadership story of Colleen Riches, an experienced community college president, who retired from her position after a few individual agendas created leadership difficulties for her. It examined her loss as a result of her departure and how support from family, old and new friends, and spiritual reflection helped her heal. The next chapter studies the case of Angela Whitmore, who was terminated from her community college presidency.

CHAPTER 7

PRESIDENT ANGELA WHITMORE

Introduction

This chapter describes the experience of Dr. Angela Whitmore who was terminated from her position as president of a community college after some members of the governing board decided they desired a change in leadership.

As in the previous two case studies, three broad areas of President Whitmore's story are addressed. First, it depicts her leadership style and experiences; second, it explores her difficult leadership situation and resultant loss; and third, it illustrates the healing she experienced and the lessons she has learned.

Leadership

Dr. Angela Whitmore was president of a large community college district for several years. She followed a purposeful path to the presidency that included a variety of educational and professional experiences. She spent time as both a high school and a college instructor; served as coordinator of several academic and continuing education programs; worked at a state governmental agency, and progressed through community college dean and vice presidential positions prior to becoming a president. This position was Dr. Whitmore's second presidency. She has also presented at conferences, written publications, and participated in a variety of local, state, and national educational and non-profit boards.

Pathway to a Presidency

President Whitmore was deliberate about her career development and used each position to gain the skills and experiences she believed she would need to become an effective community college president. She expressed belief in taking responsibility for how

she would grow and develop in each position she held by gaining the skills and attributes she needed to advance to the next position.

You are responsible for your own growth. As a professional person you can't just sit back and assume that somebody's going to lay out a path for you saying, "Now this is what you should do next and so on." I think that I have always planned what was next for me and then said, "What do you need in order to do that?" And then I've done things that I needed to do, and therefore, was in a position to move on. So, I've been pleased with myself from that perspective.

Each early position led to a more challenging position which resulted in reaching her ultimate goal of becoming a community college president.

I thought to myself, 'Okay, so you want to go into community colleges. You know, darn well, you are going to end up being the president. You're not just going to go there; you're going to have to be a president. What do you need in order to be a community college president?'

She selected the community college over other higher education institutions because she appreciated the fact that they were student-centered and had a strong commitment to their local communities.

I had a conversation with myself and said, 'Angela, what is it that you are really called to do?' The answer that came to me was that I really wanted to be serving students and the local community. These were my top values.

While her career path was intentional, Dr. Whitmore articulated how she had to make adjustments along the way because of personal challenges. For example, several months after she was suddenly widowed, she was offered a position with a government program in

another city. She indicated that, of course, her first thought was for her children and how they would feel about this. Unbeknownst to Dr. Whitmore, her children were listening on another phone when the job offer was extended.

They heard the gentleman tell me why they had selected me from among the forty plus applicants. This was all very affirming for the children who had just lost their father and were left with me to lead the family alone. We talked it over, what it would mean for them, etcetera. Their response was, 'Go for it, Mom.' Over the years, this conversation has often been reversed with me having the opportunity to support them in their career advancement. We continue to do this for each other.

After several years later she resumed her journey to become a community college president. She was unsuccessful in her first attempt, but several months later she received a promotion within the college district. She realized this higher level position was an opportunity to gain more experience related to becoming a president. Eventually she was a finalist at three community colleges in simultaneous searches, and ultimately accepted a presidency at a medium sized college.

The Presidential Experience

President Whitmore described being “*thrilled*” to secure a presidential position and believed it was a going to be a positive experience.

I was really happy about finally becoming a community college president because I could see that community colleges had so much potential as organizations.

She recalled the position announcement indicated the governing board was looking for a leader who could help the college through a healing process.

That was such a broken place. From an emotional standpoint I just wanted to go in there, take the whole organization in my arms and hold them for awhile. Apparently there had been some shouting with people breaking into tears in meetings, somebody being grilled on until they broke down and cried, etcetera. In the midst of this, the various employee groups had turned on each other.

Dr. Whitmore explained how she focused on establishing positive and respectful leadership among the faculty and staff and between the administration and all of the employee groups. She remembered how the employees seemed to be waiting for her to use anger and intimidation in leading. She described their surprise when someone asked her children, who were visiting campus, if their mother ever got angry, and they responded:

'If you're waiting for my mom to get angry, you'll have to wait a long time. She might send you to your room to think about your behavior, but she won't yell.'

Moreover President Whitmore shared how she approached her presidency with the belief that she could lead in a way that would produce substantive changes that would reinvent the community college culture. She illustrated this point by recalling how she had read about the term “autopoietic” and how the concept suited her leadership beliefs.

The author of Leadership and the New Science, Meg Wheatley, would use the term autopoietic. Autopoietic means that people can deliberately create the kind of organization they want to be.

She described approaching her leadership as serving the college in a way that resulted in the organization itself and the people who comprise the institution becoming stronger than they were before she arrived.

I have been influenced by Robert Greenleaf who first used the concept of 'servant leader.' A servant leader is someone who leaves a group better off than he or she found it, more capable of solving their own problems and more whole. So as president, I believe it is my job to lead in such a way that these things happen. This is how I can best serve the organization.

As President Whitmore looked back on her years at this college, she believed that she did help the college heal, as the governing board desired, through treating employees with concern and respect and by involving employees in planning and decision making. Other accomplishments included educating and involving employees in college strategic planning and budgeting processes, bringing increased college services to underserved areas, conducting a successful capital campaign, developing several new programs and centers, and enhancing staff development opportunities. After several years of positive responses from the employees and the governing board, she explained how it was apparent to her that the college had become an improved place. Therefore she believed she had accomplished her goals and it was time to move on to other challenges. The next situation was a larger community college that offered many of the same challenges but on a bigger scale.

Features of Leadership

It was evident President Whitmore had spent numerous hours developing skills as a leader and refining her philosophy of leadership. Early in her life she recognized leadership was one of her gifts so she embraced it.

On the Meyers/Briggs I'm an ENTJ. The narrative that goes with that category of personalities starts with, 'These people cannot not lead.' It has taken me time to be in a group and 'not lead.'

Throughout her professional development, Dr. Whitmore had mentors who helped her learn more about being an effective leader. When she was a new professional, a senior colleague taught her how to decide where to place her focus when controversial matters arise.

He reminded me to ask myself, 'Is this taste or is this a matter of principle?' Many matters simply involve differing tastes. You don't have to worry about matters of taste. Save your energy for matters of principle because you have to hold firm on those.

In addition to learning a great deal from observing and relating to leaders that she admired, she acknowledged value for her in reading about leadership and management and attending diverse conferences where she could interact with people from fields outside of education.

I also have always read a great deal, and I have taken advantage of opportunities to interact with a variety of people from other disciplines and walks of life because I could learn from them. This habit has really helped me to look at issues from different perspectives. I have made a deliberate effort to try to look at educational issues from the viewpoint of a non-educator.

President Whitmore's descriptions of her leadership included recognizing that developing the leadership potential of every member of the organization by involving all employee groups in the development and implementation of the organization's initiatives was important to the college's success. She also credited being visionary as both one of her strongest leadership attributes and one of her biggest challenges.

One of my gifts is that I've always been able to see the organization at its best. That picture is as clear to me as the reality is to other people. And so for me, it's just a very natural thing to move toward this vision. Now over my lifetime, I've had to learn

that this picture may not be clear at all to other people. It's a pain to have this, too. I tend to look at things as what we can achieve together. Let's get started. We can go there together. Let's start going there today.

Staff Development

In order to engage the employees she worked with in the vision she had for the organization, President Whitmore believed in connecting with and maintaining a strong relationship with the college staff. She preferred to be viewed as approachable rather than standoffish, and indicated people were often surprised when she answered her own phone or that they could reach her at home after hours.

In addition to working on building positive interpersonal relations with employees, Dr. Whitmore was committed to providing opportunities for all staff to develop themselves. She believed that all employees deserved these opportunities because this was both the most valuable benefit an organization can provide for its employees and this was the best way for the organization to optimize itself.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin has a line in his book Building the Universe that says, 'The best way to develop the potential of an organization is to develop the potential of the people who comprise the organization.' I can still recall exactly where I was when I read this for the first time. Truly, this was a watershed event in my life as a manager and a leader.

She adopted the concept by creating many opportunities for all employees to begin increasing their leadership experience including expanding decision-making teams and creating programs specifically designed to develop leadership skills and attitudes.

Generally people want to grow and appreciate being encouraged to blossom. So a very positive feature of coming into an organization is that there are always individuals there starving for development. Then when you arrive and begin calling them to a higher level, they feel a greater sense of self worth and a stronger commitment to the organization.

In addition, she believed that a good leader takes responsibility for helping to develop those who encompass the organization.

Robert Greenleaf talks about the servant leader as one who leaves the people he or she leads better off than when he or she arrived. There's a line in scripture that says, 'To each is given gifts for the whole.' I also think it's the leader's responsibility to figure out what those gifts are, and to create an environment where they put their gifts into service of the organization.

Staff Involvement in Leadership

Once the leadership development processes of all members of the organization are in place, President Whitmore shared that the result is a healthy college, which is one that is attractive to those within as well as outside the organization.

A staff member once described our college as a place where 'people are either growing or going.' This person acknowledged those who want or need to hang on to the status quo were very likely to be uncomfortable at the college.

She described using a circle as a symbol of the college community.

Everything we do is out in the open for all to see—except personnel matters—and can be seen from many different perspectives. Everyone is included in the circle.

Everyone has an important role to play in keeping the circle intact. We're holding

hands around the circle, so if someone starts to go down they have the strength of the entire circle to hold them up. And since we are all standing on the same ground, no one has very far to fall and no one is above anybody else.

Dr. Whitmore stated her goal was to have “*a leader-full college, a place of wall-to-wall leadership,*” and while the college president has unique responsibilities such as representing the college on many occasions, the responsibility for leaderships within the college was broadly distributed and would vary across situations.

The presidency is not necessarily being out in front, and yet you do have to be ready to be out in front when that’s the role that’s required. You have to be able to easily slip in and out of that. And you have to recognize that leadership needs to move around in organizations. Depending upon what the task is, the person who is the best at leading that task should be out in front. Obviously, that isn’t always the president. The president can use these situations to model effective followership.

She reported that despite her best efforts to achieve a “*leader-full*” college, the need to control would sometimes overtake one or more of her administrators. She illustrated this point by sharing a memory of an administrator who was uncomfortable with college employees identifying problems and forming task forces to solve these problems.

This administrator said to his administrative colleagues, ‘We’ve got to put a stop this business of people forming task forces. They should have to come to us and get permission to be a committee.’ Can you imagine how that sounded to me when my ideal was an organization where people were continually forming groups to solve problems, dissolving those groups when the problems were solved, and then regrouping to attack the next problem? I had to remind him that this is exactly what

should be happening in a healthy organization. Everyone at that college shares the responsibility for continuously improving the college.

On other occasions, however, the staff would demonstrate to her how they were integrating their leadership skills to benefit not only their own college but other community colleges within the state. She shared an example of how a staff member had learned that strong leaders share information to help organizations grow and develop.

I have always believed that we have plenty of creative ideas at our college, we have enough that we don't have to worry about giving some of them away. I had not realized how much I actually said that and lived by that until a staff member told me about colleague from another college who came to learn about a respected program we had developed. At the close of the meeting the visiting colleague asked for a copy of the program. My staff member reported thinking, 'No. This is ours. We don't have to give this idea away. If we give it away then they will have it.' And then she said to me, 'I said to myself, what would Angela say? Angela would say give it to them. We'll have plenty of ideas after this one.' And so she gave it to them.

Additionally, Dr. Whitmore shared that a benefit of working closely with all employee groups to develop their leadership abilities also helped her to improve her own leadership skills.

In almost every situation I've been in, I've been blessed with people who have been willing to help me identify ways in which I could be a better leader. For example, I recall a staff leader caring enough to review a videotape of me leading a town hall meeting at the college and point out how and why my behavior came across in ways that scared or discouraged some employees. We also brought in a consultant to help

us have more effective town hall meetings. Having my leadership behavior critiqued in front of the college community was not my favorite experience but we all certainly learned a great deal about how we could work together toward more effective college meetings.

Loss

A number of issues led to President Whitmore's departure from the community college presidency, but in the end she believed some of the governing board members simply wanted a change of leadership.

Change Agent Leadership Style

As discussed above, Dr. Whitmore exhibited a visionary leadership style that is based on helping an organization grow and change. While reflecting on her difficult leadership experience, President Whitmore had come to realize her change agent style may have met with some resistance, as is often the case with other leaders.

I honestly thought they wanted a change agent. I think this happens with boards when they think they want to be on the side of change, growth and progress. They can accept it for a time but then they get worried and/or afraid. It's no wonder some presidents elect to become caretakers.

She also commented how many presidents, with years of experience as community college leaders, frequently have had broad opportunities to witness the great ideas, programs, and initiatives that other community colleges are implementing for the benefit of their communities. In addition, she said, this breadth of experience is often greater than the college's governing board members have had an opportunity to view.

It is also likely that board members don't have the same opportunities as presidents to see good, much less great, colleges. Presidents have usually spent years working with a variety of community colleges. Thus they [board members] may not share the president's desire for the college to move toward becoming all that it could be.

Working with Governing Board Members

President Whitmore explained how she developed and maintained relationships with the governing board members using a variety of techniques. She created lines of communication including phone calls, email messages, and personal visits. She attempted to meet with each board member during the month to both discuss items related to college business and to become acquainted with each other better. In addition, she would participate in board retreats, and work with the governing board to help determine agendas for the retreats.

President Whitmore also identified three difficult leadership challenges that she was aware community college presidents may face when working with board members. First, President Whitmore described how individual board members differ greatly in their readiness for the role of being a college trustee. She explained how some of the members have had extensive experience in other types of management and public service industries while others have not. She had learned that some board members intuitively grasp the role of a community college trustee quickly while others may need time to grow into the position.

As president you try to be sensitive to individual needs. Some board members need much more attention than others. Some resent any efforts to help them. While others are eager to learn all they can in an effort to become an effective board member. It is

a delicate balancing act. I think you are always cautious. You always know that anything you do or say can be misconstrued.

Second, Dr. Whitmore mentioned how personnel issues can be a special challenge for presidents to explain to some board members, especially if the board member and employee involved have had a connection outside of the college.

When employees are not performing, the president believes she has a responsibility to do something about that whereas board members may have a long standing relationship with these staff members and seek to protect them. This becomes a no-win situation for the president and for the college community since non- or poorly performing employees are usually visible to their co-workers.

Third, President Whitmore cited her observations, in general, about the leadership challenge some female board members create for some female presidents when they attempt to move from a professional to a friendship relationship.

Sometimes women board members think they have a new friend, shopping companion, email confidant, etcetera when a female president is hired. We can't really carry that off. That is hurtful to them when the president decides to attend scheduled meetings instead of going off shopping when attending conferences, for example. If they just wanted a professional friendship it would be different. What many women presidents have experienced is that these women have a strong need to co-opt you completely, and then when you can't be a part of that you are in trouble.

Leaving the Presidency

Early in her presidency, Dr. Whitmore had identified that the college needed a facilities plan and the capital to execute the plan, the employees wanted more staff

development, and parts of the college service area were perceived as underserved. Some stakeholders had indicated to President Whitmore how the college was perceived as fragmented and lacking cohesiveness. Through meetings with the board of trustees, Dr. Whitmore understood and concurred with their desire to have the college operate as efficiently and effectively as possible. President Whitmore and the governing board shared a belief that it was important to maximize the college's return on investments in personnel, programs, and facilities while delivering the most amounts of quality services to as many constituents as possible.

Community colleges are so very needed in every community they serve so we must do our best to maximize the few resources that are available. I understood that all of us needed to work together to accomplish this.

Dr. Whitmore reported, however, after several years of working on these goals it became clear that some of the board members were no longer supportive of the method in which she pursued these goals and possibly had not realized some of the consequences of addressing the agreed upon objectives.

I realized at the time how controversial some of the decisions were but I didn't know then, and I don't know now how I could have avoided the decisions. I also understand why some of the trustees believed that I was wrong and they were right. Each of us brings a different set of personal needs and experiences to bear upon each situation. It is no wonder that we view things differently.

The details of her difficult leadership experience are both confidential and complex, but Dr. Whitmore had come to understand that while some of the board members disapproved of the manner in which she handled some issues, it appeared an overarching

issue was that some of the trustees wanted new leadership. President Whitmore believed the reasons they sought new leadership for the college depended on the individual board member's perspective. She understood how they viewed the situation from their own unique vantage point which likely had been informed by their prior life experiences.

I am reluctant to ascribe reasons why each acted in the way he or she did because I'd probably be working off the assumption that he or she was motivated in the ways familiar to my perspective. At best, that would not be a wise assumption. All that I can say is that given the individual's life experiences, each acted in a manner that he or she believed appropriate. It certainly did not feel good to me, but I am confident that their actions were consistent with their viewpoints. The fact that it was a 5-4 vote added to the lack of clarity. Did I feel a sense of loss? You bet I did! I had been working so hard to move the college forward during the years that I had been there and then to have this part of my life suddenly removed really left me in an unfamiliar place, emotionally.

Commitment to the College

Even though President Whitmore realized that she had lost support from some of the trustees, she determined that she needed to remain in the presidency out of a commitment to unfinished goals and to stakeholders who had supported a college fund drive.

I saw myself as in the middle of accomplishing some goals but certainly not having achieved all that needed to be accomplished there. In addition, it just didn't seem right to have personally asked people for significant contributions and then leave the scene. As I would be presented with other opportunities, I would explain that I couldn't possibly leave now. In my mind, I would be abandoning the ship. In

retrospect I don't know if I would have made the same call. Without the support of the majority of the board there is little hope of accomplishing much. No wonder a president colleague says, 'I wake up every morning counting the number of board votes I have.'

President Whitmore prided herself on the strong commitments she made to every position she held in her life. For example, early in her professional career she had been a long-term member of an organization. She had begun to feel like she was ready to move on to other challenges when she was elected to an important leadership position within the association, but rather than resigning she felt an obligation to fulfill that commitment and stayed with the group a year longer than she intended.

I just knew I couldn't leave before my term was done. I had been elected by my colleagues, and I felt like they were counting on me, so I couldn't back away from my commitment.

Another key piece of her organizational commitment relates to her visionary leadership perspective described above. Not only did she believe in organizations becoming the best they can be, but also committed her time and energy to helping them fulfill that promise.

My intention was always to help the unit or organization move closer to fulfilling its potential and I was willing to work hard toward this end.

Healing

President Whitmore engaged in personal and spiritual reflection to heal from her difficult leadership experience. She has also applied what she learned from this situation to

her new leadership experiences; that is, she said she tried to transform the pain into “*a useable past.*”

Post-Departure Experiences

In the days following her departure President Whitmore felt strong support from her family, friends, and professional colleagues.

There was immediate support from my family, friends, neighbors, and professional colleagues locally and from around the country. Their encouragement and belief in me meant a great deal and certainly helped me heal. I will never again wonder whether I should call a friend in a similar situation.

She also enjoyed the time she spent walking as it was a way to focus her thoughts on her difficult leadership experience.

I found it very helpful to walk. So I would walk for miles every chance I got. This gave me the quiet time alone that I needed to heal. It also helped me be able to say, ‘before I got fired’ or ‘after I was fired.’ This was a way of integrating the new reality into my life.

She also felt her spirit buoyed by members of the college community who expressed their appreciation to her for everything she had given to the college. She was awed by the courage of those who openly expressed their support for her.

One man hugged me and said, ‘Are you okay?’ When I replied, ‘I’m absolutely fine,’ (and by that time I was), he said, ‘I knew you would be. I just knew you would be.’ It was reassuring to know how many people knew that I was not going to be wiped out completely for long by the board’s action.

In the final analysis though, President Whitmore admitted it was a difficult, lonely time which ultimately led her to take full responsibility for her choices and the resultant outcomes.

After you've been willing to stand up, put your arms around it, and say, 'It has my name on it,' then the other stuff comes after you no longer really need it.

One way she was able to come to this conclusion was spending time writing in her journal. She explained how using a journal for many years has helped her to reflect upon and learn from her past experiences; like sorting out the details of her difficult leadership experience. She described the method of journaling she used by explaining how it causes one to go beyond merely noting events and experiences. She said that by delving deeper into her reactions to those occurrences, patterns may emerge that result in more conscious living.

Dr. Whitmore explained that a very practical challenge for her was finding something worthwhile to do next. After working hard for long hours over her adult life, she said it seemed odd to have so much leisure time. For a short time she volunteered her services at a local non-profit agency. She described enjoying being able to give energy to a worthy organization while she sorted out her next career move. She did not have to wait long, however, when she was asked to take a leadership position with another community college.

I was really pleased when I was invited to fill in for an administrator in another state who was retiring. This provided me with the opportunity to invest myself in community college work again. This was exceptionally rewarding, and I didn't take the opportunity lightly.

Meaning through Spiritual Reflection

Dr. Whitmore explained she looked at life from a spiritual perspective. She described her view that life is “*part of a much larger dance.*” This perspective has provided a lens from which to create meaning.

I can't really separate out my spiritual life because my life is spiritual. I hope all of the pieces of my life are spiritual. It was just natural for me to search for the deeper meaning of this event in my life.

Multiple times, President Whitmore repeated that her experience with a difficult leadership position that resulted in losing her job had played an important role in her spiritual development. Moreover, she believes the primary purpose for her life is to advance her spiritual being.

My goal at that part of my life was to become a more spiritual person and that is still my goal today. Losing my job did not affect my longstanding primary goal. I never thought of the presidency as essential to fulfilling my primary goal.

As a result, despite the distress she faced during the events surrounding her difficult leadership experience she believed she gained a greater spiritual understanding.

I have come to see that the Universe put me in that situation. It allowed me to be in that situation so that I could learn from it and so that I could have the deeper spiritual awareness. That was my gift as a result. It doesn't matter what your suffering is; the important question is do you grow spiritually as a result? And I believe that I did.

During the difficult leadership experience, Dr. Whitmore reported, she had realized the leadership position was no longer a good fit for her and believed she was rescued from a complicated position.

I knew it then, and I know it to be true now. I really think it was the Universe's way of getting me out of that situation. Given the circumstances, there was no way that I could have survived there. The best thing for me was to move on. So in final analysis, it was a blessing for me.

Personal Integrity

A key aspect of Dr. Whitmore's spiritual self, she explained, is the importance of truthfulness in her life. She credits the "strong influence" of her parents in developing her commitment to integrity.

They were big on telling the truth. No matter how bad the consequences were, we were expected to tell the truth. They were also big on integrity. I can't recall a time when I didn't have a deep respect for integrity. Being whole, of one unbroken piece; not being different things to different people depending on which would be better for my purposes; being basically the same in my values over time and across relationships. I hope I will always elect the high road.

She explained how being a person who values the truth, even when it was not the easy choice, reinforced how clear it was to make the decision to handle situations honestly. In addition, President Whitmore recognized the importance of maintaining her integrity even if it meant sacrificing her presidency.

One thing that strikes me as I talk with you is how remarkably consistent I've been across my life. As I've landed in situations where ethics have been an issue it's never

been hard to know what I had to do. It was always very clear because I always come down on the side of integrity. The consequences of having to live with myself would be more painful than anything that might have been perceived to be gained by not being true to myself.

Likewise, Dr. Whitmore understood that while some people also maintained their integrity during the events surrounding her difficult leadership experience, she had developed sensitivity towards others in circumstances where duplicity might be present. In the end, President Whitmore knew her focus on a spiritual foundation and sense of maintaining integrity gave her strength both during and after the difficult leadership experience.

Lessons Learned

President Whitmore identified several points she could apply to future leadership, her own or when mentoring others. Specifically she believed that transformational change can be threatening to some people. Especially a leadership style focused on change and growth can be particularly intimidating to trustees who desire control.

Remember the statement from Machiavelli that ‘those who have most to lose in the new order are going to be most opposed to the new order’?

Moreover President Whitmore learned how part of being a change-oriented leader involves making difficult decisions to move a college toward growth, but how some decisions, especially if they are controversial, may be viewed negatively by board members which can lead to a reduced leadership tenure.

Many times when you make a decision you have people who support the decision and others who don’t. Eventually it gets to you. So if longevity is what you are after, then

stay with areas that are not controversial. Or, if you think that substantive change needs to be made, be prepared to move on.

For a leader like Dr. Whitmore, the development of an organization to its fullest potential was important.

If you can move an organization, if you can reposition an organization so it has a better chance at developing its potential, that's what I think leadership is about. For some of us, that's clearly our personal mission and what we've been called into being to do, and there isn't anything more important. So if you've lived your life trying to be faithful to this calling it is natural to pursue this path even in the face of obstacles.

President Whitmore also believed the health of an organization is influenced by the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of the leader.

It is really important that a leader strive to become a fully functioning person. The formal leader sets the tone in so many ways, so a leader takes on a big responsibility.

Her final message she wanted to share with other leaders is about the value one places upon one's talents and energy coupled with the responsibility one has for them.

Each of us has been given talents and energy as resources to be invested in the world. When you find yourself in a situation where your investment cannot be effective, as in the case where most of your time is being spent dealing with divided bosses, then have enough respect for your talents and energy to move on. Each of us is responsible for investing our gifts wisely, so protect your talents and energy, don't waste them.

Conclusion

Although the circumstances of her leadership and subsequent departure were difficult, President Whitmore believed she handled the situation well.

Although some days felt like surgery without anesthesia, as I replay it, I don't see that I had any good options. I was truly between a rock and a hard place. So the only thing I could do was to be true to my values and not let it get to my core. I believe the college suffered minimal damage as a result.

She also hopes other leaders can learn from her experience.

I think it's important that others learn from the bizarre kinds of things that happen to presidents; no-win situations actually exist. They don't even necessarily have anything to do with you personally. Often others' issues are in the driver's seat. It's just the way it is.

There has been life after the presidency for Dr. Whitmore. She has continued to mentor, work with leadership development programs, assist community colleges with strategic planning, and serve in a variety of leadership roles.

This chapter described the leadership story of Angela Whitmore, an experienced community college president, who was terminated from her position after some members of the governing board determined they wanted a leadership change. It examined what she lost as a result of her departure and how engaging in spiritual reflection on the experience helped her heal. The next chapter interprets the shared experiences of Lucille Jerome, Colleen Riches, and Angela Whitmore.

CHAPTER 8
INTERPRETING THE SHARED EXPERIENCES OF
JEROME, RICHES, AND WHITMORE

Introduction

The previous three chapters described the individual experiences for each president as a narrative. While the complexities of each situation merited individual presentation, studying the cases collectively offers insight into the shared aspects of leadership as a result of leaving a community college presidency under a difficult experience. As mentioned elsewhere, the interviews with the presidents covered not only the difficult leadership experience, but also the span of their entire careers. As is the case when studying an individual's situation, the breadth of their personal experiences and interactions with others informs how they respond to questions posed. As such, it was neither possible nor pursued to separate out the comments the presidents made based solely on their difficult leadership experiences from their rich, career-long leadership experiences. This chapter summarizes the common leadership, loss, and healing experiences shared by Presidents Jerome, Riches, and Whitmore and offers interpretation as it relates to existing literature.

Before discussing the collective concepts, it is useful to provide a review of the similarities and differences among the presidents. All three presidents were White women who were experienced leaders with more than thirty years as community college professionals. They had earned doctorate degrees with their career paths focused within the field of education including teaching at both the secondary and post-secondary levels, holding several administrative positions within community colleges, including vice presidential roles, and having prior presidential experience. While most of their preparation

for the presidency was gained through a series of higher level administrative responsibilities within community colleges, they also commented on how participation in a variety of formal leadership development opportunities and involvement in local, state, regional, and national organizations related to higher education and related interests was important to both their professional development and desire to serve their communities and the higher education profession. Furthermore, they all expressed an active sense of spirituality. In each case, data collection occurred several years after they had left the presidency.

Besides the specific details resulting in their departures, there are a few noteworthy differences between the presidents related to the goals of this study. They left the presidency by negotiating a different exit status: two retired and one was terminated and they continued their leadership in a variety of ways: pursuing another presidency, taking an upper-level executive role, and working as a higher education consultant. In addition, the community colleges they led are located throughout the United States.

Moreover, it is important to note that while each of the presidents had a difficult leadership experience that resulted in leaving her position, which was illustrated in the previous case study chapters, the individual situations were both distinctive and complex. As stated earlier, the presidents were careful to guard their identities and the details about their specific circumstances. This chapter is intended to examine the commonalities of their leadership experiences rather than to explain the nuances of their departures. Therefore, it reports the shared experiences that emerged when data was collectively analyzed for all presidents. These commonalities, while similar, are not identical for each president, and the extent to which each theme played a role within their leadership experiences varies. Not only did they answer the questions from their own point of view, but also they indicated that their

perspectives were influenced by interactions and exchanges with a wide circle of presidential friends and colleagues within the nation's community college system.

As Chapter Three explained, unlike the cases which included only data from an individual president, this examination analyzes the data units from all of the individual interviews and the focus group. The presidents' own words are used to exemplify the concepts and are taken from both the individual interviews and the focus group transcripts. It is important to remind the reader that the illustrative quotes are not necessarily related only to the president's personal experience during their leadership difficulties.

The issues presented emerged from the data and are illustrated as they seemed to best make sense, so they are organized as themes and discussed as a summary and interpretation of findings to meet the research purposes:

1. Describing and examining the experiences of women who have experienced difficult leadership positions that resulted in departures from community college presidencies.
2. Exploring how these women have made meaning from their experiences.

The themes that describe and examine the presidents' experiences and explore how their meaning was made include: Leadership: (a) transformational-feminist leadership; Loss: (b) challenging situations with board members, (c) dealing with power struggles, (d) commitment to the college; and Healing: (e) spirituality and reflection, (f) continually creating meaning.

Leadership

The purpose of this section is to describe and examine the characteristics and experiences that Presidents Jerome, Riches, and Whitmore shared as leaders. Described

below are not the characteristics of their difficult leadership positions but a new notion of leadership established on their common views after the knowledge they acquired about their own leadership and leadership in general is applied.

Transformational-Feminist Leadership

In the descriptions and examples of leadership the presidents shared, they depicted various perspectives and influences, but their dominating models centered on both community college transformational leadership (Roueche et al., 1989; Gillett-Karam, 1989) and feminist leadership (Astin & Leland, 1991).

The community college transformational leadership model “defined transformational leadership in the community college as, ‘the ability of the community college CEO to influence the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of others by working with and through them in order to accomplish the college’s mission and purpose’” (Roueche et al., 1989, p. 11).

The feminist leadership paradigm gathered women’s leadership experiences, and inspired by feminist theory, created a new lens to use in studying leadership. Within the feminist theoretical structure leadership is defined as “a process by which members of a group are empowered to work together synergistically toward a common goal or vision that will create change, transform institutions, and thus improve the quality of life” (Astin & Leland, p. 8, 1991).

Since each of the presidents described her leadership style with characteristics of both the transformational and feminist models, examining the presidents’ leadership with the shared aspect of a difficult experience created an opportunity for a new view to emerge. This view is a result of reviewing the five themes of transformational leadership (influence,

people, motivation, values, and vision) presented by Roueche et al. (1989) and identifying the similar elements in the feminist theoretical perspective of studying women's leadership posited by Astin and Leland (1991). The resulting elements befitting the president's shared experiences are presented as a "Transformational-Feminist, with qualifiers, Leadership Model." The "qualifiers" indicate limitations to the model's elements suggested by the emergent understanding that resulted from studying leaders who had "difficult experiences." An illustration of the characteristics of the community college transformational leadership, feminist leadership, and transformational-feminist, with qualifiers, leadership models is found in Appendix D.

This section examines the five elements included in the Transformational-Feminist, with qualifiers, Leadership Model as they relate to the president's leadership experiences: (a) Involve faculty and staff in college leadership, even if others are uncomfortable; (b) Collective decision making through shared power, as much as possible; (c) Leadership development for all employees; (d) Ethics guide leadership, even when the situation is difficult; and (e) Transformative change to benefit the college, may be doubted.

Involve Faculty and Staff in College Leadership, Even if Others are Uncomfortable

The presidents described their leadership style as rejecting a top-down structure by including many people in the management and decision making of college projects, initiatives, and policies. They expressed confidence in the collective knowledge and skills of all employees within the organization.

You don't have to have a pyramid. Everybody can be trusted, everybody can take responsibility, and everybody can be productive.

One president used the concept of a circle to symbolize her commitment to an involved leadership structure.

I used the circle as a metaphor for the way we were going to organize and run ourselves. We're all standing on an equal plane. We can all see each other. Our decisions are made out in the open, in the round, where there is no corner and there is nowhere to hide.

Likewise, each president organized institutional leadership around involving faculty and staff. Not only did they meet regularly with all types of staff groups to receive input, but they also involved faculty members in management teams.

If you want to engage [faculty] into the whole work of the institution and want people really connected, you can't do that when you have got people floating in and out with directions from the top.

Furthermore, they expected participation from the on-campus staff of outsourced services like dining, custodial, and information technology. One president was very specific about this objective when describing the leadership culture of the college to a prospective technology services contractor.

I told him, 'Listen if you want to work with our college, you are going to have to be participative or you're not going to work with us.'

The presidents acknowledged there are often difficulties in creating organizational cultures where leadership involvement from the employees is the norm because many colleges have a long history of traditional, hierarchical leadership. This notion is supported by a recent study discussing the role gendered community college organizations play in

women leader's access to the presidency and experiences once she is in the position (Eddy & Cox, 2008).

Early in her tenure, one president knew teamwork was an important strategy to unite her college.

I did things to build a team because there were so many ways in which they had allowed themselves to be divided.

Another president described the college culture as historically based on “autocratic” leadership, so she understood how valuable involving employees in college leadership would be for the college's success.

I really felt that it was important to develop a team. People from different departments didn't know each other. People did work in silos.

While they believed in the value of engaging everyone in the college's leadership, they recognized how involving many people in the leadership process can feel threatening to those who are accustomed to traditional, hierarchical leadership.

A very different type of leadership can be very frightening to those who have a great deal to gain by staying with the old fraternalistic, command and control style.

One president was criticized by some of her presidential colleagues for including faculty union membership on the executive leadership team, but she believed it was critical to include the faculty in college management to ensure their perspectives were represented.

I certainly was chided by my male colleagues when I brought the union president into the cabinet. They couldn't imagine that I was doing that. Well, I couldn't imagine not including the faculty.

Regardless of the fear and skepticism, the presidents believed involving leadership was the preferred and most effective approach because they “*trust the process of many people.*” They admitted, however, that while involved leadership was valuable internally, at times the college still needed a formal leader to represent the organization externally.

You need to empower staff to be leaders, but organizations still need a leader figurehead to serve in various external roles.

Collective Decision Making through Shared Power, as Much as Possible

As a part of involved leadership, including faculty and staff in decision making teams was discussed extensively by the presidents. Collective decision making, they said, was accomplished in informal ways like meeting several times a year with groups of employees to receive input about the college and formal ways like expanding typical administrative decision making teams to include members beyond the executives.

We created a decision making group that represented all areas of the college because the college structure was so complex. They had to learn to work together and to understand the decisions each area of the college had to make.

Since engaging the collective group in decision making requires sharing information, the presidents acknowledged employees will become accustomed to receiving it and are likely to expect more of it, so they recognized the power of information is a valuable piece of leadership to share.

Information is the life blood of any healthy organization.

Similarly, they agreed empowering staff involvement in the decisions of the college might result in times when the outcome may differ from what the president would have chosen.

If you're empowering other people to make decisions, you also understand there may be decisions that are being made that are not the way you would have approached it, but you're okay with it because you know it was a group decision.

The presidents explained, however, that collective decision making does not mean the leader only facilitates without giving input; rather she is also an active participant.

I always said a leader has to be more than a facilitator. I need to bring things to the group, and I need to be an active participant in any discussion.

Likewise, the presidents explained that collective decision making does not necessarily mean the president never makes decisions. They emphasized the importance of being clear with faculty and staff about how decisions will be made, who will be involved, and to what extent input will be used.

In the beginning, I try to be really clear about how the decision will be made. Often the message is, 'We're all going to make this decision together,' but sometimes it has to be, 'This is really about advice, but I will make the final decision on this.'

The presidents recognized one of the downfalls of making decisions by including many people is that employees become accustomed to giving input, so some individuals may not accept decisions made with fewer people involved.

The more they are engaged in decision making the more they feel like they should be engaged in decision making. Sometimes a person will perceive that if not everyone is involved in the decision then it's wrong. But sometimes the decision making process has been to use a representative group.

Also, the presidents underscored how sometimes a leader had to make decisions without input, especially in situations that regarded high levels of confidentiality like personnel issues.

The notion of collective decision making concurs with the themes suggested in another study involving seven women who were four-year college presidents. They, too, believed it was important to empower employees through collaboration, shared information, and collective decision making (Jablonski, 1996).

Leadership Development for all Employees

According to the presidents, another important aspect of involving employees in the leadership of the college was encouraging them to grow and develop individually as leaders. This notion concurred with Bennett and Shayner (1988) who suggested women leaders are obligated to focus on developing other women leaders. They argued, “To believe we have been effective leaders today, we need to empower other women to realize their own potential. As women, we have a moral imperative to develop our own peers” (p. 38). Likewise, Geraldine Evans (2001) while proposing that women leaders are more equipped to lead in contemporary situations recommended that developing people is critical for effective leadership in the 21st century.

The presidents recognized how faculty and staff viewed themselves in relation to their role within the college. They realized the employees, regardless of their positions, needed opportunities to develop so they could fulfill their leadership responsibilities within the organization. In addition, they agreed employees who are strong leaders have an important role in assisting the college in reaching its full potential as an organization. One president said employees are often eager for leadership development opportunities.

Generally people want to grow and appreciate being encouraged to blossom.

In order to ensure leaders were being offered leadership development opportunities within her community college, one of the presidents established a staff development fund. She demonstrated her belief in providing these opportunities to the college employees by personally financing the start-up funds.

One of the things I'm really big on is staff development because I believe that one of the main things community colleges have to offer is what we, as the staff, have to offer. We're an educational entity that can offer our skills, our knowledge, our talents, and our ability to bring people and places together. Offering opportunities to help our staff develop is the best way to maximize our college's offerings. Just think of the value college employees can add to various volunteer organizations across the community as the employees grow.

Moreover, the presidents identified that they were responsible for establishing the systems to develop leaders not only by providing staff development experiences but also by creating opportunities for employees to practice being a leader.

You have to recognize that leadership needs to move around in organizations. Depending upon what the task is, the person who is the best at leading that task should be out in front. Obviously, that isn't always the president. The president can use these situations to model effective followership.

While the presidents emphasized offering leadership development opportunities to employees, they also believed in their own personal growth. They all shared how they did not expect to know all of the circumstances they would face when they became president, but

their belief in lifelong learning meant every experience—even the difficult ones—added to personal learning.

We didn't expect to have known all the answers as we entered the presidency. I don't think any of us even think that right now we know all the answers. If we truly believe in life long learning, every day and every experience adds to the learning that we have.

Ethics Guide Leadership, Even when the Situation is Difficult

In addition to their belief in involving the community college employees in college leadership through collective decision making and leadership development, the presidents expressed being bound by their guiding ethics. Madden (2005) concurred with this conception by suggesting “strong leaders are guided by values. Feminist theory provides a belief system that is the foundation for the values of many higher education administrators of both genders” (p. 9; see also Reave, 2005). Not only did each of them discuss the role personal principles played in their leadership experiences, but also they often referred to “*doing the right thing*” as a basis for decision making even when “right” decisions were not always popular or without consequences.

We make decisions that another person wouldn't make because they know the political ramifications. That is, hard decisions, about personnel especially, are very difficult and often are controversial. We make those difficult decisions because it is the right thing for the college, even knowing there might be consequences.

Likewise, they understood that some people will negatively view “*doing the right thing,*” but the presidents were committed to their values anyway.

If there was something I really, really did not feel that was right, I feel like I've always had the ability to stand up and to give that principled approach. Can that principled approach sometimes be viewed as too strong or negatively? Probably.

Knowing that the faculty and staff expected her to address a situation with a troublesome employee, a president described how she made that difficult decision even though she knew at the time there might be professional costs for her.

I think that my staff counted on me to do the right thing and I did. I made the decision that a lot of people wouldn't make . . . They counted on me to do the right thing. And those are the kinds of decisions that some people held against me.

Likewise, another president knew she had to take a professional risk in order to protect the institution from fiscal jeopardy by making a decision an employee group disagreed with.

So from a principle standpoint it wouldn't matter. If you were going to say I was going to be out tomorrow because I stood fast on that, I would absolutely stand fast on that.

The presidents also suggested, beyond their personal values that the public expects them to make hard choices. One of the key examples the presidents gave was how they had to make a few difficult personnel decisions which resulted in terminating an ineffective employee rather than transferring that individual to another college position, as they suspected some of their counterparts might have done. They agreed that personnel decisions are difficult but they also believed that their communities expected them to be good stewards of the public's money, and continuing to employ a dysfunctional employee was irresponsible.

We bring a keen sense of accountability to the public for using the college's resources—their dollars—in the most economical way possible. And that's why we go after those elephants that are hidden under the carpet.

They also speculated women leaders may be different from some male leaders who may avoid difficult decisions in order to preserve their careers where women leaders may risk career longevity because they are compelled to make ethical decisions.

Women make difficult decisions that can result in damaged relationships. Many men are not likely to make a hard decision because they can see how it's going to come around and get them in the end. A woman is more likely to make those decisions and accept those consequences because it is the right thing to do. It's the just thing to do.

The presidents' suspicions about differences between male and female leaders handling difficult situations are supported by research findings that indicate male leaders are more likely to engage in “passive management by exception;” meaning, “waiting for problems to become severe before intervening” (Eagly & Carli, 2003, p. 817).

Despite knowing the outcome of their difficult leadership experiences, the presidents all indicated they would not have violated their principles in order to ensure a different result. One president explained how her principles guided her during the events leading to her exit.

I knew if I decided to go a certain direction I was going to lose my job. What to do? What to do? And I just said to myself, “How do you usually decide things in your life? How do you always decide hard things?” And what came right back to me, “You always try to do what you think is right no matter what and then let the chips fall where they may.” Because you know you can't live with yourself if you don't do the right thing. So you just have to do the right thing.

Transformative Change to Benefit the College, May be Doubted

The presidents promoted a leadership vision intended to substantially transform their respective community colleges.

If you can reposition an organization so it has a better chance to develop its full potential, I think that's what leadership is about. For some of us, that is pretty clearly our personal mission. There isn't anything more important.

This notion mirrors other women education leaders who “cite institutional transformation as the ultimate reward” (Madden, 2005, p. 7).

In spite of their goals to help the college grow and improve for its students and stakeholders, the presidents suggested carefulness to other leaders. First, they recognized that engaging in the transformational work necessary for the college to benefit from organizational changes is a lengthy process. What's more, they suggested that if a leader's tenure is short then only “*surface*” changes can be accomplished.

Second, the presidents agreed that despite efforts to involve employees in college leadership, it can be difficult to engage faculty and staff in the transformation process because some of them may question the commitment and longevity of the president. In other words, if the employees do not believe the president will be at the college long enough to lead the changes then why should they give their time and efforts to the initiative?

When presidents have a timeline of three to five years in the position, they can't make the substantive cultural changes needed to really move an organization forward. You can't do that deep transformational work. You can only do surface things. Short presidential tenures can build skepticism in the long term employees. They say,

'What difference does this make? The president will only be here a few years, so we'll continue doing what we've been doing for the last thirty.'

Third, the presidents concurred how some of the decisions necessary to evolve an organization can result in resentment from some faculty, staff, or governing board members.

I think it's hard for a president to be an effective president and do the things they need to do for a long period of time because the decisions you are making to bring about change are affecting lots of people.

While reflecting on her difficult leadership situation one president suggested if a leader wants longevity then she must minimize her expectations for changing the college.

If longevity is what you are after, then don't make waves, don't do things.

The presidents' perspectives on transformational change are similar to those suggested by Giannini (2001): "to move a synergistic environment, all employees at the college must be provided with the 'big picture' and empowered to make decisions affecting their work.

Information must be shared broadly, and leaders must ensure that the vision and mission of the organization is reinforced continually" (p. 208).

Interpretation

While the presidents generally viewed the Transformational-Feminist Leadership Model as the preferred and natural way to lead, occasionally the presidents had to adopt a less engaged style. This happened when they either made certain types of decisions alone such as addressing difficult personnel matters or exhibited hierarchical leadership characteristics such as telling administrators they must respond to an issue important to the success of the college or requested by community stakeholders that they previously had refused to address.

Eagly (2007), described this fluidity of leadership style as common and expected within today's multi-faceted leadership circumstances.

Styles are relatively consistent patterns of social interaction that typify leaders as individuals. Leadership styles are not fixed behaviors but encompass a range of behaviors that have a particular meaning or that serve a particular function.

Depending on the situation, leaders vary their behaviors within the boundaries of their style. For example, a leader with a typically participative style might display the collaborative behaviors of consulting, discussing, agreeing, cooperating, or negotiating, depending on the circumstances. Moreover, leaders may sometimes abandon their characteristic style in an unusual situation. In a crisis, for example, a leader who is typically participative may become highly directive because emergency situations demand quick, decisive action. (p. 2)

This leadership flexibility may have been particularly difficult for some employees to understand, however, if the presidents previously had very few reasons to need to make leadership adjustments.

Likewise, some staff may have wanted and expected to have constant involvement in decisions. Although this level of involvement was considered ideal by the presidents, the reality of the presidential experience requires occasions when decisions need to be made without the benefit of group involvement (Eagly, 2007). The presidents described how they had explained to employees that occasions would arise when they would need to make a decision alone, but some of the employees may have disregarded, forgotten, or misunderstood.

Furthermore, the presidents exhibited a commitment to making decisions based on their guiding principles. This may have given them confidence in making difficult decisions they viewed as being in the best interest of the college about personnel, programs, and initiatives. Because of confidentiality issues, the presidents may have not been able to provide the level of rationale necessary to fully justify their perspectives, so it may have appeared controlling and may have seemed inauthentic to some people. Finally, similar to the ACE/OWHE roundtable participants who believed a “compelling vision” calls for “perseverance” (Brown et al., 2001, p. 11), the presidents also believed in maintaining a vision for the college, but warned some employees may be skeptical of their commitment to the vision.

It seems if a president wanders from an expected leadership style, even if it is rare or the situation warrants it, this behavior can contribute to a difficult leadership experience. If other individuals are searching for opportunities to make troublesome circumstances, any inconsistency in leadership becomes open to scrutiny.

Loss

This section is intended to examine the types of shared difficulties Presidents Jerome, Riches, and Whitmore identified that leaders could experience. Three common areas emerged. First, they identified some challenging situations presidents may face with board members; second, they encountered power struggles with a couple of women connected to their colleges, third, they felt a deep commitment to the college, so leaving it was difficult.

Challenging Situations with Board Members

The presidents indicated feeling great respect for the governing boards they had worked with at their community colleges. They believed they maintained a very positive and

productive working relationship with them throughout most of their presidencies. In spite of years of great partnership, some leadership difficulties arose. To maintain anonymity, the specific difficulties the presidents faced with their governing boards must remain confidential, but they made several observations, drawn from their entire careers and those shared with them by colleagues, on the types of situations community college presidents may encounter.

The common types of leadership difficulties a community college president can encounter while working with the governing board and the shared challenges a president can face with a few individual board members can be illustrated by six situations. First, sometimes board members can involve the president in conflicts among themselves. Second, sometimes a governing board member will make erroneous statements that can potentially mislead a governing board decision. Occasionally, when this happens, the president may be compelled to take corrective action so the college is protected. Third, sometimes a new board member has difficulty understanding his or her responsibility as a community college governing board trustee. When the board chair and existing board members fail to help the new members comprehend their roles, the president often has to provide the knowledge. Fourth, sometimes new governing board members will join the board with an ulterior agenda such as overturning a past college decision or manipulating the college's direction in a way that benefits either themselves or their constituents. Fifth, sometimes board members will create or maintain relationships with college employees. These types of relationships are to be expected due to the local nature of community colleges but they become troublesome for the president when they are used to advance the personal agenda of an individual board

member or a college employee. Sixth, sometimes being a female president influences how a governing board member works with the president.

Involving the President in Intra-Board Issues

The presidents shared how a president's responsibility as leader of the college sometimes contradicts her role as employee of the governing board when she is expected to handle a difficult board member or manage a controversial board situation because the board chair or other board members do not want to address it themselves.

It is difficult when a board member takes a contrary position from the other board members. But it is particularly hard when the board members don't want to address the situation; instead they want the president to handle it.

Moreover, they described how difficult it is for a president to be drawn into the middle of a long standing conflict between board members. This type of challenge is neither uncommon nor new (e.g. Fisher, 1984).

One interesting thing that happens is when one board member gets angry or annoyed or frustrated with another board member and they try to run that through the president. They try to make the president the third person in the disagreement. Often that disagreement has its roots years and years back. A president can't do whole lot about that, but they can sure get put in the middle of that very easily.

The presidents also believed a strong board chair was important to protecting the president from being drawn into intra-board issues. This notion is also supported by O'Banion (1989) who suggested the chair is the board member responsible for supervising the board members' behaviors. To illustrate the value of a strong board chair, one president described how she viewed effective and ineffective governing board chairs.

A strong board chair keeps the meeting on track by keeping those verbal and hyper-critical board members from controlling it. They focus on following the board's policies, and help board members understand that their role is to hold the college in trust. While they seek the common good, their job is not to micromanage but to work closely with the president to fulfill the organization's mission. On the other hand, a weak board chair needs to be liked and needs to have approval for the things they say and do. So it's more difficult for them to do those things that a strong board chair does like preventing someone from taking over the meeting or reminding board members of their role because they fear disapproval or being criticized.

Correcting Misleading Information

The presidents indicated they believed one of a leader's responsibilities was to ensure the governing board had accurate information with which to make decisions. When an individual board member presents incorrect information which can influence the governing board to make a decision that would harm the college, the presidents believed leaders need to offer clarification even if there is a possibility that doing so will jeopardize a board member's opinion about them.

If a board member, for example, is saying something that is untruthful, and presents it in such a way that it appears it's a fact, and the rest of the board is going to make a decision on it, a president often feels compelled to share the accurate information. I think this can be done for a period of time—and I don't know what the period of time is—but I think that is one of the little things that can build resentment.

They agreed that each time the president has to take corrective action with an individual board member there is potential for her relationship with that board member to be affected.

Every time a president has to step in and do something the board really should be doing, like managing errant members or handling conflicts among themselves, it can be viewed negatively. Somehow at an unconscious level some board members might begin to believe they are being told, 'You're not doing your job.'

Helping New Members Understand the Role of a Trustee

The presidents reported that it often can be challenging for a leader to maintain progress toward transforming the college when new members join the board (Alsbury, 2003; Boggs & Smith, 1997; Brown, et al., 2001). In particular it is difficult when there is annual turnover of trustees (Amey, Jessup-Anger, & Jessup-Anger, 2008).

Every year new members join, so the governing board is changing. As a result, a president doesn't have the cohesiveness of an established group. A president is both adding somebody new and trying to build a strong board team while also trying to maintain momentum toward the college's goals.

They also commented on how difficult it is for a leader to help some new trustees, who have never been involved with a prominent organization like a community college governing board, to balance their perceptions of personal power and prestige in this new role with their responsibility for the college as a whole and its stakeholders (Davis, 2001).

The elevation of a board member from a regular community citizen to suddenly being a public trustee can be difficult for some people to handle especially if they have not had the opportunity to develop a sense of responsibility for power.

Furthermore, the presidents admitted it can be difficult to deliver the status some new board members expect.

It can be a real struggle to give board members the kind of prestige they want.

In addition to managing issues of power and prestige, the presidents described how difficult it can be to help some new trustees to understand the division of responsibilities between the governing board and the college's administration (Davis, 2001; Potter & Phelan, 2008). While many governing board members have been community leaders on other non-profit boards, the presidents agreed the community college trusteeship is quite different. The difference, they said, is unlike community colleges with large staffs, non-profit organizations often have limited resources to hire employees, so the board members are frequently involved in the organization's administrative functions. For example, an attorney might provide legal advice or a banker might provide accounting services. Likewise, the presidents said changing how they perceive and perform their role away from an operations function to a policy setting responsibility can be difficult for some new board members to understand.

The ideal is that board members are well-developed for their responsibilities and that they have a clear understanding of the policy role versus the operational role. That is easier to do with people who have had policy role experience.

Dealing with Ulterior Agendas

The presidents also reported some trustees may have individual agendas they are striving to accomplish (Davis, 2001; Potter & Phelan, 2008). Sometimes those agendas are apparent and obvious and sometimes those agendas are hidden, but it can be particularly difficult for a leader when those agendas are contrary to the best interest of the institution. They agreed it can become especially hard for a president to manage those situations when the board member is engaging, articulate, attractive, charismatic, or yields powerful influence with the rest of the trustees.

Sometimes individual agendas can turn a whole board around. If the board is influenced by a powerful and charismatic member who is pushing his or her agenda, then other trustees might respond to that type of personality and support his or her position.

Similar to the issues described above, they wondered if the president sees the college being moved in a direction that is contrary to its best interest by a powerful and charismatic board member because the other board members are being influenced by this engaging person, how she is supposed to respond.

If a board member has his or her own agenda, and the rest of the governing board is allowing that person to dominate, and no one else takes an alternative stand, what role should the president play?

Managing Employee's Relationships with Board Members

The presidents acknowledged that often community college board members and college employees know each other. They indicated employee and trustee relationships are most troublesome, however, when board members and college staff merge to push their agendas. The presidents agreed when a faculty or staff member has contrary ideas about the college leadership or the institution's strategic direction and they have created an alliance with a similar minded board member then they may use that connection to facilitate administrative or policy change outside the leadership of the president.

The right type of board member and the right staff member may come together with their own agendas that are difficult to overcome.

Similarly, when conflict arises between the president and an employee, some board members may support the employee over the president.

Some board members have a long, long history with staff members. Their loyalty is often going to be to those staff members.

In addition to relationship coalitions, the presidents described instances they were familiar with where some staff or faculty members had recruited trustees to a governing board. They agreed that when this happens the employees often feel a sense of ownership over the board member. This can create another opportunity to promote their agendas because the board member may feel loyalty to the employee who helped him or her join the board.

If an employee group recruits a person to be on the board—whether it's an elected board or an appointed board—they often think they have access directly to those individuals. They even talk about ownership of the seat on the board by saying, 'This is our person.'

Being a Woman Leader

While the presidents were hesitant to acknowledge it, they suspected that being a woman can contribute to creating a challenging leadership experience for female presidents. They shared several examples to illustrate this assertion including suggesting some governing board members may not be prepared to work with a woman, suggesting this lack of experience by some board members may result in minimizing a woman president's leadership capabilities, and suggesting women leaders are vulnerable to being treated differently than male leaders in similar circumstances. Eddy and Cox (2008) recommend that women need to realize how leadership is influenced by the concept of gender. Moreover, they assert how “women are often penalized for acting in ways that are outside what is expected [Therefore] women needed to act tougher to meet expected work roles but could not appear too tough” (p. 74; see also Chin, 2004; Eagly, 2007).

Limited Experience with Women Leaders.

The presidents acknowledged that governing board members often lack experience in working with female leaders. They suggested this limited exposure might explain a trustee's skeptical reaction to the ways many women lead. In addition, they wondered if some board members may be excited and feel progressive when a woman is named president of their college but are unable to adapt when their perceptions about leadership are challenged by a woman leader.

They get excited to say, 'We hired a woman.' And at another level they may not be ready to work effectively with a woman or treat her like they would a male president.

One of the characteristics the presidents identified that can be troublesome for some board members to understand is the notion of involved leadership exemplified by empowerment and collective decision making. They suggested this way of leading may appear to be weak to some trustees or employees who are more accustomed to a hierarchical, command and control leadership style.

Women's leadership style is much more about relationships; certainly not about the power structure. Does that mean that a woman could be viewed as more vulnerable in difficult situations? I think if there are people that don't perceive empowering leadership as strong leadership, they might not view a woman as capable or as a strong leader.

Similarly the presidents contended there are occasions when perspectives of women's leadership abilities are diminished because some board members may suggest the difficulty of the job itself is somehow lesser because a woman is performing the work.

Some board members think because a woman has the job it isn't a very hard job.

Apparently women make it look easy.

Moreover, they were also familiar with how other female presidents had to deal with their governing boards promoting that a female president needed gender balance in the administration, so they were expected to hire a man as second-in-command. The presidents had the impression that their male counterparts had not faced a similar expectation to hire a female vice president. In other words, the governing board was emphasizing leadership gender balance over hiring the best candidate to fill an upper-level administrative post.

I've heard stories from other female presidents that their board said, 'Now that we have a female president we have to hire a male vice president.' It would be nice to get to the point that we can have a female president and we can have a female vice president without people thinking there needs to be a gender balance.

Women Leaders Face Double Standard.

Furthermore, the presidents believed that some governing board members may accept behavior by male leaders that would not be tolerated by female leaders. One of the presidents had been told about a governing board at another college who ignored a male president's long time extramarital affair. She speculated the same behavior from a female president would be unacceptable.

I was told he started an affair with a staff person right after he started the presidency, and it was still going on when he left. I'm just mystified. I don't understand. If a woman were to do that she'd be fired on that alone.

In addition, the presidents thought women were more likely to be criticized about attending women's leadership events; whereas they believed men could take an afternoon off

to go golfing or to a ball game without disapproval because these types of activities are seen as acceptable forms of networking.

Male colleagues are much more likely to go out golfing during a workday afternoon because it's all part of the business. Women are much more reluctant to even take time to go to women's CEO professional events. Maybe women's own insecurities make us feel that we aren't worth the same opportunities. We certainly believe we will be more readily criticized.

Many of the assertions the presidents suggested were similar to issues the women presidents in the ACE/OWHE roundtables discussed including how making decisions that do not fit female gender-based perceptions can create challenges for a president's leadership, how boards who hire their first female CEO are often not prepared to work effectively with her leadership style, how presidents should not assume female board members will be able to more effectively work with them than male members, and how "success in a presidency requires that the board share the president's vision and provide her the resources to achieve it" (Brown et al., 2001, p. 11).

Even though the presidents were keenly aware of the influence a president's gender plays on perceptions about her leadership, they were careful not to place responsibility for their own leadership difficulties solely on gender issues. They agreed, however, that they could not deny the possibility either.

I don't think any of the three of us would want to hide behind gender or raise it as a big unnecessary flag, but I think the reality is that it's there.

In summary, the presidents shared six common situations with board members that could be challenging for a president's leadership.

1. Sometimes board members involve presidents in conflicts among themselves.
2. Sometimes the president has to take corrective action to protect the college when a governing board member makes erroneous statements that can mislead the governing board.
3. Sometimes a new board member has difficulty understanding his or her responsibility as a community college governing board trustee.
4. Sometimes new governing board members will join the board with an ulterior agenda.
5. Sometimes board members and college employees will create or maintain relationships to advance their personal agendas.
6. Sometimes being a female president influences how a governing board member works with the president.

Interpretation

Governing board members can place a president in a very difficult leadership position if they try to engage her in intra-board disputes. When governing board chairs and other members rely on the president to handle internal board problems, they are placing the president in a very tenuous position in the short term with the difficult board member and in the long term, potentially, with others. Furthermore, although she may demonstrate the leadership experience and skills to be able to manage the situation, it is unfair and inappropriate to ask her to do so because it sends the wrong message to both the president and the governing board members about the balance of their respective responsibilities. In addition to internal board issues, governing board chairs and members can create leadership difficulties for their presidents when they do not appropriately fulfill their responsibilities in

educating new board members about the role of being a college trustee, or they do not seek out and confront hidden agendas that are contrary to board policy and the college's best interest, or they create an environment where promoting untruths and manipulating information is acceptable.

Despite greater numbers of women in the CEO office, it is still difficult to counteract the sexism they face. Women are in a double bind because while needing to exhibit effective leadership to promote and advance their organizations, time and energy must also be spent addressing misperceptions and stereotypes about the ways they lead (Chin, 2004; Eagly, 2007). As a stand alone issue, it is still something women have to face that men do not, but when combined with a leadership circumstance where a few people have ulterior agendas and approaches counter to the woman president's, the issue of sexism can influence an already challenging situation.

Dealing with Power Struggles

Despite the presidents' empowering leadership styles, they shared how occasionally during their presidential experiences they had interpersonal challenges with other women or knew other women presidents who had. They expressed concern over the conclusions that might be drawn when it was revealed in this study, and were hesitant to admit how it had impacted their leadership experiences. Interestingly, this issue is more common than the presidents may have realized. The women presidents who participated in the ACE/OWHE roundtables also indicated conflict with other women as one of their difficulties by referring to it as "sabotage from within" (Brown et al., 2001, p. 6).

The presidents described difficulties that involved a female employee or board member who tried to engage the woman leader in a power tussle. The first type of power

struggle relates to other women believing they deserve to be in the presidential position. For example, the presidents suggested the female board members may be initially very proud they have a woman leader, but then some women begin to feel they should be in the leadership position another woman was appointed to.

Some women board members may want the presidential position because they want what they see the president having.

Similarly, the presidents reported knowing female staff or other women affiliated with the college also perceiving that they could perform the presidential job just as well as the woman leader.

I think there are some women who think, 'I could do that job. This isn't so great.' They sort of find ways to dig at you.

The second type of power struggle the presidents described was when another woman seemed envious of the attention the president was receiving on behalf of the college. They speculated some female board members and staff may desire the attention and prestige often associated with a presidential leadership position such as access to influential people or receiving accolades for college successes.

They see the success the president receives in the community. They hear positive comments about her, and they want to receive the same kinds of praise.

The third type of power struggle described by the presidents involved women who expected a friendship from them.

I had a female board member one time, who wanted to go shopping with me, and she wanted to be my friend, and she wanted to expand our relationship beyond being a board member.

Relationships with some female board members became particularly troublesome for the presidents when they rejected overtures to pal around.

They may treat a female executive differently. More like a colleague or one of the gals at the water cooler, and expect that kind of interaction. When you reject those types of relationships because you want to maintain a professional one, some female board members may be surprised and hurt by this. Some of them don't understand that you want to keep your professional and personal lives separate.

Likewise, they described how a female board member can turn from an ally into an adversary once she realizes the president disagrees with her stance on an issue the college is facing.

When you take a different position about an issue, then some of the female board members can't accept it, and before you realize it they have decided to become adversarial with you.

The fourth type of power struggle related to the other women exhibiting their own power. The presidents knew about instances where a woman collaborated with a difficult board member to create leadership problems for a woman president, or a female administrator attempted to exhibit her own power by withholding information or trying to isolate the president from key stakeholders.

It was after the meeting with the governing board that the relationship became difficult with this woman. I now have come to believe that she was trying to assert her power and her power over me, but when the governing board defied her desire to have me spend more time on the activities she wanted, she saw this as a risk to her power, and she blamed me for that.

In summary, although the presidents hated to admit it they had each experienced or were familiar with various types of power struggles with other women during their careers including feeling like they deserved the leadership position, envy over the attention they were receiving, expectations of a friendship, and exhibiting their own power.

Interpretation

The power struggles the presidents experienced with women may have been related to a concept referred to as the “Power Dead-Even Rule” which is defined as:

a breakthrough in understanding the complex and often baffling love/hate relationships women have with one another. . . . For a positive relationship to be possible between two women, the self-esteem and power of one must be, in the perception of each woman, similar in weight to the self-esteem and power of the other. These essential elements must be kept ‘dead even.’ (Heim, Murphy, & Golant 2001, p. 53)

In the presidents’ power struggle situations a few issues may have been present. First, the presidents as inherent to their positions were engaged in “legitimate power” which is one of the six types of power recognized in 1959 by John French and Bertram Raven. Legitimate power is based on a person’s hierarchical position within an organization (Heim et al., 2001, p. 24). The president is the top of the hierarchy within a college, so the person occupying the role receives legitimate power based on her leadership position.

Second, the women involved in the power struggle may have had a lessened sense of self-esteem which is described as “how well you think of and value yourself, how much you’re worth in your own eyes, and the power you allow yourself to have” (Heim et al., 2001, p. 35). While it is difficult to know for sure, the women involved in the power struggle

may have regarded the presidents as having more power and self-esteem while, on the other hand, they believed they possessed less; the relationship then violated the “Power Dead Even Rule.”

Third, the women involved in the power struggle expressed reactions consistent with Nietzsche’s notion of resentment, “when one lacks some value, yearns to be the person who possesses it, and then seeks to undermine that person” (Tanenbaum, 2002, p. 55). They exhibited resentment by finding opportunities to increase their own power and undermine the president such as trying to covertly manipulate people, creating conflict for the presidents, and collaborating with others, often men, to challenge and diminish the power they perceived the presidents as having. These actions are similar to a power strategy known as “coalition formation” where the goal is to create alliances to oust the leader (Payne, Fuqua, & Cangemi, 2001).

Fourth, the presidents who viewed their leadership as collaborative and empowering—particularly exemplified in their preference for sharing decision making and regarding power as energy—may have been unable to immediately see this was a power issue because “power is in the eye of the beholder” (Heim et al., 2001, p. 58).

Within a community college presidency it is neither possible nor reasonable to share power 100 percent of the time (Fisher, 1984). But individuals who do not possess a sophisticated view of the presidency may have deemed the presidents as hoarding their power during the times when they made decisions alone. With some people, in this case women, who have both difficulty understanding the complexities of power and decision making in a community college presidential leadership position and a personal agenda to

advance themselves, the struggle for power becomes more apparent and challenging for a leader to manage.

Commitment to the College

Each of the presidents described feeling a strong commitment to her organization which made leaving the college difficult, and regardless of her personal difficulties she also felt loyalty to ensure the institution was protected.

Dedication Made Leaving Difficult

As they reflected on their leadership experiences the presidents agreed their deep commitment to advancing the institution and their strong relationships with the employees and community stakeholders made leaving the college very difficult.

We have a real deep commitment to an institution and to a mission, and we're really reluctant to walk away from that commitment. To us it's more than a contract, it's a commitment.

One president shared how she was bothered by a comment she heard about presidential tenure, and how she realized she was upset by it because she had devoted herself so deeply to the college.

Someone said, 'The president is a commodity. The president comes in, does some bidding, and when that's over leaves.' It just made my insides roil. I began to understand I felt appalled because I'd taken the work so personally.

Another president explained how her interest in the success of the people who comprised the organization influenced her commitment to the college.

You feel very dedicated because you really care about the individuals within the institution. You remember how you have been able to help support their personal advancement.

A sense of wanting to finish the transformation they had started was prevalent among the presidents. One of them admitted she had recognized, at some point before her leadership difficulties began that the time had arrived to leave the college for a new challenge, but she remained in the presidency because goals were yet to be completed.

I knew at one level that I needed a new challenge and opportunity, but at another level I kept thinking there's nothing else I really want to do. So why would I leave this college when there's still more work we can do?

They also discussed in the focus group the idea that there may be differences between the endurance of men and women in leadership positions. They wondered if the commitments women leaders make within the college may influence how long they remain in a difficult situation and they suspected that a male leader's priority may be more about career preservation rather than an obligation to long-term organizational transformation.

Because women feel this commitment and loyalty to the organization they may not step away from organizations as fast as men do. Maybe our relationships influence how we just don't seem to extricate ourselves from the situations. We believe we can solve difficulties if we persist long enough, hard enough. Where men might be more ready to say, 'This isn't working right now. I'll just cut bait right now and head off.'

The notion that women may be accepting leadership positions in more challenging or precarious organizations concurred with some of the existing research (Brown et al., 2001; Ryan & Haslam, 2005), but the female presidents in the ACE/OWHE disagreed that to

women leaders career longevity was less important than the institution they were leading (Brown et al., 2001).

Protecting the College

Regardless of the difficult individual leadership situations they were dealing with, the presidents further exhibited their commitment to their colleges by rejecting actions that might damage them. They were proud to share how they did not “*fight publicly*” to defend themselves or preserve their jobs, how they focused on exiting gracefully so major donors would continue to view the college positively, and how they worked doggedly to finish projects.

People had given to the college, and I felt a commitment to stay there to see that capital campaign through. I couldn't leave because of the commitment I felt to the community.

Another president emphasized she would not go public to defend herself so the college and the students would not be hurt in the process. She did not want any of the negativity about what was happening to her to negatively affect the institution.

Interpretation

The presidents shared a strong loyalty to their community colleges as demonstrated through their commitment to transform their organizations. Engaging in significant change efforts requires a long-term commitment. It may be possible their goal orientation influenced how the presidents viewed their leadership roles within the organization, particularly in light of how devoted they felt toward the institution and its people. Two of the presidents had been in their positions at least ten years, but focusing on achieving their college's transformation may have affected their own career advancement. Finally, the loyalty they

maintained while experiencing their leadership difficulties resulted in protecting the interests of the college ahead of protecting their own.

Healing

The purpose of this section is to explore how Presidents Jerome, Riches, and Whitmore processed their difficult leadership experiences and to describe how they created meaning as a result. Although the presidents alluded to feelings of hurt, anger, and betrayal in the immediate aftermath of their departures, they had evolved beyond those raw emotions by the time they were meeting with me to gather data for this research project, and indicated they had basically “*put it behind*” themselves by the time the results were being written.

In addition to the strong support they felt from their families and friends, the presidents had developed similar approaches to exploring what this experience meant to them. The common technique was personal reflection grounded in their individual spirituality. Naturally, they indicated engaging in reflection was more frequent during the difficult leadership situation and the events surrounding their departures, but they had come to accept that new meaning and conclusions to help them heal would continue to emerge in the future.

Spirituality and Reflection

The presidents indicated that spirituality had been a source of healing from the difficult experience. All three respondents were raised with a strong Christian foundation where attending weekly church services was typical, but they described their current faith as being more individually spiritual than practicing an organized religion. Regardless of how they labeled their faith, they expressed that their spirituality had sustained them during the most difficult times.

If there is a major change that is happening to someone and they have no spiritual grounding or no faith that gives them support, I think that would be a lot harder.

In addition, they indicated their faith gave them determination to survive and move past this challenging experience.

I think you will find that we all have a deep spiritual sense and bearing, and that that has given us fortitude and the ability to go forward.

Similarly, each of the presidents indicated personal reflection was essential to helping them understand the significance of experiencing a difficult leadership situation and why it resulted in their leaving the presidency. Their contemplation activities were both structured like reading inspirational works, writing in journals, and participating in self exploration workshops and retreats and unstructured like spending time thinking while taking a walk, caring for a pet, or driving.

Moreover, the presidents indicated how examining their difficult leadership experiences and the events leading to their departures yielded several discoveries, many of which were presented earlier in the Leadership and Loss sections of the chapter. In addition, they had concluded that the act of reviewing their difficult leadership experiences helped them to grow and develop in their leadership.

Each of us has been very introspective so we could better understand our own leadership. . . . The more you know about yourself the better you're going to be able to be an authentic leader within an organization.

Likewise, they had come to believe that despite having had negative experiences they could not allow concerns about disloyalty to influence how they interact with staff and colleagues in future situations.

How do you not allow any regrets or hurt feelings to shadow or cloud your experience in a new organization? Well, you use that past experience in a way that can help you be a stronger and more effective leader.

In addition, they also believed that reviewing their difficult leadership experiences and understanding its significance allowed them to take responsibility for any impact they may have had on others.

We need to know ourselves and to be able to master ourselves, and to know our strengths and our shadows. And to know how our shadow has an impact on the people with whom we work. And to be able to have self-mastery over that shadow so that it doesn't darken another person's experience.

Continually Creating Meaning

Besides the discoveries they had made about their leadership through spirituality and personal reflection, the presidents mentioned how they often have been exposed to new experiences and opportunities that helped them advance their understanding of past and current experiences. For example, they mentioned how participating in this study had helped them realize they were not alone or unique in their difficult leadership experiences.

What a healing experience that focus group was for me. For the three of us to share, and find our commonalities, and to know how deeply others were affected by the same type of experience as I had.

This research project may have facilitated a way, through the focus group activity, for the presidents to add to their leadership growth by offering a “safe company of people who are willing to witness each other’s stories, without necessarily trying to do or fix anything” (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, p. 122). Moreover, they admitted to seeking out

specific opportunities where they could grow and uncover additional meaning about this experience and others in their lives.

I keep exposing myself to experiences that help me reflect and give me new information on things I could have done differently, or things that were inevitable, or things I need to learn about, or accept.

Since their emotions about the difficult leadership experience had softened, they were able to express some humor about it.

I'm not sure I would say this is the best thing that happened to me, but I had had a meteoric, fast, and early rise. I had really never had any failure in my professional sphere. If you've got to get whapped, you might as well get whapped big.

In the end, rather than dwelling on what might have gone wrong, the presidents rejected any notion of viewing their presidencies as failures. Instead they emphasized the years of success they had enjoyed in their positions, noted the great improvements they had brought to their colleges, and pointed out the positive opportunities they had created for students and employees.

It wasn't a failed presidency. When you use objective criteria like money raised by the foundation, increased enrollment, enhanced visibility in the community, and improved reputation it's real clear that during my leadership, by working with lots of people, we brought the community college to a very successful place.

One of the presidents expressed pride in her presidential experience.

This might sound corny but I'm proud of all of the things I have done and feel really good about my presidency.

Another president simply said,

I feel really good about my time as a president.

The presidents agreed, although it was doubtful they could have changed anything to alter the ultimate outcome, they were proud of how they handled themselves during the difficult circumstances.

I couldn't have done anything differently when I look back over it. I was truly between a rock and a hard place, so the only thing I could do was to carry it off with dignity.

Interpretation

It was evident the presidents had healed from the difficult leadership experience because of support from those who knew and loved them best and reliance on their spirituality. The concept of spirituality is well connected to leadership (Reave, 2005) and a recent study where community college presidents and chancellors describe their views of spirituality in their leadership indicated spirituality was considered an important element of self-care and renewal (Walker & McPhail, 2009). For the presidents in this study, their spirituality was a place to retreat where they could review their difficult leadership experience in light of their spiritual relationships and foundations.

Interrelated to spirituality, the presidents' practice of self reflection served both to further their healing and to create knowledge and meaning about their difficult leadership experiences. This notion is confirmed by Dantley (2005) who suggests reflective and spiritual endeavors can assist a leader to a deeper understanding about "what is right and just" (p. 15). In addition, engaging in personal reflection activities has been studied in community college presidents and found to enhance a president's leadership role (Stoeckel & Davies, 2007). The presidents in this study reported believing that reflection about their

difficult leadership experiences resulted in improving their leadership overall. In other words, “after evaluating their own [leadership] performances, [they] discover what works and what does not” (Roueche et al., 1989, p. 4).

It was clear the presidents rejected the impression that their presidencies were failures even though they ended under difficult circumstances. In direct contrast with the notions of failure leaders suggested in other studies (Brown et al., 2001; Ward et al., 1999; Whisler, 1988), the presidents in this study focused on the enhancements they had brought to their colleges and the successes they had helped students and employees achieve.

It appears the presidents recovered from their difficult leadership experiences in some of the same ways meaning was created by school superintendents who had also experienced a difficult leadership experience resulting in a departure from their positions.

Woundedness [from a difficult leadership experience] is a double-edged (at least) sword. A wound has the potential to be a catalyst for the leader to grow or be enmeshed in crisis. The wound presents the leader with an opportunity to explore and question the actual foundation of her leadership or herself. How a leader responds to being wounded can define her as a leader. The wound, at its best, can lead her back to her own true story. (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, p. 7)

Although the details of what it meant to have a difficult leadership experience that led to departing the presidency are still evolving for each president, they indicated a common conclusion: they had come to realize they were supposed to move on from the presidency in order to use their leadership talents to benefit elsewhere.

Conclusion

This chapter described the shared experiences and perspectives of Presidents Jerome, Riches, and Whitmore while undergoing a difficult leadership experience that led to departing the community college presidency. Three main areas: Leadership, Loss, and Healing were illustrated by six common themes: (a) feminist leadership, (b) challenging situations with board members, (c) dealing with power struggles, (d) commitment to the college, (e) spirituality and reflection, and (f) continually creating meaning.

Lucille Jerome, Colleen Riches, and Angela Whitmore were community college presidents who maintained a transformational-feminist leadership style distinguished by five Leadership elements: (a) Involve faculty and staff in college leadership, even if others are uncomfortable; (b) Collective decision making through shared power, as much as possible; (c) Leadership development for all employees; (d) Ethics guide leadership, even when the situation is difficult; and (e) Transformative change to benefit the college, may be doubted.

The women shared Loss related to their presidencies characterized by a strong personal commitment to the college and knowledge of women presidents' power struggles with other women. In addition, they described six troublesome situations that presidents can face when dealing with governing boards and individual board members:

1. Sometimes board members involved the presidents in conflicts among themselves.
2. Sometimes the president had to take corrective action to protect the college when a governing board member made erroneous statements that misled the governing board.
3. Sometimes a new board member had difficulty understanding his or her responsibility as a community college governing board trustee.

4. Sometimes new governing board members have joined the board with an ulterior agenda.
5. Sometimes board members and college employees have created or maintained relationships to advance their personal agendas.
6. Sometimes being a female president influences how a governing board member works with the president.

They experienced Healing from the difficult experience through support from family and friends, reliance on their individual spirituality, and engaging in personal reflection. Self exploration helped them create meaning about this difficult leadership experience.

Chapter Nine offers conclusions, recommendations for practice and further research, and my final reflections on this research endeavor.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

Introduction

This chapter presents my conclusions about female community college presidents who experienced a difficult leadership experience and my thoughts about the lessons other female community college leaders can learn from Presidents Jerome, Riches, and Whitmore. In addition, I offer some recommendations for practice and further research, and include my final reflections on this experience.

My Conclusions

In review, the purpose of this study was to (a) describe and examine the experiences of women who have experienced difficult leadership positions that resulted in departures from community college presidencies and (b) explore how these women have made meaning from their experiences. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do the female community college presidents who have experienced a difficult leadership position that resulted in departure from their position view their leadership experiences and describe what they have learned about leadership?
2. How do they describe and view their departures from the presidency?
3. How do they describe and explain their relationships with their governing board?
4. How do they construct meaning as a result of leaving a presidency? What implication does leaving presidential positions have for their future goals and plans?

I set out to conduct this study because I have been fascinated by the topic of women and leadership since I conducted my master's research on college sorority presidents' leadership experiences. When my major professor, Larry Ebbers, within weeks of beginning my doctoral studies, suggested looking at women's leadership through the experiences of female community college presidents who had exited the presidency under difficult circumstances, I thought it sounded interesting and did not consider any other topics. I became more committed to the project when my classmates and colleagues, upon hearing of my subject matter, expressed intrigue in the subject and interest in my results. Although nearly six years have passed since that initial conversation, my interest and enthusiasm for the project has never waned.

My conclusions, however, are incompatible with my preliminary speculations about what I thought I would find. Initially I suspected I would meet women community college presidents who had made a big headline grabbing mistake we could all learn from. I thought I would be describing examples of financial mismanagement or questionable behavior that led the women to their departures. Within ten minutes of meeting with Lucille Jerome, the first president I interviewed, I realized my predictions and assumptions were wrong and that this study was going to be quite a journey of discovery for me.

What I realized after spending substantial time with Lucille Jerome, Colleen Riches, and Angela Whitmore is these incredibly capable, competent, creative, forward-thinking, engaging, and caring community college presidents, putting it simply, didn't really do anything wrong. Instead, it was a confluence of circumstances—some of them ordinary, some of them downright bizarre—that led to a difficult leadership experience resulting in departure from the presidency. President Jerome expressed it more metaphorically in a

recent email message to me, *“It was a confluence of powerful and rushing rivers creating too much white water for navigation!”*

Because my conclusions were greatly influenced by my experiences interacting and working with these women, I will digress to explain how I came to my greatest personal learning as a result of this journey. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, I met with the presidents twice individually and once as a group which resulted in six to eight hours of structured data collection time with each of them. In addition, several phone interactions related to member checking added two to three more hours of time spent discussing the emerging results of the study and its relation to their leadership experiences. In spite of my initial feelings of anxiety and intimidation when I met with them, they not only put me at ease but also were prepared to share their career-long, difficult and not-so-difficult experiences with me. And share, they did. We talked about their early leadership experiences, their families and growing up, and their paths to the presidency; with stories and examples of their leadership philosophies and approaches laid like a quilt over all of the topics. And then we came to the heart of the study, the piece that sets it apart from the rest of the research on female community college presidents: we talked about their difficult leadership experiences, what it felt like to leave the presidency, how they coped, and what they learned. Throughout our nearly ten hours of interactions they trusted me enough to tell me what I believe is nearly everything about what they went through. Moreover, they shared their emotions and opinions with honesty.

So, as a novice researcher what did I do? Well, as a qualitative researcher, I analyzed the data just like I had been trained, I ensured the analysis processes I followed were trustworthy and authentic, and then I wrote up the results just as the data had presented itself

using the presidents' words as evidence of the results. Next, I sent each of them their case studies to respond to, and for the second time in my research journey my expectations did not meet reality. I was surprised to learn that they were very concerned about how much I had revealed from our interviews and how they were worried their anonymity was compromised in the study. All three of them agreed that the details they had shared during data collection were true and accurate (as they had been sent their transcripts for review earlier), but despite my attempt at anonymity they feared the level of detail described about their circumstances or a turn of phrase in the quotes included to illustrate the results would lead many in the community college field to their identities. They, rightly, suggested that I was naïve in not realizing how small the community college leadership world really is, and that their stories required additional masking to protect not only their own identities but also those of the colleges and employees. At first I was surprised and, admittedly, a bit frustrated. I could not understand why they would have told me their stories so honestly and then become concerned when I retold them just as they had been presented to me. But just like they are shown to be in the study—encouraging leaders who believe in professional development—they patiently worked with me to help me develop myself as a leader and a researcher so that the important research results from their experiences could be told without compromising their current and future leadership reputations.

They each spent many hours working with me to rewrite their cases and to create our shared interpretations. I'm confident this partnership and re-presentation of their leadership has in no way compromised the results because in our desire to protect their confidentiality the intent of what they had originally shared about their experiences and the spirit of their message for others to learn from was never veiled. In fact, I suspect the results of the study

are richer and more fully developed than they would have been if the presidents had accepted them as originally drafted.

As it turns out, the project also expanded my attempt at feminist methodology beyond merely using the lens of women's experiences from their own perspectives as the study's focus, and closer toward Bloom's (1998) interpretation of Sartre's "progressive-regressive method" as a way to strengthen feminist methodology (p. 64).

Feminist methodology is also strengthened when Sartre's method is used to analyze narratives of a respondent who participates in the interpretation. Sartre's method facilitates an intersubjective relationship with the respondent that breaks down the knower/known distinction by asserting that the respondent has agency and therefore can offer interpretations of her own self, her intentions, and further details of her life as needed in conversation with the researcher. (Bloom, 1998, p. 70-71)

By working closely with the presidents during the interpretations phase, I have concluded the specific details of their experiences are irrelevant to the true usefulness of this study. I also realize that each of their situations was so complex that trying to maintain anonymity while weaving the details together only served to hide the truth of what can be learned from their experiences.

While another reader may identify other conclusions from this study, I believe there are two key areas that stand out. First, there is a connection to transformational leadership, which seems to be one of the current hot topics in leadership studies. Transformational leadership as it is identified in the literature, however, is an ideal to strive for. The experiences of these leaders who had some difficulties can offer a new perspective on the reality of the transformational leadership model. Second, in spite of a president's positive

impressions and feelings about her governing board and board members, challenging situations can arise to create difficulties for them. This is neither new nor novel, but understanding the potential difficulties from the perspective of a leader who has had experience can better prepare a president when she is faced with them.

Conclusions about the Transformational-Feminist, with qualifiers, Leadership Model

I have to admit, I did not realize transformational leadership was going to be relevant until late in the interpretations phase, when it became apparent that Presidents Jerome, Riches, and Whitmore shared most of the leadership characteristics with other transformational leaders. What also became evident, though, was that the nature of their experiencing a difficult leadership situation shed light on the vulnerabilities of the model. As a result of their experiences it seems leaders can take caution from the qualifiers that are suggested in the Transformational-Feminist, with qualifiers, Leadership Model. Four of the five elements of transformational leadership in community colleges proposed by Roueche et al. (1989) coupled with Astin and Leland's (1991) model of feminist leadership indicate some potential areas where leaders might need to be watchful because they could either create or worsen a difficult leadership situation. Based on the experiential perspective of the results presented in this study, some potential indicators of difficult leadership situations related to each element of the model are located in Appendix E, but I will discuss them briefly below.

1. Involve Faculty and Staff in College Leadership, even if others are uncomfortable:

Involving all employee groups in college leadership sends a message that everyone in the institution is valued and their contributions are important to the college reaching its full potential. The difficulty surfaces because some people who are more accustomed to

hierarchical, top down leadership models may be uncomfortable with broad involvement by all members of an organization. This may result in the leader being perceived as weak by these people, but other times the lack of control these people may feel can result in a reaction that can create substantial difficulties for a leader. The consequences may be a person being so uncomfortable as to conclude that a change in leadership for their organization is necessary. What's more, if that individual is dominant or charismatic, he or she may be able to wield the influence necessary to accomplish a leadership change.

2. Collective Decision Making through Shared Power, as much as possible: This ideal situation allows a leader to provide a means for engaging employees in the college's leadership, determining the best decisions for each problem, empowering employees to find solutions to issues, and bringing staff from diverse units and departments on campus to better understand how each area contributes to the success of the entire college. The qualifier cautions a leader to understand this is not possible all of the time. Sometimes there are issues, like personnel, where collective decision making is not in the best interest of the college.

2. Involve Faculty and Staff in College Leadership, even if others are uncomfortable: Similar to collective decision making and sharing power, involving all employee groups in college leadership sends a message that everyone in the institution is valued and their contributions are important to the college reaching its full potential. The difficulty surfaces because some people who are more accustomed to hierarchical, top down leadership models may be uncomfortable with broad involvement by all members of an organization. This may result in the leader being perceived as weak by these people, but other times the lack of control these people may feel can result in a reaction that can create substantial difficulties

for a leader. The consequences may be a person being so uncomfortable as to believe a change in leadership for their organizations is necessary. What's more, if that individual is dominant or charismatic, he or she may be able to wield the influence necessary to accomplish a leadership change.

3. Leadership development for all employees: This study did not suggest any qualifiers for this element. The presidents promoted the notion that strong leadership in all positions within the organization enhanced the likelihood of success for transforming the college. To create strong leaders, the presidents believed developing all employees to their greatest leadership potential was vital to involving them in the organization through collective decision making and shared power.

4. Ethics Guide Leadership, even when the situation is difficult: Being true to your personal core values is central to feeling effective and confident as a leader. Sometimes, however, a leader's notion of right and wrong can be viewed differently, even negatively, by another person. Moreover, it is especially difficult to rationalize ethical decisions to others when confidential matters are involved. For the leaders in this study, the more difficult the situation was, the more likely they turned to their ethics as a guide, and indicated no regrets for doing so.

5. Transformative Change to Benefit the College, may be doubted: Leaders who have a vision for making their colleges the best they can be by creating substantive change in order to benefit the students and the college's other stakeholders often feel compelled to diligently pursue that goal. It is critical that the governing board share the vision with the president or the necessary support and resources to accomplish it may be withheld.

Difficulties can arise, though, if doubt emerges about a president's ability or willingness to see the vision to completion.

Conclusions about the Challenging Situations with Board Members

In any community college presidency it is reasonable to expect there will be some difficulties with governing board members. As a result of their own broad leadership experience and interactions with their network of other community college presidents, Presidents Jerome, Riches, and Whitmore described six difficult situations they believed presidents can encounter.

1. Sometimes board members involve presidents in conflicts among themselves.
2. Sometimes the president has to take corrective action to protect the college when a governing board member makes erroneous statements that can mislead the governing board.
3. Sometimes a new board member has difficulty understanding his or her responsibility as a community college governing board trustee.
4. Sometimes new governing board members will join the board with an ulterior agenda.
5. Sometimes board members and college employees will create or maintain relationships to advance their personal agendas.
6. Sometimes being a female president influences how a governing board member works with the president.

Based on the presidents' experiences and perspectives it is wise for a community college president to be vigilant about recognizing when these situations may arise so she can attempt to avoid leadership difficulties. They indicated, however, these types of situations are often

tricky both to identify and to manage because the complexities of each college culture, individual perspective, and confluence of issues is unique.

So what can be concluded about the stories and experiences of Lucille Jerome, Colleen Riches, and Angela Whitmore? We need to understand that a leader cannot look at any one of their stories—even with knowing the details that were eliminated in order to protect their anonymity—and conclude a checklist of leadership behaviors to avoid so they will not also have a difficult leadership experience leading to departure. The truth is there is nothing that will ensure a presidency is trouble-free and ends on the leader's timeline. Rather, leaders should understand that a series of seemingly small events or interactions can build to culminate in a situation that cannot be avoided. A metaphor in this case is a landscape of trickling creeks and waterways that after a heavy rain can create rapid flowing water that generally the experienced leader can easily steer through. But when many creeks flow into rivers, that confluence may create too much whitewater making it difficult for a leader to navigate. Since the solutions are not simple, a president is wise to be on the lookout for troublesome issues to navigate so their presidential leadership is not capsized.

Recommendations for Practice

A few recommendations for practice may be useful to current and future female community college presidents.

- ◆ A woman president should recognize the challenges of being an inclusive leader. For many it is almost always the best way to lead. Almost always, that is, until a leader is forced by confidential personnel or other sensitive issues to stray from consensus decision making toward an autocratic, hierarchical style. The employees of an organization, who have been trained

in leadership skills and engaged in the leadership process, have become accustomed to participating in the leadership of the college, so if the president's leadership style shifts the employees may have a difficult time shifting with her. Anger and resentment can build, trust and authenticity may be jeopardized, and an opportunity may emerge for those with ulterior agendas to create problems for the leader.

- ◆ A woman president should recognize that staying true to personal ethics can be problematic. Since doing the right thing is often not popular, leaders may risk losing their leadership roles because their ethical decision can be viewed negatively by those who disagree with it. In every controversial decision a leader should consider balancing the benefits of making the choices that are best for the whole organization with the risk of angering a powerful few.
- ◆ A woman president should recognize that female leaders continue to face stereotypes about how a woman should act, and how people view her when she violates those expectations. Women leaders are still a significant minority within organizations so they must decide when and how much to conform their leadership to the majority male culture.
- ◆ A woman president should recognize that the decisions she makes may isolate people. Sometimes a leader can get away with that and other times it will come back to haunt her.
- ◆ A woman president should recognize that making significant changes within an organization will likely make some members happy and some members angry. Leaders who want to make changes need to realize that quick,

substantive changes can serve to isolate them. Working strategically toward change in a slower, methodical manner also requires vigilant awareness of the problems and issues that have arisen throughout the process.

- ◆ A woman president should recognize that her commitment to the college may be influencing her professional pathway.
- ◆ A woman president should recognize that her relationship with her governing board can be fragile and is constantly changing. She should understand how taking corrective action with board members can be risky. She should also do her best to uncover the agendas that trustees may have, related to their roles and the college.
- ◆ A woman president should recognize board members will always have relationships with college employees, and attempts to control those will likely be unsuccessful, but being attentive to recognizing and understanding them may help when difficult leadership situations arise.

Recommendations for Further Research

Community college leadership researchers may be interested in studying the following suggestions.

1. A study to further explore the notions proposed in the Transformational-Feminist, with qualifiers, Leadership Model.
2. A study exploring the role of power within relationships between female community college presidents and their female employees or board members.

3. A study to examine how a leader's commitment to an organization influences longevity in their positions.
4. A study expanded to include diverse respondents (i.e. men, or other women from other racial and ethnic backgrounds) who have had a difficult leadership experience resulting in their departure from the community college presidency.

Final Reflection

Since these presidents served as role models for engaging in personal reflection as a way to grow and improve, this dissertation will conclude with my own personal reflection. I recognize I am so privileged to have been able to study and learn from amazing female leaders like these presidents. Their stories touched me, their wisdom helped me, and I am a better leader because of my knowing them. So, what have I learned about my own leadership and scholarship?

- ◆ I have learned that I employ some of the elements of transformational-feminist leadership, but I have more elements to try to model. This is particularly true in gaining confidence in collective decision making with my staff and embracing the importance of my personal values and spirituality in my leadership.
- ◆ I have learned feminist, woman-focused, empowering research is not about the researcher and her brilliant or insightful perspectives on the respondent's experience; rather it is about a shared experience with shared meaning being created.
- ◆ I have learned that although the first draft of the case studies may have been too revealing, the shared experience of rewriting them was important to the research process because it served as a further opportunity for member checking and as a way

to delve deeper into shared interpretations. While I may have created some anxiety for the presidents (and me) at first, I'm hopeful that the end product is something that truly represents their difficult leadership experiences.

- ◆ I have learned that I can give up control and be okay with it. I understand the presidents needed to be actively involved in rewriting my draft of their case studies because it was important to them not only to feel comfortable with how their stories were told, but also to advance their own understanding of their experiences.
- ◆ I have learned how small the community college world is and how much more careful a researcher needs to be when sharing intimate details of a persons experience. Just because it was said does not mean it needed to be included.
- ◆ I have learned that time can adapt results when you are studying a person's experience. In this case the initial analysis on an issue indicated one direction, but the time between data collection and final analysis allowed the respondents to develop further interpretation and meaning. If not for our member checking collaboration, the results would have been true to the research process as it happened at the time, but further peeling back of the layers revealed a deeper more accurate picture of the true issue.

In recent months, I have had two close friends, who are women leaders in healthcare administration, experience many of the same difficulties as the community college presidents. As I supported them through their difficult leadership experiences and subsequent departures from their positions, I came to realize this is a situation many women may face in many different types of careers. I am thankful to Presidents Jerome, Riches, and Whitmore that I had their words of survival and healing to share with my friends. Just as my

friends and I have already benefited, I hope that other women leaders can learn from these experiences and take comfort in knowing that sometimes difficult situations happen to good leaders.

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office of Research Assurances
Vice Provost for Research
1138 Pearson Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207
515 294-4566
FAX 515 294-4267

Date: November 17, 2005

TO: Robin Shaffer Lilienthal

FROM: Human Subject Research Compliance Office

PROJECT TITLE: Lessons Learned: The Meaning Made from Involuntarily Leaving a Leadership Position

RE: IRB ID No.: 05-477

APPROVAL DATE: November 17, 2005 **REVIEW DATE:** October 25, 2005

LENGTH OF APPROVAL: One year **CONTINUING REVIEW DATE:** November 16, 2006

TYPE OF APPLICATION: New Project Continuing Review

Your human subjects research project application, as indicated above, has been approved by the Iowa State University IRB #1 for recruitment of subjects not to exceed the number indicated on the application form. All research for this study must be conducted according to the proposal that was approved by the IRB. If written informed consent is required, the IRB-stamped and dated Informed Consent Document(s), approved by the IRB for this project only are attached. Please make copies from the attached "masters" for subjects to sign upon agreeing to participate. The original signed Informed Consent Document should be placed in your study files. A copy of the Informed Consent Document should be given to the subject.

The IRB must conduct **continuing review** of research at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk, but not less than once per year. Renewal is the PI's responsibility, but as a reminder, you will receive notices at least 60 days and 30 days prior to the next review. **Please note the continuing review date for your study.**

Any **modification** of this research project must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval, prior to implementation. Modifications include but are not limited to: changing the protocol or study procedures, changing investigators or sponsors (funding sources), including additional key personnel, changing the Informed Consent Document, an increase in the total number of subjects anticipated, or adding new materials (e.g., letters, advertisements, questionnaires). Any future correspondence should include the IRB identification number provided and the study title.

Approval letter
Page 2
Lilienthal

You must promptly report any of the following to the IRB: (1) **all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences** involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) **any other unanticipated problems involving risks** to subjects or others.

Your research records may be audited at any time during or after the implementation of your study. Federal and University policy require that all research records be maintained for a period of three (3) years following the close of the research protocol. If the principal investigator terminates association with the University before that time, the signed informed consent documents should be given to the Departmental Executive Officer to be maintained.

Research investigators are expected to comply with the University's Federal Wide Assurance, the Belmont Report, 45 CFR 46 and other applicable regulations prior to conducting the research. These documents are on the Human Subjects Research Office website or are available by calling (515) 294-4566.

Upon completion of the project, a Project Closure Form will need to be submitted to the Human Subjects Research Office to officially close the project.

C: ELPS
Larry Ebbers

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: **Lessons Learned: The Meaning Made from Leaving a Difficult Leadership Position**
Investigator: **Robin Shaffer Lilienthal, M.S.**

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The objectives of the study are to (a) describe and examine the experiences of women who have experienced a difficult leadership position that resulted in departure from a community college presidency, and (b) explore the meaning these women have made from the experience. The views of the community college presidency will be enhanced by studying the presidency through the experiences of female leaders. By examining a difficult leadership experience and the resultant meaning created for the participants, we may learn about the ways both women and men understand the implications of their presidential and leadership experiences. Also we may learn more about the ways presidents and governing boards can develop and maintain a successful relationship. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a current or former female community college president who has experienced a difficult presidential position and subsequently left that leadership situation.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your involvement will consist of participating in two 90-120 minute individual interviews at a location of your choice and one group interview with the other study participants likely via phone or another means of distance communication. Interview questions will cover your experiences as a community college president and your previous leadership activities. The first individual interview will occur during the fall of 2005, the group interview will occur during the winter of 2006, and second individual interview will occur during the spring of 2006. You may also be asked to provide artifacts (if available) related to your experiences as a community college president such as a current vita or other documents which may help me to understand your experiences.

Prior to beginning the study there will be a discussion of the informed consent form and confirmation of your participation. You will also have the opportunity to ask any questions about the study or the informed consent form. Following your completion of the informed consent form, the interviews will begin.

Each of the interviews will be tape recorded. The tape recording will be maintained until the project is completed and then erased. You will be invited to review all data including

interview notes and transcripts to confirm, clarify, or change responses. You will also be invited to review the final findings of the study and make amendments prior to any dissemination.

RISKS

The potential risks to you involve only those inherent in self-reflection.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there will be limited benefits to you including a deeper self-reflection and the opportunity to contribute valuable information to the further understanding of the experiences of female community college presidents.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Iowa State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken. You will not be identified by name, either in the coding or the reporting of the data, in this study in an effort to maintain confidentiality. Audiotapes and notes will be stored at the principle investigator's home in a secured storage area and any computer files that include identifying information will be stored with a protected password. Should you withdraw from the study, at any point, all recorded materials will be returned to you and will not be used in

the study. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential. The results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you cannot be identified.

_____ By initialing in the space provided, you verify that you have been told that audio recordings will be generated during the course of this study.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about this study contact Robin Shaffer Lilienthal, XXX-XXX-XXXX (home) or XXX-XXX-XXXX (work) or Robin.Lilienthal@xxxxxxx.edu or Larry Ebbers, major professor, XXX-XXX-XXXX or lebbers@xxxxxxx.edu.
- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, Office of Research Assurances, (515) 294-3115, 1138 Pearson Hall, Ames, IA 50011.

SUBJECT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the signed and dated written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Subject's Name (printed) _____

(Subject's Signature)

(Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

(Signature of Person Obtaining
Informed Consent)

(Date)

APPENDIX C

DATA COLLECTION AND MEMBER CHECKING PROTOCOL

First Individual Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself and how you came to be a community college president. What motivated you to pursue a career in community college leadership?
2. Who and what has influenced your professional and leadership development?
3. When I say the word “president” what comes to mind? Of all of those images which ones apply to you? Why? What images of community college presidents exist that don’t apply to you and why?
4. Describe your first days as a community college president. What do you remember thinking? How did you feel? How did people around you react?
5. Compare and contrast your first days in your first presidency with those at your most recent college.
6. What role does relationship-building play in leadership? Who are the groups or individuals you felt were important to build relationships with?
7. What did you do to build your relationship with your governing board?
8. What elements are necessary for an effective president-board relationship? Follow up from literature: accountability, trust, communication, support, confidence, respect, ethics.
9. What types of conflict are likely to exist between presidents and governing boards? What strategies did you employ to work through these types of conflicts?
10. Tell the story that led to your departure from the presidency. Describe the first time you sensed your relationship with your governing board was in jeopardy. What incident do you believe was the tipping point that led to your termination?
11. Think back to your first days after the involuntary separation was finalized, what do you remember thinking and feeling? What strategies did you employ to begin “picking up the pieces?”
12. What has this experience cost you?
13. What have you gained as a result of this experience?

14. What have you learned about leadership as a result of this experience?
15. What have you learned about yourself as a result of this experience?
16. Is there anything I should know that you have not had a chance to tell me? What questions should have been asked, but weren't?

Focus Group Interview Questions

Board-President Relationship:

- ◆ What types of conflict may develop between presidents and governing boards? What strategies should be employed to work through these types of conflict?
- ◆ What role does the president need to play in managing difficult board members? What risks are there in taking that role?
- ◆ A staff or faculty member who had ties to a board member contributed to your difficult leadership experience, what have you learned about staff/faculty relationships with board members?
- ◆ What are the most important considerations for a president when a board member joins who appears to have a personal agenda?

Male and Female Presidential Leadership Style:

- ◆ What role, if any does gender play in a presidency?
- ◆ How might male and female presidents differ in responding to difficult leadership experiences?
- ◆ Are there aspects of female leadership that may make a person susceptible to being caught off guard? If so, please describe.
- ◆ What role, if any does differing communication styles play in a presidency? How does gender affect communication?

Respondent's Personal Reflection on Experience

- ◆ What have you learned about presidential leadership as a result of having a difficult leadership experience?
- ◆ What are some of the "things they never told you" about being a president?

Conclusion

- ◆ Is there anything I should know that you have not had a chance to tell me? What questions should have been asked, but weren't?

Second Individual Interview Questions

Today's interview will focus more on the meaning you have made from this experience and its implications.

1. Describe your process of self-reflection as you have attempted to find meaning in this experience. What discoveries have you made? Do you think race, gender or age were factors? What role, if any, has your spirituality played in the meaning you have made of this experience? Christian upbringing.
2. What have you learned about leadership as a result of this experience?
3. What have you learned about a president's relationship with the board?
4. What have you learned about yourself as a result of this experience?
5. How has departing a presidency under difficult circumstances influenced your goals?
6. Are there aspects of the feminine leadership style that may serve to increase a president's vulnerability when faced with a difficult leadership experience? Why or Why not.
7. The actions of other women seem to have played a role in your difficult leadership experience. Do you think this is significant? Why or why not?
8. All of you talked about having an early sense or intuition that the situation was going to be very difficult. What do you think that means?
9. Think back to your first days after the separation, what do you remember thinking and feeling? What strategies did you employ to begin "picking up the pieces?" Where did you find support during and after the difficult leadership experience?
10. Some might use terms like "failed presidency." How do you react to this and what words have you used to describe your experience?
11. Throughout the interviews I have heard about feelings of isolation and personal betrayal. Does this relate to you and, if so, has it influenced your view leadership?
12. Why might the gains of long-term organizational change be more important to some presidents than the risk of generating circumstances that might lead to a difficult presidency resulting in departure? How does a president know when it is time to leave

13. How did you feel about your role in the group interview? Were there views expressed that do not represent you? Was there anything you wanted to say but did not have a chance to?
14. What do you suspect are the common threads between the three of your experiences?
15. What might you have done differently as president?
16. Is there anything I should know that you have not had a chance to tell me? What questions should have been asked, but weren't?

Transcript Member Checking Questions

1. What additional meaning have you made about your experience since reading the transcripts?
2. Are there inaccuracies in the transcript that need clarification or correction?
3. What other comments or insights would you like to share?

Describe data analysis process and next steps.

Interpretations Member Checking Questions

Today's conversation has two elements. First, I am going to ask you a couple of questions to see if your case study and the common experiences chapters "ring true" for you. Then I want to discuss any concerns you have about how you are represented in the chapters. If you don't mind, I would like to tape record our conversation so I can concentrate on our conversation rather than on taking notes. Is that okay?

1. First, it has been a couple of years after the experience. Having read both your case study and common themes chapters, what more have you learned about yourself, your leadership, and what this experience means to you?
2. What, if anything, that I have written surprises you?
3. Are there elements that you believe I have misinterpreted?
4. What additional interpretations do you make of this?
5. Anything else you would like to comment on?
6. Are there concerns you have about how you are represented in the chapters?

APPENDIX D

TRANSFORMATIONAL-FEMINIST, WITH QUALIFIERS, LEADERSHIP MODEL

	Community College Transformational Leadership (Gillett-Karam, 1989; Roueche, Baker & Rose, 1989)	Feminist Model of Leadership: Positional Leader Viewed as a Catalyst or Facilitator (Astin & Leland, 1991)	Transformational-Feminist, with qualifiers, Leadership Model
People	~Value people ~Value opinions of others	~Social construction of reality ~Diverse experiences and perspectives ~Unique talents, knowledge & expertise guide responsibilities	~Involve Faculty and Staff in College Leadership, even if others are uncomfortable
Influence	~Shared decision making ~Empower others to act ~Collaborative Situation	~Interdependence ~Collective Effort ~Power as Energy ~Shared Power	~Collective Decision Making through Shared Power, as much as possible
Motivation	~High expectations of others ~Inspire others to develop skills	~Development and achievement of others	~Leadership Development for all Employees
Values	~Personal value system ~Value consistency and integrity	~Communicates values	~Ethics Guide Leadership, even when the situation is difficult
Vision	~See what college can become ~Take risks ~Commit colleges to meet needs of communities	~Provides a vision ~Change improves quality of life	~Transformative Change to Benefit the College, may be doubted

APPENDIX E

TRANSFORMATIONAL-FEMINIST, WITH QUALIFIERS, LEADERSHIP MODEL
DIFFICULT LEADERSHIP SITUATION INDICATORS

Transformational-Feminist, with qualifiers, Leadership Model	Transformational-Feminist Leaders should be Mindful of these Situations that may Create Leadership Difficulties
Involve Faculty and Staff in College Leadership, even if others are uncomfortable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Some may perceive an involved approach as weak leadership. ◆ Involving others may seem threatening to those more accustomed to hierarchical, command and control leadership. ◆ Including stakeholders with diverse perspectives like a union in college administrative team may be viewed as giving away power. ◆ Fluid leadership styles may appear to be inconsistent with an expected style, so can seem inauthentic.
Collective Decision Making through Shared Power, as much as possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ If decision making is based on representative groups, others may dismiss the results if they don't believe they had a voice. ◆ Personnel issues and other sensitive decisions may minimize opportunities for shared decisions. Some decisions must be made by the leader alone. ◆ Power struggles may trump shared power. ◆ The power of information is a valuable piece of leadership to share. ◆ Lack of clarity about how decisions will be made, who will be involved, and to what extent input will be used can be problematic. ◆ Personal agendas may overtake college priorities.
Leadership Development for all Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ If employees are not encouraged to develop leadership skills, fulfilling their leadership responsibilities or engaging in the college's transformational goals may be minimal. ◆ Limiting leadership development and practicing skills to administrators may indicate to other employees they are less valued within the college.
Ethics Guide Leadership, even when the situation is difficult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Choosing to address tough issues like personnel matters rather than delaying intervention until they are troublesome may not be viewed positively. ◆ Doing the right thing can make decisions clear for the leader, but may not always be popular or without consequences. ◆ Taking action to protect the college from decisions jeopardizing its position may be professionally risky.
Transformative Change to Benefit the College, may be doubted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Promoting a leadership vision to substantially transform the college may produce skepticism from stakeholders. ◆ Balancing leadership tenure is difficult: don't leave too early; don't stay too long. ◆ A president's commitment may sacrifice career advancement to ensure the college's advancement. ◆ If the governing board does not share the vision, support and resources to accomplish it can be withheld.

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