

## ABSTRACT

BERRY, REBECCA. Female Community College Presidents and the Effective Utilization of Senior Leadership Teams. (Under the direction of Dr. Audrey J. Jaeger).

The purpose of the qualitative study was to determine how new, first-time community college presidents in the first five years in the role, who had also served in an Aspen Presidential Fellowship, effectively utilized their senior leadership teams. Community colleges are vital to both the student populations and to the economic development of the regions they serve (AACC, 2014; Eddy, 2019; Crawford & Jervis, 2011; The White House, 2016). The presidents who lead them have had persistent turnover for nearly a decade and this trend is projected to continue, as presidents state they only intend to stay in their roles 5-6 years (Gordon, 2016). The demographics of those coming to the role is increasingly changing as well, because women now constitute more than 30% of new presidents (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Women have been found to have more democratic (Northouse, 2016), inclusive, collaborative (Eddy, et al., 2020), and transformational (Eagly et al., 2003) leadership styles than men, which are all favorable competencies in the leadership of teams. The effective utilization of the senior leadership team is an essential component to efficient operations (Boggs, 2020) and the leadership style of women is conducive to leveraging their capacity.

This narrative inquiry examined how five, first-time, female presidents utilized their senior leadership teams using the LaFasto and Larson (2001) theoretical framework, “The Six Dimensions of Team Leadership.” Further, the perspective of their senior leadership team members was gained through a 42-item survey, entitled “The Collaborative Team Leader (Team Version)” also by LaFasto and Larson (2001). For the purpose of clarity, a follow-up lunch was held for them to provide insights for their survey answers.

The findings revealed that the presidents do effectively utilize their teams and their leadership team's responses to the survey aligned with the presidents' narratives. The data also showed that past presidents and mentors shaped the president's leadership. Further, the president's experience throughout the college prior to the presidency enhanced their effectiveness, particularly their faculty role, which gave them a focus on student success outcomes. After assuming the role of president, they took action to shape senior leadership teams who are aligned with their leadership style and held them accountable to work collaboratively. By building strong relationships and developing trust, they were able to coach their teams to collaborate on strategic issues and authorized them to work independently on operational needs within their divisions.

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Female Community College Presidents and Effective  
Utilization of Senior Leadership Teams

by  
Rebecca Berry

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
North Carolina State University  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

Adult and Community College Education

Raleigh, North Carolina  
2021

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## DEDICATION

My mother, Charlotte's, encouragement, support, and love are what allowed me to break through boundaries and achieve this degree. Happy for me to go to college, especially as a first generation college student, she encouraged me to live at home until well into my 20s. She cheerfully supported me by cooking, doing my laundry, and more, while I worked the night shift and went to school during the day. Much later, when I wanted to go to graduate school to obtain a master's degree, she often watched my son for my husband and me while I attended classes or worked on homework. When I got a travel grant to perform research in Egypt, she and my father drove from Arkansas to North Carolina to stay with my son in my absence while my husband worked. When I decided to pursue a doctorate degree, she cheered me on, often through her own grave illness. She was my very best friend, tireless champion, and constant companion. While she didn't get to see me finish this degree, I know she had full confidence in my ability to do so. This dissertation is dedicated to her, and to women everywhere who encourage and support their daughters to reach their full potential.

## BIOGRAPHY

Rebecca Berry is originally from Searcy, Arkansas where she obtained a bachelor's degree in Psychology from Harding University. After obtaining her degree, she served as a case manager for the Department of Human Services in Child Abuse and Neglect. She moved to North Carolina and worked as a personnel director in contract security, but moved back to Arkansas to marry her husband of nearly 25 years, Peter Berry. She worked as a regional merchandiser for a fashion designer and again as a case manager, but eventually, and happily, became a stay-at-home mom to Noah. Subsequently, she obtained a master's degree in History from Arkansas State University. After moving back to North Carolina, she worked part-time as an adjunct history instructor and in the airline industry before becoming employed full-time at Wake Tech in 2009.

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In her spare time, Rebecca enjoys traveling, renovating her historic home, and gardening. Most of all, she loves chatting with her family, whether it be on the morning conference call that has continued for decades, or lounging on her deck and discussing life plans with Peter and Noah.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Every member of my family was in graduate school at the same time and we relied on each other for support and motivation. First, thank you to my husband, Peter, for agreeing to go back and gain your doctorate at the same time. With the visits to the library, hours studying together, and relentless APA formatting questions tossed your way, you truly made this work enjoyable. Thanks too to our son, Noah, for always making our job as parents easy and for assisting with proofreading.

Thanks are also especially warranted to my father, sister, and brother for your encouragement, allowing me time to write, study, and report on my daily progress.

Much appreciation for the classmates in my cohort and friends who provided encouragement—Robin Warfield kindly cheered me on during assessment weekend, my proposal defense, and all the way to the end. Thanks to other friends who also supported me, like Katie Loovis and Elizabeth Davis who often sent encouraging messages.

Thank you to my mentor, Dr. Jeff Cox, who provided guidance and helpful connections that helped me to grow as a professional in the field. I sincerely appreciate your thoughtfulness and sincere desire to mentor me.

I am especially grateful to Dr. Audrey Jaeger, my advisor and chair. She perfectly balanced allowing independence and providing guidance, as well as balancing critique with encouragement. I have been so fortunate to have her guidance and friendship throughout this journey. She is a remarkable chair, faculty member, and woman. I am honored to be associated with her and am forever grateful for her support.

Thank you to my committee, Dr. Michelle Bartlett, Dr. Mary Rittling, Dr. Kandi Deitemeyer, and one who served during the proposal phase, Dr. James Bartlett. As I nervously

entered into this research, and all the way to the end, you provided encouragement, flexibility, and support.

Lastly, a sincere thank you to the presidents who gave freely of their time and insights during a time when you had so much else going on. Your grace and encouragement carried me through a process of which I often felt uncertain. Thank you for sharing your insights about your leadership. You are all remarkable women and getting to know you was a wonderful benefit this research afforded me.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Community college presidents today lead complex institutions that require many different types of specialists to carry out efficient operations, who can often be found within the senior leadership teams (Boggs, 2020; Eddy et al., 2015; Kezar, 2019; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). This was especially illustrated during the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic for which operational change had to demonstrate unimagined agility. Over the last decade, for example, organizations slowly sought ways to move portions of their operations online. With the quick onset of a global pandemic threatening the health of employees and students, community colleges across the nation were forced to accelerate these ideas and move most operations online in merely a week or two (Dembicki, 2020). Doing so required expertise in technology infrastructure, instructional design, human resources, student support, facilities management and nearly all other operational aspects. As news outlets reported, institutions quickly learned the compounding effects of problems caused by the pandemic. Many students at institutions across the nation lacked access to technology; some staff were testing positive for the virus, especially in Washington state where the virus hit hard early; and some instructional programs still required hand-on training (Dembicki, 2020). One lone-acting president would have likely found it difficult, if not impossible, to exercise all the competencies needed to take an entire organization online in such a short timeframe. It is clear that having senior leadership team members who are specialists in many areas can help to afford agility in times of great change and “the most vital teams are those who bring a range of skills, abilities, and talents to their assignments” (Boggs, 2020, p.4). The global pandemic is just one example of the agility required at community colleges for which senior leadership teams can assist. Community college presidents today are facing several

difficult challenges leading many to leave the role earlier than past presidents (Boggs 2020; Kezar, 2019).

Compounding the strains on modern presidents is that most are new to the role due to the high turnover at community colleges. It has been widely reported that the turnover in community college presidencies is widespread (Gagliardi et al., 2017; Phillipe, 2016). One in four presidencies in the United States experienced a turnover in 2015 (Smith, 2016, May 20). Smith (2016, May 20) reported a steady five-year decline from the American Association of Community College database tracking (See Figure 1). This has resulted in a cycle of newcomers to community college leadership. While a few presidents have moved up to this role within their initial institution, most who are new to the role of president are serving in new institutions as well (Phillipe, 2016). This means that presidents are having to acclimate to the role while also acclimating to a new institution.

### **Figure 1**

#### *Presidential Transitions Image*

<b>Year</b>	<b>No. of Transitions</b>
2011-12	134
2012-13	158
2013-14	262
2014-15	269
2015-March 2016	203

*Note.* From AACC as reported in <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/05/20/many-community-college-presidencies-are-upheaval> (2016).

## **Turnover Brings Diversification**

This turnover has not been all negative though, as openings in the presidency have been filled with a greater number of women and people of color than in past decades (Gagliardi et al., 2017), which is important to meet the needs of the diverse student body at community colleges. While men still constitute two-thirds, and white individuals still constitute 80% of community college presidencies (Gagliardi et al., 2017), a 2012 to 2017 comparison shows the “first large move in racial diversity in the community college sector since the inception of the survey in 1986” (Eddy, 2018, p. 2) and more women are coming to community college presidencies than ever before in history (Gagliardi et al., 2017). The shift in racial and gender diversity is important for a number of reasons. First, community colleges serve a more racially diverse student body than any other type of higher education institution (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), and more female students (56.6%), than male students (Gagliardi et al., 2017), so the new diversity in leadership better reflects the student population. Another important point, diversity in leadership is also an indicator of increased productivity and innovation (Lorenzo & Reeves 2018, January 30), so the effectiveness of institutions can be bolstered by increased diversity.

Considering the complex competencies needed to operate a successful community college and the high degree of turnover of presidencies, senior leadership teams can provide the capacity to create agile institutions during this transition (Boggs, 2020; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017) and can help to bring about a greater range of talents to assist with challenges (Boggs, 2020; Kezar, 2019; Northouse, 2016). While research into the effective utilization of senior leadership teams has received some attention over the last two decades (Gaval, 2009; Kezar, 2019), some presidents are using “idiosyncratic norms and tradition” (Kezar, 2019, p. 105) to

utilize their senior leadership teams. Given the vast number of new presidents and the increasing number of female presidents, the current model of operating senior leadership teams should be, likewise, updated to meet these changing profiles. Kezar (2019) pointedly argues for an “urgent need for research on SLTs, particularly given their likely centrality to changes that are particularly needed in higher education” (p. 104). Therefore, more information is needed to better understand how the growing number of new, first-time, female presidents make effective use of their senior leadership teams, especially in the environment that has been described as chaotic and ever-changing (Eddy et al., 2015).

The following sections will provide an overview of the critical role of community colleges, the essential role of the president, community college presidential transitions, how organizations are training new leaders, the increasing number of female presidents and how their leadership differs, the usefulness of senior leadership teams in aiding the president, and criteria to assess the effectiveness of teams. This chapter will conclude with an overview of the research methodology, the theory that was used to frame the study, the purpose and significance of this dissertation, as well as an identification of some key terms.

### **Critical Role of Community Colleges**

Throughout the United States, community colleges provide diplomas, degrees, and certificates that enable transfer to four-year institutions and the ability to obtain jobs in career fields with urgent vacancies. These credentials are vital to filling labor market demands within the economy in areas that constitute some of the 30 fastest-growing professions, like those in healthcare occupations and computer technologies (BLS, 2020). Community colleges serve a vital role, not only to students but to the local and national economy as well. As an example, California, the largest community college system in the United States, is also the largest

workforce training institution in the nation (California Community Colleges, 2020). This benefits students and taxpayers alike. Students who graduate from California community colleges “double their earnings within three years” (California Community Colleges, 2020, n.p.).

Taxpayers in the state also benefit by receiving “\$4.50 for every \$1 invested in students who graduate from a California community college” (California Community Colleges, 2020, n.p.).

Community colleges are well-poised to meet workforce demands due to the partnerships they create with businesses needing specialized training to fill specific jobs. Miami-Dade Community College President and 2016 Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient (The Obama White House Archives, 2016), Eduardo Padron, created his legacy of success through a partnership with the Business-Higher Education Forum (BHEF). This is “the nation’s oldest membership organization of Fortune 500 CEOs, college and university presidents, and other leaders dedicated to the creation of a highly skilled future workforce” leading to partnerships with companies like “Amazon, Facebook, Google, McKinsey, Tesla, Microsoft, Generation, IBM, Siemens” (Padron, 2019). These partnerships enabled the college to report that graduates had 23% higher salaries than other new hires in the region (The Aspen Institute. 2019, April 2). Surely, connections of this magnitude are a time-consuming endeavor. Meaningful partnerships are crucial to students seeking worthwhile careers, but can take up a large amount of time and energy for college presidents. Padron was an experienced president, but many recent newcomers to colleges must make these business and industry connections while also acclimating to their new roles as first-time presidents in new institutions.

### **Presidential Turnover**

New presidents are arriving at community colleges in near-unprecedented numbers. Just in 2015 alone, 269 community presidents assumed their roles, meaning that, nationally, one in

four colleges had a transition (Smith, 2016, May 20). As presidents enter these institutions, strategic plans are being developed, new partnerships with industry are being arranged, and often dozens of initiatives are in full swing. Oftentimes, presidents are not just new to the institution, but as was illustrated in survey data from American Association for Community Colleges (AACC) in 2016, “56% were in their first CEO positions at a community college” (Phillipe, 2016, p.4).

Community college presidents are also staying in their positions for a shorter period of time than in recent decades, averaging about 5-6 years (Gordon, 2016). California community college presidents stay an even shorter time in the role, at 3.5 years (Wheelhouse, 2016). This trend is not likely to change, as an AACC survey also reports that “one third of sitting CEOs will retire within 5 years, and 80% of sitting CEOs will retire within the next 10 years” (Phillipe, 2016, p.8). In addition to a large number of community colleges having new presidents, most are new to the job and do not plan to stay in the position for an extended period of time. The rapid turnover of community college presidencies can also cause operational difficulties.

This short time on the job means another typical, time-consuming search required for finding a replacement (Clowers, 2018), i.e.—the president gives notice; institution-wide, operational decision-making slows (or stops); an interim is selected; a hiring committee is formed; candidates are interviewed; recommendations are made to the board; a president is selected; they give notice; and then (sometimes months later) the new president takes their position. In this time period, change initiatives can be stalled, which can also lead to stalled improvements and within the context of Gordon’s (2016) work Cooper states “stable and strong leadership is crucial for efforts to improve rates of community college student retention, completion and transfer” (n.p). To assist new presidents in acclimating to the role and learning

about the institution, they are often dependent upon others to provide them with critical information (Boggs, 2020). The senior leadership team can serve an important part of providing community college presidents with information and support to enhance operational outcomes, especially during times of rapid change (Boggs, 2020; Kezar 2019). Further, many organizations like the Aspen Institute, are focusing on leadership development and mentoring programs to aid in the development of new presidents.

### **Presidential Leadership Training**

The Aspen Institute is a nonpartisan, humanitarian organization who “drives change through dialogue, leadership, and action to help solve the greatest challenges of our time” (The Aspen Institute, 2020a, n.p.). Understanding the critical importance of education and in particular, community colleges, they created the “College Excellence Program” in 2010 in order to improve student success and retention (The Aspen Institute, 2020a). The premiere project of this program was the “Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence” which delivers an impressive one-million-dollar award for institutions who demonstrate exceptional progress in student success outcomes (The Aspen Institute, 2020a). The Aspen Institute focuses on the leadership development of presidents as well.

In 2016, they selected 40 individuals for the inaugural “Aspen Rising Presidential Fellowship,” class (Rodriguez Jansorn, 2016). At the time, College Excellence Program founder, Josh Wyner, stated that the program, “will expand the talent pipeline to the presidency at a time of dramatic presidential turnover and urgent need to improve student outcomes” (Rodriguez Jansorn, 2016).

By 2019, Aspen recognized the large number of new presidents coming to the role and their unique training needs. This led to them creating two very distinct fellowships in their

program, the “Aspen Rising Presidents Fellowship” and the “Aspen New Presidents Fellowship” (Aspen, 2019). The participants of both programs are focused on advancing the needs of low income students and students of color in achieving success within the context of their hallmark pillars of learning, completion, transfer, labor market, and equity (The Aspen Institute, 2020, February 5). There are distinct differences between the two programs.

The “Aspen Rising Presidents Fellowship” (2019b) continues to address the vast turnover in community college presidencies by training participants who have intentions of obtaining a presidency within five years. The program aims center on three broad themes, including “defining and assessing student success”, “transforming institutional culture and core practices” and “implementing new structures with external partners” like those within K-12, university, and community organizations (The Aspen Institute, 2019b, p. 3).

The “Aspen New Presidents Fellowship” (2019a) focuses specifically on the needs of those who have already obtained a presidency and are in their first five years in the role. The aims of this fellowship are within two broad themes, “defining and assessing student success” and “honing a vision and transforming institutional culture through finance, human resources, the development of a senior team, and data use” (p.2). For the inaugural 2020-2021 cohort of this prestigious fellowship, a majority (52%) of those selected for were female, first-time presidents (The Aspen Institute, 2020, February 5). While the intersection of these two themes, that of those specifically trained in the development of senior leadership teams and that of the training of first-time, female presidents, closely align with this study, it was not chosen as the central focus due to the risk of breaching the confidentiality of participants, given the small numbers of presidents who fit the description at the time of selection in December 2020. Please see the recommendations section at the end of this work for recommendations for future study.

In a 2017 Chronicle of Higher Education interview (Field, 2017), Josh Wyner stated that they were intentionally attempting to seat 20 new presidents through their fellows program over the following three years. Of the 160 selected for their combined initial “Aspen Rising Presidential Fellowship” and “Rising Presidential Fellowship” programs since 2016, more than 25% of them have gone on to become community college presidents at the time of this writing (The Aspen Institute. 2021, March 29). Their actions match Wyner’s claim that they intend to move the needle to increase the number of female community college presidents.

### **Female Presidents**

More women are serving as community college presidents than ever before (Gagliardi et al., 2017). From 2011 to 2016, nationally, the number of women presidents in higher education rose by four percentage points overall. More specifically, women hold the presidency in 38% of associate degree-level institutions (Gagliardi et al., 2017). In 2012, Maryland had a rate of female community college presidents that was 20% higher than the national average (Martin, 2014). When Martin (2014) sought to determine the reason, she found that in addition to a favorable labor market and educational attainment, growth in national and regional leadership development opportunities, as well as extensive and intentional mentoring of women community college leaders created an environment favorable for female leadership (Martin, 2014). So, while women are still in the minority, they are increasingly leading more institutions and considering the favorable conditions for them to lead (Martin, 2014), and the pace isn’t likely to slow.

The pipeline to the presidency is most often filled through the Chief Academic Officer position (Eddy, 2018), and this position is held by women in 2 year colleges half of the time (Eckel, Cook, & King, 2009), therefore it appears that the trend for increasing numbers of female candidates will continue. The research, however, indicates that women lead differently than men

(Book, 2000; Helgesen, 1990; Stout-Stewart, 2005). Women have been found to have more democratic (Northouse, 2016); inclusive and collaborative (Eddy, et al., 2020); and transformational (Eagly et al., 2003) leadership styles than men, which are all favorable competencies in the leadership of teams. The effectiveness of female leaders tends to slow when the roles in which they are placed are masculinized (Northouse, 2016). Eddy & Khwaja's (2019) discourse analysis revealed that masculine-normed leadership has remained unchanged over the last 25 years as well.

While women are increasingly taking on presidential roles, the research on the way in which women lead these organizations demonstrates that they differ from men. In Northouse's (2016) meta-analysis of differing leadership styles, he found that women tend to lead in "more democratic, or participative, manner than men" (p. 402). Another meta-analysis by Eagly et al. (2003) demonstrated that women tend to be more transformational leaders as well. Women tend to be less effective, however, when the leadership role is masculinized (Eddy, 2018; Northouse, 2016). Considering that women are filling presidencies that were traditionally held by men, more information about how to adapt the model to meet their leadership style is needed. Also, considering that the research (Eddy et al., 2020) shows that women tend to be more inclusive and collaborative, and knowing that leveraging the capacity of senior leadership teams can enhance institutional effectiveness (Boggs, 2020; Kezar, 2019), research into how women presidents collaborate to build and utilize effective senior leadership teams is important to understand.

### **Usefulness of Senior Leadership Teams**

It is in times of great transition and in daily operations that presidents can make their work more successful through reliance on members of their senior leadership team (Boggs, 2020; Kezar, 2019; Kezar and Holcombe, 2017). A college president's relationship with the senior

leadership team can be vital to ensuring their own success (Boggs, 2020; Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Kezar 2019; Wageman, 2008). With so many new presidents coming to the role, and many who are also first-time presidents, the senior leadership team can have the capacity to smoothly transition a president into their role (Boggs, 2020).

Senior Leadership Teams suffer from several difficulties in terms of defining who they are and what they do. For example, across institutions, what we will entitle *Senior Leadership Teams*, often possess different nomenclature. They may be called Senior Leadership Teams (Wageman, 2008), Top Management Teams (Woodfield & Kennie, 2008), the President's Cabinet or a myriad of other names. Community college senior leadership teams are generally those charged with carrying out operations in a particular division, or divisions, of a college like Student Services, Academic Programs and Services, Information Technology, and the like. Senior leadership teams are defined by Kezar (2019) as, "typically a team that works on the articulation of vision and direction, priority-setting, and strategy that shape decision-making and policymaking for the institution" (p. 104).

Presidents who utilize their leadership teams effectively "outdistance the capacities of a single person" (Wageman et al. 2008, p. 7). In addition to strengthening their leadership position by leveraging the competencies of a larger pool of intellect, Wageman et al., (2008) asserts that widely distributing the responsibilities and decision-making can create a more favorable culture by its ability to energize the creativity of groups. Additionally, Wageman et al. (2008) say senior leadership team development and utilization allows the chief executive to have those who will carry out the operation in the room when the decision is made further ensuring operational effectiveness.

For community college presidents, specific examples have been provided to better conduct college operations by using teams (Bailey et al., 2015) for which others agree, like that community colleges can significantly increase rates of student success if administrators reorganize “programs of study, support services and instruction” (Boggs, 2020, p. 205). While many who perform research on teams strongly suggest team leadership as the key to enhancing operations, (Kezar, 2019; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Northouse, 2016; Wageman et al., 2008), Boggs (2020) makes the bold proclamation that community colleges’ work to enhance student success outcomes “can *only* be accomplished through effective leadership teams” (Boggs, 2020, p. 206). So, while presidential leadership is important, their effective use of the senior leadership team appears to be a vital component to community college success.

### **Effective Utilization of Senior Leadership Teams**

Senior leadership team members can help presidents to make their message clear to constituents (Boggs, 2020; Kezar, 2019) and, considering their connections at the institution, can “make the difference between success and failure for the leader, and the difference between excellence and mediocrity for the institution” (Boggs, 2020, p. 16). A team’s effectiveness starts when the team is formed (Gaval, 2009; Tuckman, 1965) and can be continually assessed by the characteristics they possess (Hackman, 2012; Larson & Lasfasto, 1989). Having a team that works well together (Gaval, 2009), shares responsibility (Kezar 2019, Kezar & Holcolmb, 2017), and works as a real team (Hackman, 2012; Woodfield & Kennie, 2008), meaning their work is interdependent, are all important components to ensuring a team’s effectiveness.

The process by which presidents assess and form their senior leadership teams varies widely (Gaval, 2009). This is likely due to the aforementioned process by which Kezar (2019) stated that higher education presidents utilize these teams, as being defined by tradition, meaning

there is no handbook or published promising practices. While sometimes team members may be in training for the president's position, their work as members of the senior leadership team requires the ability to work collaboratively with other members of the senior leadership team to produce results. Even if one can determine who they are, some of them do not work as *real teams*, (Woodfield & Kennie, 2008). Much has been written on the effective use of senior leadership teams in healthcare, an environment that understandably takes an interdisciplinary team for the organization to function optimally, and in business, where the needs of the organization require agility. When examining the use of senior leadership teams from this perspective, and by adding what little research is available for higher education, several useful insights are gained as well as a few models that are applicable on how teams can be used effectively.

Team Leadership theory and the models and framework that support it, as outlined in Northouse (2016), like the *Hill Model for Team Leadership*, Lafasto and Larson's (1989) *Characteristics of Team Excellence*, and Hackman's (2012) *Enabling Conditions of Group Effectiveness*, all provide practical solutions to implement effective leadership teams. The Hackman (2012) and Larson and LaFasto (1989) models are more focused on the enabling conditions and characteristics of teams (Northouse, 2016, p. 368) that lead to a team's effectiveness. Hackman (2012) states that teams must have a compelling purpose and Larson and LaFasto (1989) state that they must have a clear and elevating goal. The Hill Model (Northouse, 2016) provides guidance for the top leader, in this case the community college president, to form, monitor and guide the team. This model researched the president's role in team leadership from a phenomenological perspective, seeing the president's role in the team's effectiveness as beginning with their "initial leadership decisions, moving to leader actions, and finally focusing

on the indicators of team effectiveness” (Northouse, 2016, p. 381). The president’s role is to communicate goals and expectations and then to use their own observations to know if and when to intervene, and then to aid the team in effective problem solving. All three of these guides help leaders to assess their team’s effectiveness and to perform continuous improvements.

Institutional operations are further enhanced, though, if teams are provided with shared responsibility (Boggs, 2020; Northouse, 2016).

### **Shared Leadership**

Senior leadership teams can be especially useful in leveraging the talents of a greater number of people working in college operations if they espouse shared leadership (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). Kezar defined “distributed leadership” in an earlier work as, “as moving away from the leader/follower binary; capitalizing on the importance of leaders throughout the organization, not just those in positions of authority; and creating an infrastructure so that organizations can benefit from the leadership of multiple people” (Kezar, 2017, p.v). The utilization of senior leadership teams with shared leadership leverage the competencies of a greater number of people to more quickly carry out community college operations (Boggs, 2020; Kezar, 2019; Northouse, 2016). Hambrick and Mason state that even though shared leadership is important to institutional change, “we have had very little study or examination of teams in higher education, particularly senior leadership teams,” (Kezar 2019, p. 104).

### **Teamwork and Real Teams**

Another important consideration in presidents leading effective teams is that they foster authentic teamwork (Boggs, 2020; Wageman et al., 2008; Woodfield & Kennie, 2008). The famous quote by Aristotle about ‘the sum of the total being greater than its parts’ is fitting when discussing the usefulness of senior leadership teams working with shared responsibility in higher

education. Woodfield and Kennie (2008) brought together the body of research across disciplines to determine that although higher education teams function in a very different environment, they face the same challenges. Higher education institutions generally work individually, rather than collectively, even though research demonstrates that cooperative work generally results in enhanced outcomes. Fostering teams to act in real teams rather than in competing silos has been demonstrated to enhance operational outcomes in a variety of other sectors (Woodfield & Kennie, 2008),

In each of the models posed by Hill; Hackman; and Larson and LaFasto, they establish criteria to make them real teams, as have been mentioned in the works of other higher education researchers (Wageman et al., 2008; Woodfield & Kennie, 2008). Although the Hackman model already clearly included components for a real team, he explicitly uses one primary criteria for effectiveness, stating the team must be a *real team* through their interdependent work. Albeit a bit redundant, he is clearly trying to get his point across—teams must engage in true teamwork in order to be effective. In the Hill Model, an outside perspective allows the group to act as a real team and also brings in an element of shared leadership, as the president is not acting as a figurehead, but rather, is examining their ways of work and setting the team forth with a goal.

For teamwork to be beneficial, teams must authentically function in concert with one another both as individuals of a team and as leaders of their own individual divisions or departments throughout the organization (Boggs, 2020; Woodfield & Kennie, 2008). It is through this that their collective efforts become more useful than their individual contributions. Those groups identified as “teams” do not always function as such (Woodfield & Kennie, 2008). Bensimon and Newmann (1993) stated that, from an institutional perspective, leadership teams who function as teams can be broken down into two groups, authentic teams who are

“functionally and cognitively complex” (p. 151) and those who are not authentically acting as teams who are “functionally and cognitively simple” (p.151). Those who are authentically acting as teams, are identified as those who are complex, function in three ways: “utilitarian, expressive, and cognitive” each of which require complex “thinking” roles in the organization (p.151). These intellectual roles create work which tends to be time consuming for the team, not only because they are working collectively, but also because their work requires developing ideas, like strategic plans. While this work is challenging, it is also rewarding for its members (Bensimon & Newmann, 1993).

Woodfield and Kennie (2008) also offered a solution to conducting effective teams. They state that teams must “focus on the right mix of strategic and more operational matters and to leave other issues to more appropriate bodies within the institution” (p.406). When teams work individually, the goal should be that they do so with their thoughts toward a collective effort for the organization, rather than one that ignores or competes with others within the organization. Kezar (2019) notes the importance of developing “a shared vision and to narrow the often long list of institutional priorities” (p.117) in order to effectively use teams to meet the needs of institutions of higher education.

For institutions to weather the storms of uncertainty due to changing demands and complexity, as well as rapid presidential turnover, reliance on senior leadership teams is vital (Boggs, 2020; Kezar, 2019; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). It is not enough to simply name a team (Wageman et al. 2008), but these individuals must work collectively (Wageman et al. 2008; Woodfield & Kennie, 2008) to make effective use of their talents (LaFasto & Larson, 2001; Northouse, 2016). Further, to enhance the effectiveness of the large number of female presidents coming to the role, we must “be conscious of the language we use to communicate team

expectations” (Eddy et al., 2020, p.37) and ensure that masculine language and leadership expectations are removed (Eddy et al., 2020; Northouse, 2016). This will allow institutions to get the full benefit of female presidents proving democratic, collaborative, and transformational leadership through the effective utilization of their senior leadership teams.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Community colleges are becoming progressively complex institutions (Eddy et al., 2015) all the while presidential turnover is alarmingly swift. The demands of community college presidencies require commitment to complex issues, in addition to their already-demanding schedules of running the day-to-day operations at institutions that fulfill a variety of purposes to local communities. National non-profit institutions, like the aforementioned Aspen Institute, are working to assist with these challenges by helping to develop new leaders, especially the high numbers of female presidents assuming the role. Institutional vitality is also aided by leveraging the talents of a greater number of people in the senior leadership team.

The problem is that even though community college leadership is changing to include more females and we have evidence that women lead differently, as Kezar (2019) noted, we are using traditional models of forming and utilizing senior leadership teams, which may be ineffective. In other words, current female presidents are provided advice and given models of leading senior leadership teams that are not conducive to their style of leadership. While the research (Boggs, 2020) demonstrates that senior leadership teams are key to the effectiveness of presidents and to institutions, new community college presidents need to understand the conditions by which teams operate effectively (Kezar, 2019). This is of particular importance in an era when so many new presidents, many of which are female, are coming to community colleges (Gagliardi et al., 2017; Phillippe, 2016). Female leadership now constitutes a third of all

community college institutions (Gagliardi et al. 2017; Phillippe, 2016) and we know that non-masculinized discourse and expectations will enhance their leadership (Eddy & Khwaja, 2019; Northouse, 2016).

The practices for the utilization of senior leadership teams that exist in other areas, like healthcare systems are a useful tool, but given just the vast differences between healthcare institutions and community college budgets alone, we can see a wide gulf in the relevance of the application of theories between the two. As an example, when comparing the largest community college in the state of North Carolina, Wake Tech Community College's annual operating revenue in 2018 of \$216 million (Wake Tech, 2019) to the largest healthcare system in the same county, Wake Med, which had an annual operating revenue of \$1.3 billion in the same year (WakeMed, 2018), we see how it would be difficult to apply theories of practice from one to the other. Community colleges are operating with much leaner budgets, and thus would benefit from better utilizing their workforce capacity more efficiently. Furthermore, the research on female chief executives' utilization of senior leadership teams is scarce, even when broadened to other disciplines, like business or healthcare.

Eddy et al. (2020) states that community colleges are unique institutions due to the higher number of women leading them as opposed to other higher education institutions and that "gender plays a significant role in teamwork and team leadership" (p.21). Female leaders are well-suited to bring solutions to contemporary colleges facing strains with their penchant for working democratically (Northouse, 2016), transformationally (Eagly et al., 2003), and collaboratively (Eddy et al., 2020), all of which contribute to leveraging the work of teams (Wageman et al., 2008). Eddy emphatically states that the study of women's presidential leadership is timely (Eddy et al., 2020). At the center of this is the need to know how new, first-

time, female presidents in the first five years of their presidencies make effective use of their senior leadership teams. This research provides the rising number of female presidents with promising practices for utilization at their institutions.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand the promising practices of new, first-time, female presidents in effectively utilizing their senior leadership teams. Further, to increase the likelihood that the presidents would have effectively utilized their senior leadership teams, those who had received training in an Aspen Presidents Fellowship were selected for inclusion in this study. Considering the changing demographics of those coming to community college presidencies (Gagliardi et al. 2017), it was especially important at this time to study females entering the role for the first time. In particular, understanding the promising practices of new, female, presidents who have successfully made use of their senior leadership teams provides better guidance to the large number of new non-traditional presidents entering the field. One aspect of importance that Eddy and Khwaja posit is, “What remains unknown is whether these conceptions of leadership are inclusive of women” (2019, p. 56). As community colleges become increasingly complex (Eddy et al 2105; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017), national organizations focus increasingly on leadership development of women (The Aspen Institute, 2020) and the literature demonstrates the importance of effective use of senior leadership teams (Boggs, 2020; Gaval, 2009; Kezar, 2019; Northouse 2016; Wageman et al. 2008), more information was needed about how new, female, first-time, presidents make effective use of their senior leadership teams. Studying those trained by award-granting organizations like The Aspen Institute was not the qualifying mark, but rather enhanced the probability that effective utilization of the team had occurred.

This research is useful to a wide swath of new presidents as they assume their roles and seek to base decisions on research-informed best practices (Kezar, 2019). These practices can help to inform a new generation of presidents, regardless of gender, race or ethnicity, in creating senior leadership teams that can partner with presidents to carry out ongoing processes, determine the needs of the organization sooner, and to help initiate and accomplish change actions for the betterment of institutions.

### **Methodology**

This research was conducted using the qualitative method of narrative inquiry with five, female, first-time, presidents in their first five years in the role, who have also served in some type of Aspen Presidents Fellowship program, to understand how they effectively utilized their senior leadership teams to meet the needs of their institutions. Narrative inquiry helps us to understand the lived experiences, or “stories,” of individuals and how they make sense of these events (Kim, 2016, Merriam, 2016). As Frank (2000) states, however, the “story” and the secondary making sense of the event or “narrative” are two different points of understanding the lived experience. The “story” is the preliminary retelling of the event, and differs from the “narrative” which is the point that the research participant works through the event to bring meaning to it. As Patton (2015) explains “One distinction is to treat the story as data and the narrative as analysis, which involves interpreting the story, placing it in context, and comparing it with other stories.” This type of research requires the researcher to interact and deeply connect with those providing their firsthand accounts (Creswell, 2014). This profound, relational approach is appropriate for this research because the study seeks to understand the personal experiences of each of these female presidents in order to find universal characteristics that may inform future practices in the field. Considering the presidents may not have considered what led

to successful practices, the interviews happened over a period of time and with time in between each interview for self-reflection.

Narrative inquiry also required the researcher to understand the “in process” nature of the narrative and to recognize the past, present, and future of the context of the story (Riley, 2004). In the case of understanding the presidents’ lived experiences, narrative inquiry helped to identify key points in time that the president and senior leadership team had breakthrough moments and how the relationship developed over time. Further, the combination of the president's own explanation or “organizing theme” and the form of the narrative (stable, progressive, or regressive) helped to provide the “coherent directionality” of the story and is what gave it its meaning over time (Riley, 2004, p. 230).

Creswell stated that qualitative research, like narrative inquiry, is well-suited as a method by researchers who possess a strong “interest in creating a better society” (p.21). Due to the role community colleges serve in society and the capacity for the effective utilization of senior leadership teams to create efficient institutions (Boggs, 2020), this was another cause for the selection of the method.

Better understanding the practices of these presidents required conducting three, hour-long interviews, with the last occurring as a virtual campus visit. According to Creswell (2014), narrative inquiry is the process of the research participant retelling their story into a “narrative chronology” to the researcher who then blends their own life into a “collaborative narrative” (p. 12). Creswell (2014) stated there are three primary methods to ensuring data analysis is credible. These are triangulation, member checking, and peer evaluation. In the case of this research, to triangulate the data, one artifact from a collaborative project was examined alongside the interview data. To member-check the information, an opportunity for participants to provide

either a written or verbal reflection, (whichever they prefer) to the written research was included in the process. To gain the senior leadership teams' perspective of their president's leadership style and effectiveness, a virtual lunch was conducted with members of the senior leadership teams. To gain an understanding of the appropriate direction of questions that were posed, a familiarity with the research was gained to inform the overarching theme of the questions for these encounters.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Team leadership has been studied from many useful perspectives to gain understanding about how institutions benefit from them. Kezar's (2019) research provided a review the literature studying senior leadership teams from many angles, of which, some examples are: composition (Gaval, 2009; Whelan, 2009); vision and direction (Morgeson, 2010; Woodfield & Kennie, 2007); team planning or onboarding (Carpenter et al., 2004; Purser & Cabana, 1998); coaching and development (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993); roles and responsibilities (Belbin, 2013); and relationships and dynamics (Carpenter et al., 2004; Gaval, 2009; Wageman et al., 2008). Because many teams are already formed and have their roles already provided at the onset of a president taking the role, and because team effectiveness is credited with creating agile institutions (Boggs, 2020), the focus of this dissertation will be the literature and theoretical framework that assesses, in particular, a team's effectiveness. Therefore, the theoretical framework that underpins the understanding of how presidents make effective use of their senior leadership teams is LaFasto and Larson's "Six Dimensions of Team Leadership" (LaFasto & Larson, 2001).

For their research, LaFasto and Larson (2001) surveyed 6,000 employees of 600 leaders, across businesses, healthcare and education establishments. What resulted is a framework that

focuses specifically on how top leaders make effective use of their teams, which is directly aligned with this study. LaFasto and Larson's work (2001) has been used widely in a number of disciplines, including business, healthcare, and education (discussed in detail in Chapter 2) for its straightforward nature, reliance on shared leadership, alignment with female leadership, team building, motivation, and commonalities with other measures of leadership assessment.

LaFasto and Larson (2001) use six straightforward, concise guiding principles in their "Six Dimensions of Team Leadership." They are: focus on the goal; ensure a collaborative climate; build confidence; demonstrate sufficient technical know-how; set priorities; and manage performance (LaFasto & Larson, 2001, p.99). These criteria were developed through research disclosed in their 1989 study on organizational team excellence and high performance, which was refined in 2001 (Northouse, 2016). Accompanying their later work, was a 42-item questionnaire entitled "Collaborative Team Leader Instrument" (Northouse, 2016, p. 389), which is still-widely utilized and demonstrates a strong focus on shared leadership. While the criteria are simply defined, have practical applications, and are concisely stated, they are by no means simple to accomplish. Priority setting, alone, appears difficult in an era of widespread initiative fatigue. LaFasto and Larson (2001) stated that these principles cannot be assessed singly by the leader themselves. They challenge leaders to get feedback from their team, because if they don't, they are guessing at their effectiveness "and probably overrating it" (LaFasto & Larson, 2001, p.99).

In addition to Northouse's review of LaFasto and Larson, Human Resource researchers, Barnett and Weidenfeller's (2016) literature review on the topic of team effectiveness cited the LaFasto and Larson model as standing alongside other works (Morgeson et al., 2010; Zaccaro et al., 2001) which point to the need for a leader to provide conditions for shared leadership. In

particular though, they mention Day, Gronn, and Salas' (2004) review of developing leadership capacity in teams with shared leadership and the alignment with LaFasto and Larson's model (Barnett & Weidenfeller, 2016).

These guiding principles are held within their larger conceptual framework, "The Five Dynamics of Teamwork and Collaboration" (LaFasto & Larson, 2001). The more broadly stated conceptual framework provides guidance for leading teams from the perspective that begins with the responsibilities of team members all the way to the responsibilities of organizations to create environments that foster effective teams (LaFasto & Larson, 2001). The conceptual framework also guided the context of this study, but a more detailed analysis of the relationship between the president and the senior leadership team was the primary focus and the research questions clearly overlaid the theoretical framework questions.

### **Research Questions**

As mentioned previously, LaFasto and Larson developed their own survey instrument. It was designed as a questionnaire and given to both a leader and the team they lead. While this was a useful tool, the purpose of this research was to get to the deeper meanings about how the leader accomplished these goals. Therefore, the broader, central question that framed this study was, how do new, female, first-time presidents in their first five years of coming to the role, who have also served in an Aspen Presidents Fellowship, effectively utilize their senior leadership teams? The accompanying semi-structured, sub-questions that frame this study were:

- How much time do presidents take to learn about the individuals, the team, and/or the institution before making changes to the senior leadership team?
- How do presidents first define, or relate, goals for your senior leadership team?

- In what ways do presidents foster their senior leadership teams to work collaboratively?
- Do members of senior leadership teams have shared responsibility in leading the institution?
- What do presidents do to quell apprehension and indecisiveness within their teams?
- What are some of the ways they build confidence within their teams?
- How do presidents balance utilize their own technical know-how with talents of those on their teams?
- How do presidents set the priorities for their teams?
- How do presidents hold team members accountable collectively and individually?

## **Framing of Key Terms**

### ***Senior Leadership Teams***

Senior leadership teams are generally composed of a team of administrators who report directly to the college CEO (Boggs, 2020). In the case of community colleges, these are often vice-presidents who operate various divisions of the institution, i.e. Curriculum Education, Student Services, Human Resources, Information Technology, etc. Generally speaking, this body of leaders is those with key decision-making authority and who work collectively (Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Kezar, 2019).

### ***Shared or Distributed Leadership***

Shared leadership is sometimes also called “distributed leadership” (Harris, 2005; Spillane, 2005), “team leadership theory” (Northouse, 2016), or “collaborative leadership” (Hallinger & Heck, 2010), oftentimes with nuanced differences. For the purposes here, shared leadership (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017) was defined as that in which team members each assumed

and shared roles of authority to achieve collective goals. Unless quoting a source that used a different name, the term “shared leadership” was used throughout this study and in the context of those people who work collaboratively, with shared authority.

### ***Real Teams***

Many different criteria existed for teams to be classified as “real teams.” What these had in common was the characteristics defined by Wageman et al. (2008) as those who had clear membership, were stable, worked collaboratively, and who were “highly interdependent” (p.16).

### **Summary**

Community colleges are increasingly complex institutions, requiring a greater diversity of talents and abilities. They have demonstrated that they are well-poised to meet workforce demands and that they are providing a significant return on investment to the taxpayers in the states they serve (California Community Colleges, 2020; Fox Valley Technical Institute, 2020; Padron, 2017). Across the United States, however, a large number of presidents are retiring, leaving significant turnover in community college’s top leadership positions (Gagliardi, 2017; Phillippe, 2016; Smith, 2016, May 20). Additionally, there is a rise of presidents who are new to the role, including an increase in female presidents, who now make up more than 30% of the presidencies in community colleges across the United States. These new, first-time, female presidents are coming to the role in record numbers (Gagliardi et al., 2017) and may have differing leadership styles from their male counterparts. The next generation of leaders can benefit from knowing how new, first-time, female presidents leverage the capacity of the senior leadership teams that support them. It is important to not rely on what Kezar (2019) states are “idiosyncratic norms and traditions” (p.105), but instead, to give other new presidents a tool-kit of promising practices to assist them in achieving the same success.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

As was presented in Chapter One, this narrative inquiry was intended to examine how new, first-time, female presidents in the first five years of their presidency effectively utilized their senior leadership teams. Although it is not central to the thesis, those who had served in an Aspen Presidents Fellowship were selected in order to enhance the probability that they may be individuals who would effectively utilize their teams. The background outlining the importance and complexity of both community colleges and the role of the president were presented in that chapter. Additionally, the era of presidential turnover and an era of changing demographics of new presidents were provided. The information demonstrated that this era of transition and change also required the need to leverage a greater number of people with a diversity of skills, found most readily in the senior leadership team. Chapter One stated the research about the way that new presidents, particularly female presidents, utilize their senior leadership team is largely unexamined. To best understand effective utilization of senior leadership teams, the LaFasto and Larson theoretical framework was provided as a guide. Here in Chapter Two, the literature related to these topics is reviewed.

### **Importance of Community Colleges**

The literature outlining the modern importance of community colleges in the United States cannot be overstated. Repeatedly, community colleges are said to be a vital component to the country's economy, the economic health and economic mobility of its citizens, and to businesses who rely upon a trained workforce (AACC, 2014; Eddy, 2019; Crawford & Jervis, 2011; The White House, 2016).

Community colleges are viewed as vital to the country's success generally because they offer a variety of needed certificates and degrees, at a low cost, have flexible scheduling, and are

easily accessible by those residing in local communities (Crawford & Jervis, 2011; The White House, 2010). Former President Obama further stated that community colleges were instrumental in making the U.S. competitive in the world economy and intended for them to produce 5 million graduates by 2020 through a plan he unveiled in 2010 (The White House, 2010). Demonstrating just how important the Obama administration thought community colleges were to the national economy, he proposed *The Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act* with \$2 billion in funding over four years to train students in desperately needed career fields in community colleges (The White House, 2010).

Community colleges are demonstrated in the literature and research as a path for social and economic mobility (Eddy, 2019; Crawford & Jervis, 2011; Heelan & Mellow, 2017). They enroll a diverse student body, enrolling a minority of white students at 48% in 2019, and steadily declining by about a percentage point per year for the three years prior (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). In 2014, the American Association of Community Colleges warned that 50 percent of Americans were at or below the poverty level and that the most effective way to change this was to redesign the community college system (AACC, 2014). Just a year later, in 2015, the charge was answered when President Barack Obama's State of the Union address proposed to make community college degrees free to American citizens in his America's College Promise proposal. He stated that because they offered affordable, accessible, and meaningful credentials, 40 percent of students enroll in community colleges, and that access to them should be expanded. He viewed them as the backbone of the American education system, having the potential to not only aid individuals, but the country at-large.

## **Community College Complexity**

Community colleges often have relevant and lean program requirements with credentialing that readily meets market demands. Remaining relevant to so many different fields, however, many of which are related to the most critical demands in the American economy (BLS, 2019) also creates very complex educational institutions. Besides being a good value and more accessible, due to open door policies and partnerships with area high schools, community colleges also serve communities with festivals and cultural activities (Crawford & Jervis, 2011). Community colleges are well-known for the vast offerings in developmental education; high school dual-enrollment; degrees to transfer to universities; job-ready certificates and diplomas; and skill-bolstering/personally enriching continuing education. Conceptualizing, developing, and organizing all of these programs is no small feat.

The transfer education degrees offered by community colleges allow an individual to earn a two-year degree for transfer to university to complete a four-year degree program through comprehensive articulation agreements. Articulation agreements detail responsibilities for both the two- and four-year institutions intended to provide, in the best scenarios (Edinbarough, Bouniaev & Elliott, 2014), results for near-seamless transfer for students. Ideal transfer conditions are not always widely experienced by students though. While top administrators attempt to create transfer arrangements with attention to every detail, transfers still lag and more attention is needed to improve them (Bartek, 2020; LaSota & Zumeta, 2016).

Other types of credentials offered are those in career programs that result in a degree or certificate which allows an individual to immediately enter the workforce, increasingly in the form of industry partnerships. In the early to mid-1990s, a large part of the literature bemoaned the shift of community colleges to industry partnership training grounds (Guenther, 1999; Teitel,

1991), as it seemed they had just become established as university transfer partners and were being shifted back to technical education. Teitel, (1991) stated that since the 1970s they had become comprehensive colleges and that their transformation into “virtual trade schools” posed a “threat to their legitimacy” (p.7). Now, nearly 30 years later, the transformation appears complete at many institutions due to their vast industry partnerships, but the illegitimacy does not appear to be realized. Instead, students benefit from a wealth of programs, resulting in real economic mobility (Padron, 2019).

The attractiveness of the diverse programs, especially with their promise of economic mobility draws large numbers of students (The White House, 2010) new to the world of higher education, who often need developmental education (Crawford & Jervis, 2011, Pruett & Absher, 2015) and assistance navigating how to transfer to universities (Bailey et al., 2015), adding another level of complexity to already-complex institutions. Community colleges enroll more students needing developmental education than four-year institutions, prior to starting college-level courses (Crawford & Jervis, 2011, Pruett & Absher, 2015). Many of whom are first generation college students, who also need guidance to understand how to meet graduation requirements (Bailey et al., 2015) through expert advising practices. Add to this complexity, the fact that community colleges, especially since the 1930s, have served as a hub for skills training and personal enrichment courses in their continuing education offerings (Meier, 2008). Today, these offerings are realized in short-term courses like notary certification and short-term conversational language skills.

Community colleges also provide their courses in a diversity of delivery methods, like through online courses, dual enrollment, early college high schools, community-based education, apprenticeships and internships, and via the traditional brick and mortar classroom environment.

Besides the cost associated with each of these delivery methods, each of these methods brings with it the need to make these delivery methods work efficiently and according to state and federal guidelines. For example, distance education alone brings with it the need to make virtual content meet very complex, federal “Section 508 Guidelines” (U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) Office of Government-wide Policy (OGP), to ensure that web content is accessible to students with disabilities. At the center of these operations, and the ultimate responsibility often falling squarely on their shoulders, community college presidents must manage a vast number of duties in the complex institutions they serve.

### **Presidential Job Complexity**

The strains of higher education leadership gained attention when the former military commander, William H. McRaven, who organized the raid on Osama bin Laden, stepped down from his chancellorship at The University of Texas after three years and stated, “The toughest job in the nation is the one of an academic- or health-institution president,” (Thomason, 2020, n.p.). A 2006 assessment of community college presidents found that they spend 57 hours a week, including nights and weekends, on administrative duties (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). Further, the study provided insights into what they do during these hours. In addition to meetings and administrative duties internal to college operations, more than half of the presidents surveyed in 2006 were mentoring future leaders. Approximately, one third sat on corporate boards and nearly all (97%) sat on nonprofit boards, both without compensation. They also met frequently with business officials and K-12 partners and on a near monthly basis with state officials (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007).

Throughout the literature, it is apparent that not the least of a president’s responsibilities is that to the students at their institutions (Eddy, 2019; Heelan & Mellow, 2017; Wyner, 2014).

While community colleges fill an important role in society (Eddy, 2019; The White House, 2010), they struggle to create real student success. The reality is, less than 46% of students who enter into community colleges nationally obtain a degree or certificate (AACC, 2014). Many of these students are inexperienced in the college world and suffer the lingering effects of systemic racism. Many instances in the literature deem it the president's responsibility to undo these inequities (AACC, 2014; Heelan & Mellow, 2017).

In meeting the completion agenda, community college presidents struggle to help their most vulnerable students. As the National Center for Education Statistics reported in 2011, "one analysis indicates that 6 years after college entry, only 30% of low-income community college students, 26% of Black students, and 26% of Hispanic students have completed either a degree or a certificate, compared with 39% and 36% of White and high-income students, respectively" (AACC, 2014, p. 14). Poor student completion rates are often exacerbated because advising is inadequate (AACC, 2014; Bailey et al., 2015, Bartek, 2020). Community job needs often go unfilled due to misalignment of programs and real jobs and the lack of agility of some community colleges (AACC, 2014). It is no wonder that colleges and presidents who overcome these metrics are well-regarded in the literature (Arnim, 2019; Fox Valley Technical Institute, 2020).

Weisman and Vaughan (2007) also noted that from 2001-2007 a president's focus was shifting away from internal operations, one example of increasing external operation job responsibilities would be the very important workforce development connections mentioned previously (Fruehling, 2017; Mims, 2018, June 29; Padron, 2019). Workforce development was one example of a time consuming process that presented an uneasy balance of responsibilities, but one vital to the president's role. As Eddy (2019) stated, agility and understanding the needs

of the workforce helps to keep colleges viable.” On the other hand, though, these connections are not just a drain on a president's time, they are also a drain on a college's financial situation.

While Fletcher (2017) agreed that workforce development programs were essential to colleges remaining viable, he noted that these programs are “experiencing changing demands from the community, declining government support, debates over function and purpose, and escalating competition from for-profit higher education institutions” (p. 373). He proposed that institutions find new funding sources, restructure tuition costs, seek grants, and reallocate resources (Fletcher, 2017). This balancing act adds another layer to an already toppling list of demands on presidents-- the financial strains of operating the college.

Community college's lean budgets have become even leaner in many instances across the country (Fletcher, 2018; Flynn, 2012). These budget cuts can force community colleges to lower the capacity for enrollment and cut programs (Flynn, 2012). To combat this, presidents often seek funding sources outside traditional local and state revenue sources. Price, Schneider, & Quick's (2016) research of the literature yielded financial challenges as “most critical for the operation of community colleges” (p. 509) by community college presidents. Due to the deleterious effects decreased funding can have on an institution, presidents must sometimes add “fundraiser” to their long list of job responsibilities (Price et al., 2016).

Those in the Chief Academic Officer role, after witnessing the demands of the presidents' job, were observing “the daily stressors of the president's role and do not find the role appealing” (Appiah-Padi, 2014). Historically, the literature has demonstrated that the most common path to the presidency was through the academic pipeline (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). Considering the large number of retiring presidents (Gagliardi et al., 2017; Phillipe, 2016) and the short-tenure anticipated for sitting presidents (Gordon, 2016; Wheelhouse, 2016), “contraction of the

presidency pipeline due to CAO attrition could and will compound leadership crises faced by U.S. colleges” (Appiah-Padi, 2014, pp. 1-2).

### **Presidential Transitions**

The literature signaled for alarming rates of presidential turnover over the last decade (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007) and in the current decade (Phillipe, 2016; Smith, 2016, May 20) turnover is continuing. Just in 2015 alone, 269 community presidents assumed their roles, meaning that, nationally, one in four colleges had a transition (Smith, 2016, May 20). Oftentimes, presidents are not just new to the institution, but as was illustrated in survey data from American Association for Community Colleges (AACC) in 2016, “56% were in their first CEO positions at a community college” (Phillipe, 2016, p.4). Community college presidents are also staying in their positions for a shorter period of time than in recent decades, averaging about 5-6 years (Gordon, 2016). California community college presidents stay an even shorter time in the role, at 3.5 years (Wheelhouse, 2016). This trend isn’t likely to change, as AACC survey also reports that “that one third of sitting CEOs will retire within 5 years, and 80% of sitting CEOs will retire within the next 10 years.” (Phillipe, 2016, p.8). So, in addition to a large number of community colleges having new presidents, most are new to the job and do not plan to stay in the position for an extended period of time. The rapid turnover of community college presidencies can also cause operational difficulties (Appiah-Padi, 2014; Wheelhouse, 2016). In addition to rapid turnover, those coming to the presidency are increasingly female, and the research indicates that they not only lead differently (Book, 2000; Helgesen, 1990; Stout-Stewart, 2005), but that they work best when the roles and expectations are not masculinized (Eddy & Khwaja, 2019; Northouse, 2016).

## Female Leadership

Within the last decade, the number of announcements touting the first female president to be hired at an institution were numerous. This is a remarkable achievement, because women were not a topic in leadership literature until the 1970s (Chemers, 1997). Women have made gains since then and now lead one in three community colleges (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Considering the newness of women in presidential leadership positions, some of the research questions ask if women lead differently than men (Northouse, 2016) and if women work more effectively in certain environments (Stout-Stewart, 2005). The literature on leadership very often states that women do lead differently (Book, 2000; Helgesen, 1990; Northouse, 2016; Stout-Stewart, 2005) and notes that women's successful leadership can be stymied when the institutional discourse uses masculinized language (Eddy & Khwaja, 2019, Northouse, 2016) and sets expectations in the context of leadership styles generally exhibited by men (Tedrow, 2001). Women most often work in ways that have been developed by the men that preceded them, which causes women to "spend a good deal of time and energy simply trying to survive" (Tedrow, 2001, p. 19). Further, new, first-time female presidents are worth examination because the differences in female leadership styles "might better advance needed educational reforms than traditional leadership frameworks have" (Wenniger & Conroy, 2001, p. 18) and their styles are those "styles associated with contemporary notions of effective leadership" (Northouse, 2016, p. 404). Understanding how women lead can help to establish promising practices in the field for other, new women leaders who are assuming presidential positions at community colleges today and in the future. Women and men are both effective at leadership (Northouse, 2016). They do lead in different ways though. Women have been found to possess more democratic (Northouse, 2016); inclusive and collaborative (Eddy et al., 2020); and

transformational (Eagly et al., 2003) leadership styles than men, which are all favorable terms to the leadership of teams.

Considering that community college leadership is one area most hospitable to female leadership (Stout-Stewart, 2006), female leadership styles are conducive to team leadership (Eddy et al., 2020) and that senior leadership teams have the capacity to create agile institutions (Boggs, 2020), community college leaders would benefit from understanding women in the context of the charge posed by Kezar (2019). She stated we need to know more about how “SLTs develop a set of priorities, articulate strategies to narrow the agenda, and determine ways to manage the politics of prioritization” (p. 108). These questions also align with the LaFasto and Larson (2001) “Six Dimensions of Team Leadership” framework, which in part, determine effectiveness in terms of “focusing on a goal, set priorities, and ensure a collaborative climate” (p. 99). The intersection of female presidents, senior leadership teams, and how female presidents effectively lead them appears to be a gap in the literature.

## **Senior Leadership Teams**

### ***Benefits of Relying on Senior Leadership Teams***

Presidents can make college operations operate more efficiently, especially in times of transition by leveraging the capabilities of a large number of specialists in their senior leadership teams (Boggs, 2020; Kezar, 2019; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). Senior leadership teams have the capacity to assist the large number of new presidents coming to the role to acclimate them to the institution, especially those who are also first-time presidents, and can be vital to ensuring their own success (Boggs, 2020; Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Kezar 2019; Wageman et al., 2008). Wageman et al. (2008) who write broadly about senior leadership teams in business state that CEOs who utilize their leadership teams effectively “outdistance the capacities of a single person” (p. 7),

leverage the competencies of a larger pool of intellect and, by providing opportunities for sharing leadership, create a more favorable culture by energizing the creativity of groups. Additionally, they state senior leadership team development and utilization allows the chief executive to have those who will carry out the operation in the room when the decision is made, further ensuring operational effectiveness.

For more than three decades, a petition has been lobbied for research on senior leadership teams (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993; Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Yet, as recently as 2019, Kezar stated in her writing, *Senior Leadership Teams in Higher Education: What We Know and What We Need to Know*, that a fair amount of literature existed on senior leadership teams in the business and healthcare sectors, but there was a shortage of research on this topic in higher education. Although few, if any, comprehensive works existed on senior leadership teams in higher education, several useful themes emerged.

### ***Who is the Senior Leadership Team?***

Viewing the responsibilities and ways of work of senior leadership teams is important to identifying who they are in an organization. No conversation on senior leadership teams would be complete without mentioning Bensimon and Newman (1993) and their framework for presidential leadership teams in higher education. Their work comes the closest to being a comprehensive work in terms of senior leadership teams, albeit not one from a community college perspective. Through their research they found that presidents' work is often increasingly "interactive, collaborative, and shared" (p.xiii), leading them to shift from a focus on presidential leadership to shared leadership with, what they termed a "leadership team" or a "top administrative team" (p. viii). They described leadership teams as groups who work closely and communicate frequently with the president, share in decision-making, and work as a team. They

stated that the health of a team is interdependent upon the health of the institution and the leadership abilities of the president. Capturing those groups who have close communication with the president and who help him to make decisions, regardless of title, is useful.

Hambrick and Mason (1984) laid the groundwork on this topic in the business sector and established a definition of what qualifies as a senior leadership team. While defining a senior leadership team may seem simple, it is very important considering the problem with various title nomenclature within community college systems around the United States. Woodfield and Kennie (2008) warn about the terminology used in higher education nomenclature. While they default to using the term “Top Management Teams,” they state that most of the words, like “‘top’, ‘management’ and ‘team’” associated with these groups provides “a significant indication of status” and are generally used in an uncomplimentary manner (p. 405). Kezar (2019) summarizes Hambrick and Mason’s definition as “(SLTs) are defined as the key decision-makers invested with authority who work collectively to achieve goals (p.3). For the purpose of this study, Kezar’s (2019) definition of senior leadership teams of those who articulate vision, priorities, strategies, and make decisions. In community colleges, these are most often those who are generally titled as the vice-presidents of particular areas of an institution, like that of Student Services, Curriculum Education, Information Technology, and the like.

### ***Presidential/ Senior Leadership Team Relationship***

From the time a president takes office to the time they have a high functioning team can be a time of anxiety and one of crucial importance in setting the stage for senior leadership team effectiveness. Presidents are most often hired by board of trustee members and are often assisted by search firms. According to Overend (2011), “only 19% of university presidents hired each year are insiders within the self-same institution, thus over 80% of incoming presidents do not

know their senior administrators at the time they take office” (p. 22). This means that a senior leadership team’s first authentic encounter with the president is most often after they are hired.

After a president transitions to the new role, rarely do they start from scratch in creating their senior leadership team (Gaval, 2009; Giovannini, 2020). Often, they are faced with acclimating to an existing team and the initial encounters generally establish the characterization of the relationship for the long-term. Much of the literature on presidential teams and acclimating to a new team places a good deal of focus on a president’s relationship with existing teams, rather than building a new team (Gaval, 2009; Giovannini, 2020; Kezar, 2019). Gaval’s (2009) research found that this change in presidential leadership also often leads to, in the least disruptive of circumstances, a senior leadership team that remains intact, takes a period of time to understand the president’s mission for the college and comes to understand how they can best contribute. Conversely, she found that in the most disruptive situations, the situation results in a senior leadership team that has members to resign or retire. This disorder further results in a period of rehiring or reorganization, and then the new group taking time to understand the president’s mission for the college and how they can contribute. Of the 19 participants in Overend’s study (2011), more than half were considering resignation after a presidential transition. Overend (2011) found that senior leadership team members who departed or went back to a faculty role were generally due to a feeling of misalignment with the goals of the new president or a feeling of being lost during the transition. Senior leadership teams who leave the institution after a presidential transition are costly to the institution, both in time and economic terms (Gaval, 2009; Overend, 2011). Presidential relationships with the senior leadership team is very important to the overall effectiveness of the organization (Boggs, 2020; Gaval, 2009).

The key to overcoming anxious relationships and to ignite thoughtful productivity is for presidents to take time to get to know their organization and the staff, particularly those who work closest to them and in the community college, this is the senior leadership team (Giovannini, 2020; Overend, 2011). Overend (2011) summarizes the work of two foundational works on sensemaking to understand the core of this objective, Weick (1995), who defines sensemaking as “giving meaning to experience, a reduction of uncertainty” (Overend, 2011, p.11) and Klein et al., (2006) as “understanding connections to take effective action” (Overend, 2011, p. 11). Through thoughtful, personal communication with those in the institution where they have recently been hired, a president has the power to quell fears, learn who the decision-makers and influencers are, and to mine for competencies to help them to achieve institutional objectives (Gaval, 2009; Giovannini, 2020). Birnbaum (1992) explains the importance of sensemaking to presidential success as,

Taking time to make sense of college history and mood permits presidents to learn how people communicate, what they mean by the language they use, and what dreams and visions they have. Through interaction, presidents not only learn about others but help others learn about presidential hopes and expectations.

Making sense helps presidents understand others' expectations. (p. 174).

When presidents take time to get to know those within their organization, they know who they are working with, how their goals align with those of the team, and whether or not they can count on them to contribute to the mission and vision she wants the institution to fulfill (Wageman et al., 2008). A president who takes time to clearly articulate their personal mission and values, sincerely works to know the senior leadership team (Giovannini, 2020) and gets rid

of derailers early (Wageman et al., 2008) will move more quickly in acclimating to the role and preparing themselves to better utilize the senior leadership team.

One of the most important factors in determining whether or not a senior leadership team will function is team composition (Gaval, 2009; Kezar, 2019; Wageman et al., 2008). Teams should be small, selected based upon needed competencies, be sufficiently diverse, and should be constantly monitored for needed adaptation (Kezar, 2019). Adaptation to get rid of those who intend to derail the team's mission should happen early (Gaval, 2009; Kezar, 2019; Wageman et al., 2008). Once a president has established a working relationship with the senior leadership team they must ensure to provide an atmosphere conducive to their efficient operation.

### **Senior Leadership Team Effectiveness**

The effectiveness of senior leadership teams is demonstrated in the literature to be an essential component of a president's effectiveness (Boggs, 2020). Acebo (1994) went so far to use Keidel's analogy of sports teams to say that a president's effectiveness is contingent on the effectiveness of the senior leadership team. He also likened their relationship to the work of quick-acting basketball teams, in that they both have little time to intervene in decision-making. This is different from a baseball team, in which the players' actions are mostly autonomous, and football, which he states acts much like a factory and whose greatest strength is "protection against high-cost failure" (p. 584). Basketball teams, instead, require a coach to communicate their mission and vision to the team and to trust them to carry out their ideas in a quickly changing environment. This provides insight into how presidents can make effective use of their senior leadership team and how this can benefit their community colleges.

The literature discussed the benefit of team leadership development not just to the president's function, but also the institution's efforts toward their overall goals. Parker (1990)

stated that presidents who effectively utilize their teams can experience teams that provide “greater productivity; more effective use of resources; better decisions and problem solving; better-quality products and services; and greater innovation and creativity” (Northouse, 2016, p. 364). Acebo (1994) further conceptualized the benefits of team leadership when he stated that the president must build a competent team, provide a clear mission, and act as their coach. In his analysis of the community college senior leadership team function, he stated, “The hero is the team” (p. 584) and in this case the benefactor is the institution. For presidents to achieve team effectiveness, Hackman’s *Enabling Conditions of Group Effectiveness* (2012) stated that ideally, they will provide a convincing purpose, put the right people on the team, practice true teamwork, establish operating guidelines, work in a supportive environment, and work under a leader who coaches them like a team (Northouse, 2016, p. 369). Larson and LaFasto (1989) provided a similar, but a bit more complex model to determine a team’s effectiveness. They added that teams should also be focused on the results and to work collaboratively. Additionally, they clarified that the leader must not just coach the group as a team, but must also give them internal and external recognition, set expectations for excellent work, and be personally of high moral regard. They state that the leader modeling this behavior themselves will also motivate each team member’s competencies to be more effectively demonstrated. Several key themes in the literature converge to demonstrate how to establish effective teams, most all of which are articulated in LaFasto and Larson’s (2001) “Six Dimensions of Team Leadership,” albeit sometimes using different phrasing or ordering.

### **“Six Dimensions of Team Leadership”**

Lafasto and Larson (2001) surveyed 6,000 team members and 600 team leaders to determine what leads to the effective utilization of teams. They came up with a conceptual

framework entitled the “Five Dynamics of Teamwork and Collaboration” (p. xxiv). Held within this conceptual framework are guidelines for: fostering an environment conducive to teamwork; team leadership; team problem solving; team relationships; and team members. While all of these guiding principles are useful, when examining the president/senior leadership team relationship in terms of what creates the most effective arrangement for community colleges, LaFasto and Larson’s (2001) direction for the team leader appears as a useful guide. The literature on team literature is explicit on the need for shared leadership and teamwork (Boggs, 2020; Kezar, 2019; Northouse, 2016). LaFasto and Larson wove these themes throughout their “Six Dimensions of Team Leadership” framework. Their model has been used throughout business, healthcare, and education to determine the effective utilization of teams. Kezar et al. (2006) cited this framework for its focus on collaborative leadership, especially as it relates to female leaders in higher education. Gilley et al. (2009) performed a literature review of leadership models conducive to effectively carry out change in an organization and cited LaFasto and Larson’s (2001) framework as possessing the needed criteria of “motivation, communication, and teambuilding skills” (p. 44). Northouse (2016) also cited the framework for its ability to assess team leadership in a structured manner. The following subsections outline this framework with other research literature that are aligned with it.

### ***Focus on the Goal***

LaFasto and Larson entitled their first of six dimensions “Focus on the Goal.” Nearly all models identified in this study remarked that this was an important, if not the single-most important, component of team leadership. John Kotter (2012) unquestionably built his own business empire on leading successful change in an organization. In his eight-stage process of leading change, his fifth step required one to “develop a vision and strategy” (p.69) to carry out

your mission. For college presidents, if they have a strong senior leadership team with whom they are well-bonded, the guiding coalition Kotter describes can help to forward these goals. Wageman et al. (2008) listed this as an “essential” component in their framework for senior leadership teams as “Create a Compelling Purpose” (p. 57). Boggs (2020) called the senior leadership team’s understanding of the president’s mission “the most basic of expectations for members” (p. 13).

Gaval’s dissertation (2009) went on to explain how the president/senior leadership team relationship could benefit community colleges. She stated that presidents must take the time to not only forward their own agenda, but must also take time to listen to what their constituents believe is needed for the organization. She stated that considering many senior leaders have been at their institutions for a long time, they often know the culture and can best attest to the changes the organization is ready to implement. Presidents having a grasp of the senior leadership team’s vision and competencies can enable them to create an agenda that team members will more likely support. It’s often been stated (Wageman 2008; Woodfield & Kennie, 2008) that teams who do not feel they have a purpose to rally around, and one that matches their competencies, creates frustration within a team. These frustrations can devolve teams quickly, giving them reason to sequester into their silos and to focus on individual needs, rather than collective ones. When the work of goal setting is done collaboratively, it creates social bonds and “buy-in to any defined shared goals” (Woodfield & Kennie, 2008, p. 408).

### ***Ensure a Collaborative Climate***

This leads to LaFasto and Larson’s next dimension of (2001) “Ensuring a Collaborative Climate” (p.108). They defined collaboration in two ways-- a collaboration between the president and the team, and as a collaboration between the individual members of the team.

Because LaFasto and Larson (2001) included both types of collaboration under one category, the literature widely supported this theme. The findings were generally held under two primary identifiers-- “shared leadership,” which bridges both types of collaboration: a president sharing their leadership with the team; and individual team members sharing decision-making with the group in their respective areas. The other primary identifier described the collaboration between members of the team and was often called “teamwork” or acting as a “real team” in the literature.

### ***Shared Leadership***

A strong indicator of a team’s success is dependent upon the ability to practice shared leadership (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006; Gaval, 2009; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). Shared leadership, sometimes called distributed leadership (Gaval, 2009) or team leadership capacity (Northouse, 2016), was defined succinctly in Northouse as the act of a team member “taking on leadership behaviors to maximize team effectiveness” (2016). According to Kezar, “Shared leadership consistently emerges as a key factor for organizations that were better able to learn, innovate, perform, and adapt to the types of external challenges that campuses now face” (2017, p. v). Woodfield and Kennie agreed that shared leadership is an important leadership style in higher education and stated that “it is particularly important in a higher education context to balance the power and influence of the top leader with contributions from those within the team with high levels of expertise in specific areas” (p. 413).

The rapid trend toward shared leadership in the last decade was evident in the literature (Boggs 2020; Gaval, 2009; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). Although hierarchical leadership is traditional, familiar, and allows for quick decisions to be made, leveraging the competencies of a group of leaders enables multiple perspectives and ideas to enact a solution or create an innovation. The literature strongly supported the benefits of shared leadership over hierarchical

leadership. Kezar and Holcombe (2017) explicitly stated, “Given this current era of significant change in higher education, there is growing attention to the importance of understanding the leadership required to guide campuses successfully, and a growing concern that existing approaches to leadership are ineffective” (p.1).

The literature also provided the benefits to shared leadership for presidents willing to trust and train their teams. When teams work together, Bergman et al., (Northouse, 2016), stated that they experienced less conflict, came to consensus more often, trusted one another, and experienced more cohesion than groups who did not share leadership. For presidents to establish effective, real teams, the Hill Model for Team Leadership stated that leaders must set forth the agenda and then share responsibilities throughout the team. They must allow the team to self-monitor and judge the success of the team’s performance by both the quality of the work they provided and their ability to cohere as a team (Northouse, 2016). Shared leadership is sometimes avoided due to trust, risks, or even competing needs, but the leaders who practice it can reap great rewards (Purser 1998; Wageman et al., 2008).

Shared leadership was favored in the literature not just for its ability to enable operations to continue more consistently during times of presidential transitions, but also due to the increased capacity for the collective competencies to be utilized. Further, Eddy et al., (Boggs, 2020) stated that shared leadership provided a unique opportunity for women and minorities, who are often excluded from mentoring and the leadership opportunities that follow, to gain greater access to participating in decision-making opportunities. Kezar and Holcombe (2017) posited that another benefit of shared leadership included the rapidly changing technological world we live in and that traditional models of aptitude would be difficult to fill the competencies needed to perform adequately. In other words, it would be difficult for one person

to keep up with the technology needed to service an organization, while also keeping up with the overall needs of the organization at the same time.

### ***Teamwork and Real Teams***

Directly related to the concept of shared leadership within a team in the literature was the concept of “teamwork” or working as a “real team.” Although it is an important part of team effectiveness, the literature demonstrated that it is sometimes difficult to ascertain whether or not a senior leadership team is working as a real team. Wageman (2008) stated that you will know a real team by the behavior and feelings of its members. He states that team members of real teams think their team meetings reflect vital work, that the members want to attend, the members trust the actions of others in their absence, and that the meetings make team members feel “productive and energized” (p.52). He also stated that between meetings team members collaborate on problem solving, hold each other accountable, and integrate their processes. Woodfield and Kennie’s (2008) work specifically researched higher education institution’s use of teams in the United Kingdom, and defined real teams as those who’s “collective work (is) focused on achieving a defined goal (p.401). Söderhjelm (2018) took a similar view, but went so far to state that a top leader providing the team with a collective goal is part of the team building experience. Further, the leader must convey their expectation of excellence to the team to help them to cohere. This also fell in line with the Larson and Lafasto Characteristics of Team Excellence (1989) as outlined in Northouse (2016), which stated that teams must “have a unified commitment” and “standards for excellence” (p.369).

Their position in the organizational chart and considering they are often key decision-makers in the divisions they oversee, makes community college senior leadership teams well-positioned for shared responsibility and to function as a real team. Bensimon and Neumann

(1993) defined presidential teams as having three core functions, utilitarian, expressive, and cognitive. These roles ensure that the work gets done in the context of institutional needs and that the president's team can work together to accomplish this. Woodfield and Kennie (2008) found that these teams have often functioned as a tool for the president, but are now moving to team work and strategic operations. Kezar, Dizon, and Scott (2019) stated that effective teams are ones that have members who adopt differing and non-competing roles. Through their research, they identified eight roles, "completer-finisher, implementer, team worker, specialist, monitor-evaluator, coordinator, shaper, and resource-investigator" (p.8). These are similar in function to Bensimon and Neuman's (1993) roles, in that each person has a similar function in the group and work in concert with one another. The research demonstrated that selecting team members for individual roles within the team, and based upon their competencies contributes to team effectiveness.

Another consideration for senior leadership teams in community colleges is the need for interdependence and stability (Hackman, 2002). Often, presidential cabinets, like as happens in many other sectors, meet, report on what they are doing in their respective divisions, compete for resources, and then go back to their functional areas (Woodfield & Kennie, 2008). To ensure the effective use of teams, community college presidents can foster shared leadership by matching team member competencies with what is needed at the time (Bensimon & Neuman, 1993; Kezar et al., 2019) and by fostering the collaborative environment and interdependence Hackman (2002) mentions. The theme of shared leadership also bridges over into LaFasto and Larson's third dimension of "Build Confidence" (p. 121) because the experience of shared authority can also build confidence in teams.

### ***Build Confidence***

While shared leadership has the ability to enhance the working environment and buy-in on objectives, LaFasto and Larson stated their third dimension, “Build Confidence” (p.121) also has the capacity to enhance team effectiveness by creating momentum. In Acebo’s (1994) paraphrase of Lao-tzu, he states “The bad leader is the one whom the people despise. The good leader is the one the people praise. The great leader is the one to whom the people say, ‘We did it ourselves.’” (p. 587). The literature on the topic of building team confidence as a strategy for team effectiveness is much more scarce than that of shared leadership or teamwork, but it is nonetheless convincing. Team members are most effective when they believe they have the ability to be successful (Hackman, 2012; LaFasto & Larson, 2001; Larson & LaFasto, 1989; Northouse, 2016; Wageman et al., 2008). There are many factors that help to build confidence in teams including knowing they have the resources to complete their work (Hackman, 2012), are recognized for team accomplishments (Larson & LaFasto, 1989) and have supportive organizational structures (Hackman, 2012). While not focused narrowly on team leadership theories, Kotter (2012) includes “Generating Short-Term Wins” (p. 121) as one of his, award-winning, eight stages of leading change. Confidence-building through celebrating institution-wide accomplishments is much more evident in the business literature (Kotter, 2012; Purser, 1998) but allows team members to see the value of their work, which has the capacity to build momentum.

### ***Demonstrate Sufficient Technical Know How***

LaFasto and Larson’s (2011) fourth dimension is “Demonstrate Sufficient Technical Know How” (p. 130) and aligns closely with other models (Hackman, 2002; Wageman et al., 2008) describing what it takes for teams to be effectively led. In the LaFasto and Larson

framework, this is stated as “understanding the content, or body of knowledge specific to a well-defined field” (p. 131). This proficiency is demonstrated at many levels-- trust in the leader to be knowledgeable, truthful and impartial; trust in the process; (LaFasto & Larson, 2001); and trust in the leader to have the influence to bring the fruits of the team’s labor to fruition (Kotter, 2012).

In his literature review of team leadership, Northouse (2016) listed “Principled Leadership” (p. 371) as a primary characteristic for effective team leadership. In his citation of the work of Zaccaro et al. (2001) he stated that leaders influence teams through four sets of processes: “cognitive, motivational, affective and coordination” (p.371). Teams must trust that their leader possesses the capabilities to lead them through these processes to be effective. When assessing the most important criteria for building a team, team trust scores at or near the top on the list for nearly all researchers on the subject (Gaval, 2009; Wageman, 2008; Woodfield & Kennie, 2008). In all cases, researchers state that team member’s trust in their leader is vital to carrying out change. In Gaval’s list of competencies presidents wanted in members of a senior leadership team, she named “trust” as the first desired criteria, in front of “loyalty, confidence, collegiality, strong management and organizational skills, problem-solving, and the ability to achieve quantifiable goals” (p. 87). Likewise, however, she listed this trait as being the most frequently reported by presidents as the most difficult to find in a team member.

Therefore, the technical know-how also extends to the team members too, as they should be those who have the “knowledge, skills, and experience required for the team’s work” (LaFasto & Larson, 2001; Wageman et al., 2008, p. 15). The literature that provided warnings about what can go wrong with teams and specifically mentioned incapable team members as a primary peril to team effectiveness. Kotter (2012) provided examples of teams who cannot bring

an idea to fruition and called them “The Low-Credibility Committee” and Lencioni (2002) cited ineffectiveness in many of characteristics of his “The Five Dysfunctions of a Team,” including the “absence of trust, a lack of commitment, and inattention to results” (pp.188-190).

### ***Set Priorities***

LaFasto and Larson’s (2001) fifth dimension of “Set Priorities” (p. 135) focused on a leader and their ability to focus their team on important tasks. Setting priorities goes beyond goal setting. In this dimension, team leaders have to clearly ensure which of the goals, or which portions of them, are urgent. In Wageman et al.’s (2008) framework for leading senior leadership teams, his “A Compelling Direction” section stated that when team members are queried about what their purpose is they should be able to state quickly and succinctly what strategies and tactics they are working on as a team. Wageman et al. (2008) also added that this helps them to make more agile decisions, because they deeply understand the interconnectedness of the team. LaFasto and Larson (2001) also mentioned changing priorities. They stated that changing priorities happen, but the key is to not let them change too frequently. Further, team members should contribute to decisions regarding how goals are prioritized and if a shift is made, leaders should thoughtfully convey why. Otherwise, an emotionally invested team could get discouraged. Another warning they provided to leaders about managing priorities was to not allow them to “simply multiply, thus diluting the team’s effort” (p. 137).

Frequently, community colleges battle the strains of too many objectives being pursued at once, or what is known as the concept of “initiative fatigue.” When the Aspen Institute released a handbook outlining their strategies for improving transfer rates, they specifically mentioned how to address initiative fatigue to convince the stakeholders this particular project was a worthy priority (Improving Transfer at Scale, 2017). Pelletier (2019) noted that innovative solutions are

of crucial importance to battling initiative fatigue, so stalling initiatives is not the answer. Instead, he stated that it is important to have collaboration across previously siloed areas and to provide rewards and incentives. The support for the vision also means more when the support “comes from the top” (p. 27). LaFasto and Larson (2001) focused more on the team than the top when thinking about what helps to make priority setting work, especially when there are so many priorities in an organization. They cited efficiency and “the alignment of *individual* effort that makes *collective* effort work” (p. 138). In short, when teams believe that their work is being made easier through a greater collective effort, they are more likely to see that accomplishing large or multiple goals as easier.

### ***Manage Performance***

Managing performance which was also termed “team accountability” was prevalent in the literature (Boggs, 2020; Gaval 2009; Kezar, 2019). Team roles are often defined from two levels, that within the organization and that within the team.

Wageman et al., (2008) said that many existing teams are, oddly, too diverse. This is often done by well-meaning executives, but results in poor outcomes. They stated that when executives require a representative from every area of an institution, it fosters people working in silos. Instead, keeping teams small and requiring them to work cross-functionally creates opportunities for senior leadership team members to get out of their silos and to learn about the work of others in the organization. Understanding ideal team dynamics is key to creating a system of best practices in team formation. Wagemen et al. (2008) said it best when he said, “Just because someone wants to be on your team, has always been on your team, or was a heavy hitter of the past, does not mean you are obligated to have him on your team” (p. 79). New presidents who feel empowered to create senior leadership teams they can lead and which fill the

competencies needed to accomplish the tasks at hand can enable effectiveness, according to the literature.

Wageman et al. (2008) also stated that it is important to get rid of problematic team members early. He calls them “dangerous derailers” and said that most successful chief executive officers gave problematic team members no longer than six months to stop their “balking” and to get to work (p.97). They said these team members were often easy to identify by their actions like, “having a victim mentality” and a “tendency to make blanket negative assessments of other people” (p.100). Having the derailers on board can destroy team operations, even when the rest of the team would be otherwise high-functioning. They stated there is no simple test, but that some behaviors of challenging team members are that they have tendencies to complain and criticize others, amplify negativity in the group, attack people, gossip, say one thing in public and another in private, and be resistant to change their behavior when challenged. The literature agreed that getting these people off the team early apparently enables a senior leadership team to heal the team and get back to action sooner than later.

Gaval (2009) stated that presidents often think about team roles in terms of what competencies they themselves lack. This is especially true of financial skills. Presidents often spend a great deal of time making thoughtful appointments of Chief Financial Officers because this is an area that can most often determine the fate of a president and an institution.

Most of the literature stops short of holding teams accountable for their work (Boggs, 2020; Gaval, 2009; Purser and Cabana 1998; Wageman et al., 2008). Yet, it would stand to reason that a team’s effectiveness cannot be judged unless one can determine whether or not the team has performed the prescribed duties. In Gaval’s (2009) interviews, she found that some of the most successful efforts in senior leadership team development involved presidents who made

decisions about team members early. In two cases with those she interviewed, incoming presidents even placed a contingency on whether or not they would accept the position upon current senior leadership team members being fired from the organization before they arrived. In both of these instances, this decision was made after reviewing the financial statements of the organization and required the firing of the Chief Financial Officer of the institution. In one case, it was suspected that legal action may be required. Having a Board of Trustees to make some tough decisions before a president arrives also makes it easier for the president not to have to smooth over hard feelings. Making decisions early, or even before onboarding, allows presidents to more quickly gain the trust of the other team members and his organization at large.

Lafasto and Larson stated that both the leader and the teams must regularly assess themselves and one another (2001). Although they provided a 42 item questionnaire, they stated that the six dimensions of leadership cannot be reduced to a simple to-do list and that it isn't enough for leaders to excel in one area and to fall short in another. Rather, that leaders have to "be good enough at all of it" (Lafasto & Larson, 2001, p.150). For the Lafasto and Larson (2001) model to work, the CEO must manage the performance of the team. Lafasto and Larson stated that the most frequently noted feedback offered to team leaders is the failure of a leader to manage a team member who is not "pulling his or her weight" or a person who is difficult to work with (Lafasto & Larson, 2001, p. 139). In one Fortune 100 company example provided, a CEO commented that even though he had acted on a performance problem within a team, he did so discreetly and over an extended period of time. The solution for this appears to be developing a record of managing performance and while this takes time, it is important to build a team's trust in the leader (LaFasto & Larson, 2001).

## Summary

Community Colleges are important to the economic vitality of individuals as well as the economy as a whole (AACCC, 2014; Crawford & Jervis, 2011; Eddy, 2019; The White House, 2010). Because they serve so many roles, to so many individuals, and through so many modes of delivery, they are enormously complex institutions (Crawford & Jervis, 2011; Edinborough et al., 2014; Guenther, 1999; Teitel, 1991). Likewise, the presidents who lead these institutions have complex occupations (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). Whether it is the strains of the job or simply because they have reached the age of retirement, the fact remains that community college presidencies are experiencing rapid turnover (Gagliardi et al., 2017; Phillippe, 2016; Smith, 2016, May 20). This turnover is forecasted to continue, as presidents are staying in the role for a short period of time (Gordon, 2016; Wheelhouse, 2016). The face of the presidency is changing, as more women are coming to community college presidencies than ever before (Gagliardi et al., 2017). We know that women lead differently (Book, 2000; Helgesen, 1990; Stout-Stewart, 2005) and that they function best in environments devoid of masculinized discourse and where expectations are structured in ways intended for their male counterparts (Eddy & Khwaja, 2019; Northouse, 2016). Furthermore, even though community college leadership is changing to include more females, and we have evidence that women lead differently, as Kezar (2019) noted, we are using traditional and potentially ineffective models of forming and utilizing senior leadership teams.

It is evident who can function as the senior leadership team in community colleges--those who immediately precede the president in the hierarchy, generally those entitled "vice-president." What is less apparent is how to effectively utilize them (Larson & LaFasto, 1989; Woodfield & Kennie, 2009). Northouse articulated it well when he said, "Excellent teams are

those who have developed a sense of unity or identification” (p. 370). LaFasto and Larson (2001) developed a theoretical framework that brings together many ideas throughout the literature and concisely organizes them in their “Six Dimensions of Team Leadership” (p.98). To summarize the literature and how it aligns with this framework, leaders should: provide a clear focus on their collective goals; create a collaborative environment; help the team members to feel confident in their own ability to succeed; demonstrate their own competence; establish what is urgent; and hold the team members accountable for their performance both individually and collectively. While the literature overwhelmingly points to how this framework works for leaders in business and healthcare, understanding how female presidents effectively utilize their senior leadership teams using this framework can provide valuable insights to new presidents, particularly the growing number of female presidents who may possess different leadership styles. This qualitative study, using narrative inquiry, will create an opportunity of deep engagement with female presidents to understand the manner in which they have utilized their senior leadership teams.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The vast and recent community college turnover has created two notable results: a greater number of women coming to the role than ever before (Gagliardi et al., 2017), and the need to utilize the diversity of talents of the senior leadership teams to maintain efficient operations (Boggs, 2020). Considering the research on senior leadership teams has been deemed “urgent” (Kezar, 2019, p. 104) and the “success of the CEO depends on the effectiveness of the executive leadership team” (Boggs, 2020, p. 4), research on this topic is timely and relevant. Also considering that women lead differently than men (Book, 2000; Eagly et al., 2003; Helgesen, 1990; Stout-Stewart, 2005) and that their leadership styles are conducive to team leadership (Eddy et al., 2020) studying women presidents in this context has the capacity to make meaningful contributions to the field of community college leadership. Therefore, to gain a deeper understanding about how female presidents effectively utilize their senior leadership teams, a narrative inquiry was conducted with five, first-time, female presidents who were within the first five years of obtaining a presidency at a community college. To enhance the potential findings of effective leadership, each of these women also had participated in leadership development through some type of an Aspen Presidents Fellowship.

Further, because oftentimes leaders overstate their leadership abilities (Northouse, 2016), each president’s group of senior leadership team members was surveyed and interviewed, to allow them provide their perspective. LaFasto and Larson (2001), the authors of the theoretical framework which supported this study, stated that when leaders are provided with a self-assessment of their collaborative team leadership competencies, they generally overstated their “ratings by an average margin of 50%” (p. 100). So, while the focus of this qualitative research was on female, community college presidents, the perspective of members of the senior

leadership teams was also gained through a survey (see Appendix F) and follow-up virtual lunch. This lunch provided an opportunity for the senior leadership team members to see the survey results and to answer clarifying questions. This information was compared to the president's perspective and incorporated into the analysis.

### **Research Question**

Kezar (2019) petitioned for many approaches to the study of senior leadership teams in higher education, like that of team composition, roles, dynamics, etc. The focus of this research, however, centered on effectiveness, especially because most teams are formed before a president takes office (Gaval, 2009) and senior leadership team effectiveness is key to overall institutional operational effectiveness (Boggs, 2020). Therefore, the primary question of this qualitative research was, "How do new, first-time, female, community college presidents who are within the first five years in the role effectively utilize their senior leadership teams?" Although it was not central to the thesis, those who had served in some type of Aspen Presidents Fellowship were selected in order to enhance the probability that they may be individuals who would effectively utilize their teams. Some other sub-questions to gain a better understanding of this relationship were:

- How much time do presidents take to learn about the individuals, the team, and/or the institution before making changes to the senior leadership team?
- How do presidents first define, or relate, goals for your senior leadership team?
- In what ways do presidents foster their senior leadership teams to work collaboratively?
- Do members of senior leadership teams have shared responsibility in leading the institution?

- What do presidents do to quell apprehension and indecisiveness within their teams?
- What are some of the ways they build confidence within their teams?
- How do presidents balance utilize their own technical know-how with talents of those on their teams?
- How do presidents set the priorities for their teams?
- How do presidents hold team members accountable collectively and individually?

These questions directly related to the literature on effectiveness and the theoretical framework used in this study by LaFasto and Larson (2001), entitled “Six Dimensions of Team Leadership.”

### **Framework**

There are many approaches to the study of team leadership (Boggs, 2020; Hackman, 2002; LaFasto & Larson, 2001; Larson & LaFasto, 1989; Northouse, 2016; Wageman et al. 2008). This study centered specifically on senior leadership teams in the context of community college leadership and how to effectively utilize them to the benefit of the institution. While much has been written about senior leadership teams (Aritzeta, et al. 2007; Wageman et al. 2008), less has been written about senior teams in the context of higher education (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993; Woodfield & Kennie, 2008) and a gap was noted about the how they are effectively conducted in the community college environment (Kezar, 2019). Frameworks or models demonstrating how senior leadership teams are effectively led in the higher education environment were not found in the literature. Therefore, a framework of the effective leadership of teams used widely in the business and healthcare sectors was implemented for this study. The selected theoretical framework was that of LaFasto and Larson (2001), because it contains a great number of commonalities with others in the research literature, as was mentioned in the

latter half of Chapter Two. The researchers that developed this framework are highly qualified in the field of leadership and Larson has also experienced a successful career in higher education, further demonstrating the framework's applicability in this environment.

Further, team leadership researchers Frank LaFasto and Carl Larson have each produced a number of articles on team leadership and together have produced two best-selling books on the topic. LaFasto holds a Ph.D, has served as the Senior Vice President of Organizational Effectiveness for Cardinal Health, and possesses 25 years of experience advising on successful team leadership (LaFasto & Larson, 2001, back cover). Carl Larson is similarly qualified in that he also possesses a Ph.D., but he also possesses experience in higher education, as he previously served as a Social Sciences Dean at the University of Denver. Additionally, he has written many books on leadership and has won the Driscoll Master Educator Award for his work in education (LaFasto & Larson, 2001, back cover). The combined experience and education of these two researchers is well-aligned with the objectives of this study.

By using LaFasto and Larson's (2001) overarching, conceptual framework, *Characteristics of Team Effectiveness*, broad understandings can be gained about how senior leadership teams may be formed and utilized. The authors additionally created a theoretical framework, with accompanying survey instruments for both the leaders and those they lead. While they conducted their own surveys with more than 6,000 employees being led by 600 leaders to determine how leaders should lead teams, they understood the shortcomings of only using a survey approach and followed it up with qualitative interviews. They did test the reliability of this survey, however, with two sample populations using one-way ANOVA testing. They examined whether the survey discriminated between positive and negative responses and found a statistical significance for each of the six dimensions between the two groups, meaning

that the survey provides a suitable gauge for feedback. They stated that “being an effective leader isn’t some calculable math problem” and that leadership must be “interpreted, and adapted to each person’s unique qualities and the situation at hand” (p. 99) though. This study used the interpretation mentioned by LaFasto and Larson, by using narrative inquiry to get to a deeper understanding of how first-year, female presidents adapt the leadership of their senior leadership teams to effectively lead effectively in the community college after administering their Collective Team Leader (Team Version) survey (Lafasto & Larson, 2001, p. 151).

To determine how the female presidents effectively led their teams, the interview protocols went through three phases to identify within the narratives of the leaders each of the dimensions within LaFasto and Larson’s (2001) “Six Dimensions of Team Leadership” as follows: “Focus on the goal; Ensure a collaborative climate; Build confidence; Demonstrate sufficient technical know-how; Set priorities; Manage performance (p.99). While these not only served as a measure of effectiveness, they were a useful guide whose themes aligned very closely with other themes in the literature, like shared leadership (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017) and fostering groups to function as real teams (Woodfield & Kennie, 2008).

### **Research Design**

LaFasto and Larson (2001) examined team leadership effectiveness from both a quantitative and a qualitative standpoint to provide their recommendations for assessing teams and providing recommendations for operating effective teams. In their work, “When Teams Work Best: 6,000 Team Members and Leaders Tell What It Takes to Succeed” (2001). This dissertation utilized LaFasto and Larson’s (2001) theoretical framework on team leadership to produce a qualitative research study, using narrative inquiry with participants who were new, first-time, female presidents of community colleges who were within the first five years in the

role. To enhance the probability that they had effectively utilized their teams, one characteristic for selection was that the presidents had received leadership training through at least one Aspen Presidents Fellowship program within the College Excellence program. It also utilized the perspective of the senior leadership teams through a 42-item survey (See Appendix F), as well as a dissemination of the survey findings and clarifying interview with the senior leadership team in a follow-up, virtual lunch meeting.

### **Qualitative Methods**

Among many reasons, qualitative analysis is useful when the topic is new or the current field of research may not be applicable to the group of people being studied (Creswell, 2014). In this case, senior leadership teams are well-examined in business and healthcare, but not in the field of higher education. Further, Kezar (2019) stated that “higher education research rarely borrows from the many concepts in the broader field of SLT research” (p. 105), demonstrating the need for an in-depth, contextual examination of senior leadership teams in higher education. Furthermore, qualitative research is useful when the researcher does not know the variables to study (Creswell, 2014) and while the LaFasto and Larson model is being used as a guide for senior leadership teams, the way in which the framework applies, especially with examples of their application in the context of community college leadership, is unknown. Qualitative research is also useful to gain the perspectives of groups who have traditionally been underrepresented in a particular field of research (McGrath et al., 2019). Historically speaking, women have not been widely regarded in leadership literature (Chemers, 1997) and while caution must be taken not to disrupt and diminish their contributions to the field by participating in this research (McGrath et al. 2019), having their robust narratives will enable other rising, female presidents to see the potential for their leadership.

Heigham and Croker (2009) stated that qualitative research “examine(s) the relationships between information about people’s actions and phenomena” (p.39). In the case of the community college presidents participating in this research, the intersection of their thoughts and actions with regard to their senior leadership teams were key to understanding the effectiveness of their relationships. Heigham and Croker (2009) stated that the information gained in qualitative research is likely to be uncovered in an iterative process and cyclical in nature, often creating more questions than answers and that research questions are often shaped by the environment in which they are studied. In this case, each institution studied presents a set of unique circumstances that, when examined with each leader, each required clarifications of unique characteristics of leadership in additional interviews, posing further questions and clarifications. This iterative process of questions and answers is suitable for a narrative inquiry study. To accomplish this, the researcher in this study conducted three interviews, each ranging from 45 minutes to an hour and a half, with the last occurring as a virtual campus visit with each of the presidents.

Creswell stated that qualitative research, like that of narrative inquiry, is well-suited as a method by researchers who possess a strong “interest in creating a better society” (p.21). Considering the role that community colleges serve in society and the capacity for the effective utilization of senior leadership teams to create efficient institutions (Boggs, 2020), this was another reason for the selection of the method for this study. Performing qualitative research using narrative inquiry also allowed the researcher to understand the lived experiences of the presidents and how they made meaning of the events surrounding their leadership (Creswell, 2014).

## **Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry helps us to understand the lived experiences, or “stories,” of individuals and how they make sense of these events (Merriam, 2016). While using narrative as a means to collect data has been done informally throughout history, it emerged as a more standard practice in qualitative research in the 1990s (Merriam, 2016). It requires that the researcher collect information through interviews that allow the research participant to provide their experiences in the form of stories. Narrative inquiry also requires the researcher to understand the “in process” nature of the narrative and to recognize the past, present, and future of the context of the story (Riley, 2004). The researcher then organizes and analyzes this information, (Creswell, 2014). This type of research requires more than just hearing about these stories, but also in interacting and deeply connecting with those providing their firsthand accounts. As Frank (2000) stated, however, the “story” and the secondary making sense of the event or “narrative” are two different points of understanding the lived experience. The “story” is the preliminary retelling of the event, and differs from the “narrative” which is the point that the research participant works through the event to bring meaning to it. This was particularly true in this study, as the researcher participated in a discussion about the lived experiences of the presidents and then analyzed the narratives using qualitative methods of analysis, like coding, categorizing, and theming.

## **Researchers Positionality and Subjectivity**

Narrative inquiry allows researchers who favor the constructivist ontology to spend the time necessary for meaning to emerge from deep and meaningful conversations. Constructivists believe that reality or “truth” is not universal (Heigham & Croker, 2009) and believe it lies in an interpretation of an individual's experiences. This is an important consideration to understand how women’s leadership styles have emerged from their experiences, rather than relying on

traditional forms from their male counterparts. While the outcomes may seem fluid in nature, the manner in which narrative inquiry is conducted is a “rigorous and systematic methodology to help researchers explore people’s worlds” (Heigham & Croker, 2009, p. 7). The result is one that allows individuals to configure their identity through the retelling of narrative.

(Polkinghorne, 1988). This relational approach was appropriate for this research because the study sought to understand the personal experiences of each of these female presidents in order to find universal characteristics that may inform future practices for future presidents. Narrative inquiry requires that the interviewer become a co-creator of the data who does not bias or contaminate the information, but rather facilitates an understanding using their own “abilities, experiences and competencies” (McGrath et al. 2019, p. 1004). Throughout the interview process, it was important for me to set aside my preconceived notions about effective leadership and to actively listen to the presidents’ experiences, in order to reduce bias. This intentional act also allowed the follow-up, clarifying questions to be authentic. Having never served as a member of a community college senior leadership team, or a community college president, also aided in remaining neutral about the presidents’ experiences.

I possess a constructivist ontology and believe that deep meaningful engagement with others helps us to discover their truth, as truth is not universal. Rather, I ascribe to the philosophy mentioned previously, and set forth by Heigham and Croker (2009), that truth lies in an interpretation of one’s own experiences. Considering my co-creation of this story, brought out by the research, it is important to note my personal history and beliefs.

My personal background is one of a female, first-generation college student born to a working class father, and stay at home mother. My mother encouraged me to pursue occupational pursuits regardless of the gender conventions of the time, like my professed desire

to be a train conductor at age four, when women were not generally permitted in the role. While my parents were supportive of educational pursuits, I was the first of my siblings (both older and younger) to graduate from college. I did so by working for several years in a warehouse environment as a cherry-picker lift driver while going to college. Working the overnight shift and attending university full-time took its toll on my grades, so every summer I attended community college in a nearby town to enhance my grade point average. After graduation, I worked as a case manager in child protective services, as a personnel director, and a regional manager for a major New York fashion designer. After getting married, having a child, and being a stay at home mom for five years, I decided to pursue a Master's degree in History. Considering my low undergraduate grades, again, I sought out community college to raise my probability of being accepted into graduate school. I was able to raise my undergraduate scores and was accepted to a history program at Arkansas State University, where I excelled and developed a love for teaching while serving as a Teaching Assistant. During this time, I also procured a large number of awards, including a grant to perform independent research in Egypt, where I gained a wider understanding of the world. After graduating, this time with a 3.89 grade point average, I decided to help others who had navigated a similar path in pursuing an education. Knowing of Wake Tech through my receiving a notary certification there for an employer several years prior, and seeing the more favorable job market in North Carolina, my husband, child and I moved to North Carolina and I attempted to gain employment in the North Carolina Community College System. I have worked in the North Carolina Community College system since 2006, beginning as an adjunct professor. In 2007, I gained an adjunct position at my desired school, Wake Tech Community College. In 2009 I was hired as a full-time instructor. Since that time, I have risen through the faculty rank program to the rank of Senior Professor, the first in my department.

Additionally, I have had the opportunity to work as an Associate Department Head; as a team lead for various special projects; to serve as the Professional Development Coordinator; and most recently to serve as a Project Director to lead a portion of strategic planning efforts and a project to improve student success outcomes in English and Math courses in the Student Experience Program.

My leadership of various teams led me to an interest in this topic. I enjoyed this work and have maintained contact with team members who no longer serve on my teams due to the bonds of our shared successes. I recognize that I have a positive bias toward others who enjoy team leadership. As a female who has worked in a male-dominated position, albeit in a different environment, I also recognize my positive bias toward women who successfully manage working in masculinized environments.

### **Participants**

Research is dependent upon gaining access to the data and in the case of qualitative research, the data source is through the participants who can answer the research question (Saunders, 2012). This study included the perspectives of five, first-time, female presidents who were within five years of coming to the role, as well as a majority of members of each of their senior leadership teams. The number of senior leadership team members for each college ranged in size from 4-10 members. This number of participants allowed the researcher to delve deeply into meaningful conversation and resulted in findings that contained the ideal of a rich and descriptive narrative (Heigham & Croker, 2009).

The term “participant” in research typically denotes the person being studied and that they have consented to participating (Merriam, 2016). Merriam (2016) stated that the researcher must ensure the participant has thoughtfully consented to the research, is fully aware of the

purpose and motivations for the study, and must provide their consent for participation. In light of this understanding the researcher treated those participating in the study authentically as “participants.” Each participant was provided with an informed consent form (See Appendices D and E) and an information sheet about the research project prior to their taking part (See Appendix F). Thoughtful consideration for their partnership occurred throughout the data collection process by remaining flexible with their schedules, changing meeting times as needed, reminding them that their answers would be de-identified, verbally reflecting on their answers in interviews, and allowing them the freedom to stray from the questions if they believed other information was of importance.

### **Sampling**

Creswell (2014) provided guidance for sampling procedures to select research participants in qualitative research. He stated that the researcher should purposely select the participants for the study based upon who has the knowledge needed to answer the research question, unlike the random sampling procedures typical for quantitative research (Creswell, 2014). He also stated that there is no set number of participants required for qualitative research, but that he has found “narrative research to include one or two individuals” (p. 189).

The candidates selected were purposively sampled from a national pool of candidates, based upon the narrow criteria, which took into account their role as president, their gender, the time in the role, and their having participated in at least one type of an Aspen Presidents Fellowship. Potential candidates were found in via the Aspen Presidents Fellowship Alumni page (The Aspen Institute, 2021). Although candidates of the New Presidents Fellowship Program have specific training regarding the effective utilization of their senior leadership teams, the presidents included in this study were those who had participated in any Aspen Presidents

Fellowship in the College Excellence Program. This was due to the small number of women who met the other eligibility requirements and the need to maintain confidentiality of the participants in the program. Further, this study was not intended to determine the efficacy of the Aspen training, but rather, it was intended to be a characteristic that may enhance the probability that the presidents would provide information that demonstrated the effective utilization of their teams as deemed by the theoretical framework by Lafasto and Larson (2001).

According to the Aspen College Excellence Program website (The Aspen Institute, 2020, February 5), since its inception in 2016, more than 160 individuals have participated in the Aspen Presidents Fellowship as of February 21, 2021. Of that number 42 were current presidents within five years of taking the role. Additionally, Aspen distinguished another need and added an inaugural class of New Presidents Fellowship of 25 presidents for the 2020-2021 academic year, each of these were in their first five years in the role. This created a total of 67 total new presidents who are within five years in the role. When limited to female candidates, there were 13 female New Presidents Fellows and 23 Rising President Fellows Alumni (when removing the 3 candidates who were also currently serving in the New Presidents Fellowship class), resulting in a total of 36 national female candidates who would qualify for inclusion in this study.

Those who were selected for this study were primarily from regions closest to my location in the Southeast portion of the United States, particularly due to the possibility of being able to travel to interview them in person if Covid-19 restrictions were lifted. This resulted in the majority of the candidates working in an environment that had a similar governance structure. While not all in North Carolina, the institutions included in this study are similarly held within a larger system of community colleges governed by a larger entity. Therefore, the presidents selected for this study all worked within a similar governance structure. Within the context of

being close to my locale, an attempt was made to include presidents from institutions that possessed variation in terms of size and location. This study included two institutions that were considered small and three that were considered medium size by Carnegie classification (Indiana University, 2017). Carnegie classification for small is institutions that have full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollments of 500–1,999 and medium institutions have FTE enrollments of 2,000–4,999 (Indiana University, 2017).

The senior leadership teams represented their own sample, which by nature were pre-selected by their association with the president that participated in this study. Every member of a president's senior leadership team was invited to participate in the study both by the president and again by myself. In each case, a majority of the senior leadership team members agreed to participate in the study.

### **Access**

Gaining access to participants who have many demands on their time is sometimes difficult and this can be confounded by feelings of skepticism about the motivations of the research or even the researcher, especially if the topic contains sensitive information (Saunders, 2012). This may be especially true in the case of research of this nature, where the complexity of the president's job (as was referenced in Chapters 1 and 2) is time consuming and oftentimes stressful (Thomason, 2020; Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). What Saunders (2012) calls an "opportunistic approach," or having the request brokered by an intermediary, like a colleague who may have access to an organizational gatekeeper, may prove useful to gaining access to research participants who may prove otherwise difficult to obtain (p. 3). The request is more likely to be fulfilled if the research design is clear and provided at the onset, with the understanding that some slight amendments may be necessary as the project progresses (Saunders, 2012).

In the case of this project, because presidents have many requests from others for their time, it proved helpful to have an intermediary to assist in making a request to potential participants. My advisor and another personal contact allowed me to copy them on the solicitation email to potential presidential candidates who had been identified via an online search, to add an additional layer of credibility. The solicitation email included an informed consent and a one-page description of the purpose, intended process, and need for the research. When the email was sent, my advisor and personal contact then sent an endorsement of me and my research. This helped to garner a 100% participation rate of those contacted.

Five candidates were contacted by the researcher via email and each of them agreed to participate in the study. When the number of participants reached five, no further candidates were contacted, so that the transcription, coding, and theming would be manageable, because the researcher intended to perform this work personally and without the use of coding software. This was done so that the researcher could become deeply familiar with the narratives throughout the data collection and analyzation process.

For the senior leadership team members, an information sheet and an informed consent form were provided to the president to share with the team prior to my contact. Each president informed their team of their personal participation in the study and noted that I would be contacting them to ask them to participate. At the first meeting with each president, I asked for permission from the president to contact the senior leadership teams. Subsequently, I contacted each group via email and asked for their participation, again providing the information sheet and informed consent form. The team members were informed that their participation would help to provide perspective of how their president conducted the effective leadership of their team. The method of analysis was intended to occur via a survey and a follow-up virtual lunch in which

they would be asked questions to gain clarity on the survey results. For three of the institutions, a Doodle poll was sent to gain a good time to meet with the team. In the other two instances, the President stated that their Executive Assistant had access to the team's calendar, would find a date, and would send a "Save the Date." In all cases, I followed up with the team to ensure that the date was suitable for the majority of team members. Due to IRB regulations, I informed them that they would not provide the informed consent back to me via email, but rather, would note their agreement in the first question of the Qualtrics survey.

### **Covid-19 Considerations**

One last consideration about the participants was related to the online nature required of their interviews in light of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Merriam (2009), specifically mentioned that online research brings about three key considerations for the researcher, about how the online interviews will affect: "the context on the data; the effects of software functionalities on the data-gathering process; and the effects the medium tends to have on ethical practice" (p. 162). Because Covid-19 restrictions had taken all operations online for the entire 10 months prior to interviews being conducted, participants more comfortable with conducting interviews online than they may have been previously. This was an unexpected benefit of the move to all remote operations in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. In all instances, participants had already become astutely familiar with conducting meetings and discussing sensitive information via video conferencing. Nonetheless, I attempted to mitigate any potential unease through several measures. For example, written consent for online interviews was gained in advance and was also gained verbally prior to recording interviews on Zoom and the transcription application, Otter AI. When selecting dates for interviews, a six to eight-week window was provided for them to suggest dates and times for our meetings. When candidates

seemed anxious about the virtual visit and its usefulness, I adapted the meeting style to one of a “campus conversation” to discuss what we would have seen on the campus. Additionally, I held all interview sessions in a quiet and uninterrupted environment, and patience and understanding was extended to the participants for interruptions they experienced during our interviews.

Furthermore, I informed the participants that the information would be stored securely and that I would hold their identity in confidence, to aid them in feeling comfortable with providing sensitive information for the research.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Researchers must consider the principle of beneficence when approaching any study regarding human subjects and minimize risks while maximizing the rewards to participants. Benefice goes beyond simply doing no harm though, and is an altruistic act that not only benefits the individual, but society at large (Pieper, 2016). Within the context of social science research, there is the need to consider the full range of ethical consequences of research, like the “emotional, professional, or social harm” that may occur (Pieper, 2016, p. 127). The nature of this information contained in this research on community college presidents risks all three criteria stated by Pieper, especially given revelations that may arise about institutional effectiveness and job performance. Considering the risks to research participants, this research study has consulted the literature on ethical considerations for research design (Creswell, 2014).

Even before the research commences, Creswell (2014) stated that ethical considerations must be minded. The primary considerations before conducting research he mentioned that are relevant to this study were to gain Institutional Review Board (IRB) permission to conduct the research and to gain the appropriate permissions from the research site. An application for IRB approval was submitted to the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board for the

Protection of Human Subjects and was approved before conducting any research of human subjects. Furthermore, permission was gained from the presidents to conduct the study on their campus. Two of the institutions had their own institutional review board processes. For those, I completed their applications and gained approval before proceeding with research at those institutions.

Once the research commenced, Creswell (2014) provided additional research relevant to this study, for example he stated that a research question which benefits the participants should be selected, participants should be well-informed of the purpose of the study, and should provide consent to participate. The initial research questions that were identified resulted from a scan of the literature, but as Patton, (2002) cited as good practice, the researcher is open to “adapting the inquiry as understanding deepens and/or situations change” (p. 40). The researcher allowed extra time to explore reflections deeply in one case in particular, which turned out to be incredibly useful. After one of the first interviews with a president that went nearly an hour over time due to reflections and conversation, she noted that she was participating in the research due to a relationship with someone who had recommended it to her. In the end, she found the questions and her own reflection incredibly helpful, saying, “I don't say every time, so just know this. I feel like I've probably gotten more from this opportunity, because it isn't like going to Aspen and talking with other folks who are also saying, ‘this is what we did’ or ‘this is what I'm thinking.’ Your guided inquiry has really been very helpful, so thank you for that.”

To further ensure ethical research practices were conducted, each participant was informed of the study, including the presidents and their senior leadership team members, and asked to agree to participating as was outlined in a consent form. They were informed they did not have to agree and could leave the study at any time. No member of the team was coerced or

forced to consent to the research. Not all members of all teams participated and the research continued with a remaining, majority of the members. Care was taken to ensure that the remaining participants knew the number of team members continuing in the study, so they could determine their risk of being identified. The presidents were not informed of which members did not participate, so that the remaining members were less likely to be identified by their respective president.

### **Confidentiality**

Creswell (2014) provided important guidance for protecting the privacy of participants and recommended that researchers use pseudonyms to protect participant's identity. Considering the risk of breaching confidentiality due to the small number of female presidents who have served as both first-time presidents and in an Aspen Presidents Fellowship in some capacity, each president was asked to provide a pseudonym.

Research must be conducted in a way that will not reveal information about the president or the senior leadership team that publicly identifies them. Confidentiality and anonymity were key considerations. The data was stored on a protected server, interviews were conducted in a private setting via Zoom, consent forms and surveys were sent via a secure Qualtrics server, and candidates were selected from a national pool to reduce the probability of re-identification.

Of particular ethical concern in the data collection process was the ability for senior leadership team members to be easily identified, which could have posed risks both internal and external to the institution they serve. To reduce the probability of identification, their data collection was received in two forms, through a secure survey and through an informal interview lunch. The senior leadership team members answered the Lafasto and Larson (2001) *The Collaborative Team Leader (Team Version)* (p. 153) forty-two item survey to provide an

assessment of their team leadership experiences with their president. This survey was submitted anonymously online to help ensure the anonymity of the participants. A unique survey was deployed to each institution so that the senior leadership team members could be matched to their respective presidents. Therefore, the only identifying information was the institution that they serve. The survey information was not shared with the presidents throughout the course of the interviews, to further protect the senior leadership team members. Participants were advised of the measures being taken to protect them and their identity, but they were also warned of the associated risks involved, and as Creswell (2014) stated, “inclusion of data in the final report that they may not have expected” (p. 100). Every attempt was made not to disclose information that could be harmful to those participating in the research.

### **Data Collection**

McGrath (2019) acknowledged that each situation is different, but provided general guidance by stating that interviewers should: prepare for the interview in advance; create a guide and practice the questions beforehand; “consider cultural and power dimensions”; create a connection with the participant; be mindful of the co-creation role; listen more than you speak; allow adjustments during the interview; prepare for demonstration of emotions; transcribe the interviews soon after concluding them; member check, but with caution; and analyze the data early (McGrath et al., 2019, p. 1005).

To best understand the president’s stories in context, Seidman’s (2013) “Three Interview Series” was used (p. 20). A semi-structured interview protocol was created for each of the three interviews with the presidents. This allowed the presidents to elaborate on their own interpretations and personally constructed truth of how they lead their senior leadership teams (Golafshani, 2003). Considering the presidents had not previously considered what led to

successful practices and understanding that trust between the presidents and myself should be built, the interviews were conducted at least one week apart, throughout February and March, 2021. This allowed for rapport-building between the interviewer and interviewee and with time for self-reflection. Seidman (2013) states that the interviews should occur “from 3 days to a week apart” (p. 24), but is slightly flexible. Considering the complex nature of the president’s role, I was flexible with the presidents’ schedules.

After each president had agreed to participate, in mid-January, I began working with their executive assistants to schedule a time in the president’s schedules using the parameter that each interview should be schedule at least one week after the one prior and that all interviews should conclude by the end of March 2021. It was important gain access to their schedules as soon as possible after IRB approval, because the busy nature of their schedules left little room for interviews. To make good use of the time with the presidents, interview protocols were created and mailed in advance, I reviewed the questions and the previous transcripts (for the second two interviews), and maintained attentiveness throughout the interview for both the spoken word and non-verbal communication. Field notes were taken during and after interviews, and the videos were transcribed quickly after they occurred. Data collection and analysis procedures are discussed in detail near the end of this chapter.

Creswell (2014), described detailed characteristics of the nature of data collection in qualitative research. He stated that data collection is information gained in the natural setting in which it exists, and the “key instrument” (p. 185) in the collection is the researcher. Once the researcher has determined the best method of collection, and in this case it is narrative inquiry, the researcher may include many methods to add interest and multiple perspectives (Creswell, 2014). To accomplish this, each participant was interviewed on three separate occasions while in

their own work environment. The first interview was one hour, the second was 45 minutes and the last occurred as a virtual campus visit with the presidents. Each interview included semi-structured research questions and focused on the topics of effectiveness which related to the theoretical framework, allowing them to uncover what they deemed as beneficial to society to know and understand. This aligned with ethical considerations cited by both Creswell (2014) and Pieper (2016).

Due to the enduring Covid-19 pandemic, the Institutional Review Board rules forbade personal contact with human research subjects. Therefore, the interviews occurred via a personal North Carolina State University Zoom account. The interviews were recorded, for the sake of accuracy, via Zoom. As an additional measure, and in the case of technology failure on the first device, they were also recorded on a mobile phone via the software application Otter AI. This phone is password protected and both the Zoom and Otter AI transcripts were stored on a Google account that has two-factor authentication. Recording on two devices ensured that the president's time was not unnecessarily wasted, as McGrath et al. (2019) cautioned against, if one device fails. This information was deleted after the research was fully accepted and approved in the Electronic Thesis and Dissertation (ETD) system.

In order to gain a fuller perspective of the leader's abilities from their senior leadership team's perspective (LaFasto & Larson, 2001; Northouse, 2016), a survey was conducted with the senior leadership team and an informal virtual lunch to discuss their perceptions of the president's leadership was held. The survey was sent to participants via Qualtrics and participants were given between 7-10 days to complete the survey. Reminders were sent prior to the survey closing and in three instances, the survey was reopened to allow submissions by participants who said the Qualtrics emails had gone to their junk mail and they wished to

participate. When this happened, I emailed the senior leadership team members and asked them to check their junk mail, if they wished to participate. Data was also collected via a virtual lunch to discuss the survey results.

### ***Interviewing***

Merriam (2009) stated that qualitative data is “conveyed through words” and that in educational qualitative research it is the most common form of data collection (p. 85). Patton (2002) stated that so much poor qualitative interviewing is done that it threatens to be undone as a respected method of inquiry. Heigham added that the reason was due to, “the process of becoming an effective interviewer demands considerable sensitivity, self-critical awareness, and openness to change. Researchers must also meet the challenge of combining close analysis of interview discourse with conventional coding in order to avoid the trap of treating interviews as simply reports to be mined for information” (p. 195). Throughout this process it was important to treat the presidents as individuals, rather than a repository of data. The interviews were each began with a friendly introduction and “pulse check” of the president’s current situation and flexibility was granted in scheduling.

To ensure a balance between mining for information and allowing the conversation to flow so informally that the needed information is not gained, Patton (2002) provided guidance for interviewing. He states that interviews can range from fully structured to open-conversation. All interviews should allow for the participants to respond with a narrative in their own words. He states that the three types of interview strategies, “informal conversational, interview guide, and standardized open-ended” (p. 343-344), can be combined and sequenced in one research study. These are also categorized in the literature as “highly structured, semi-structured, and unstructured” (Merriam, p. 91). The interview style for this research included three interview

guides (See Appendices A, B, and C) which were emailed out to participants between 24-48 hours in advance of each meeting. Participants were informed they were not being asked to prepare answers for each question, but that I simply wanted them to have time to reflect on the questions. The questions were semi-structured, to allow for open dialogue. Considering I am not a college president, nor a senior leadership team member, this method uncovered information unknown to me.

Patton (2002) provided a suggestion to use the informal conversation early, then midway through the time to move to an interview guide, and toward the end to use the standardized open-ended question to get systematic information to close out. This method was employed with this study, primarily because beginning the series of interviews with a more unstructured approach helped to build trust and rapport with the participants. For example, presidents were asked to introduce themselves and how they came to the role to start the interview process. By the second interview, the questions were more aligned with the theoretical framework (See Appendix B). During the last interview, the questions were much more open like, “Given what you have reconstructed throughout our interviews, what stands out to you as important moments in how you’ve effectively utilized your senior leadership team?” and others (See Appendix C). In accordance with the guidance of Patton (2002) an attempt was made to balance rapport with neutrality I am not a judge of what qualifies as the effective leadership of senior leadership teams and did not provide information or opinions about the preconceived framework of LaFasto and Larson (2001). Instead, I asked the questions and let each of the presidents tell their stories. This interview session was scheduled to be a virtual campus visit to ask the presidents to think broadly about how their actions have resulted in the effective utilization of their teams. Many of the presidents were working remotely, at least part time, and the one who worked primarily on

campus was hesitant to walk me around the campus. Therefore, the virtual campus visit was adapted to ask questions regarding the campus environment (See Appendix C). One president was still excited to tour the campus virtually using her mobile phone, so after the campus conversation questions, we did tour the campus and met a few individuals who were on campus.

When asking interview questions, the kinds of questions, the wording of questions and providing follow-up probes are all important considerations (Patton, 2002). The six types of questions identified by Patton (2002) are: Experience and Behavior; Opinions and Values; Feeling; Knowledge; Sensory; and Background/Demographic (p. 348-351). An attempt was made to provide opportunities for presidents to answer questions within each of these categories.

### *Trustworthiness*

When using qualitative research design, it is important to understand the need for a constructivist approach (Golafshani, 2003). Generally speaking, the term “validity” is used in quantitative research and its connotation is one of absolute truth. This is less useful in qualitative research where the truth and understanding are constructed throughout the process of understanding how “individuals construct reality in interaction with their social worlds” (Merriam, 2016, p.22). This also aligns with my personal positionality as having a constructivist ontology.

Trustworthiness and the soundness of research in qualitative research design is defined by credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided four criteria for the assessment of trustworthiness of qualitative research. They ask if the findings have internal validity, or if the findings are **credible** to the subjects within the context of the study; if the findings have external validity, or if the findings are true in the are **transferable** to other settings; if the findings are consistent within the same

context elsewhere or are **dependable**; and if the findings are absent of the researcher's bias or, rather, are they **confirmable**? To ensure the trustworthiness in these areas they provide several strategies.

To ensure confidence in the method, the credibility of the researcher, the participants, the method, and the way the method is conducted trustworthiness must be assured (McGinn, 2010). This can be done through strategies like triangulation, or checking the truth of information against other sources of data. In the case of this research, to triangulate the data, one artifact co-created by the presidents and their senior leadership teams was examined alongside the interview data. Creswell (2014) stated that in addition to adding internal validity to a study, triangulation also enables the researcher to build their "justification for the themes" (p. 201). Other methods to ensure credibility were prolonged engagement with the participants and member-checking. Prolonged engagement was established through three separate interviews with each president participant, the last occurring as a virtual campus visit. To member-check the information, each president received a 10-12-page summary of the interviews within a few weeks of the conclusion of this segment of the research. They were provided an opportunity to provide either a written or verbal reflection (whichever the participant preferred). They were provided two weeks to provide comments. This verbal feedback was recorded and this feedback is considered in the co-creation of the research narrative.

As a peer-review, senior leadership team members were given the LaFasto and Larson (2001) "The Collaborative Team Leader (Team Version)" survey (p. 153). A follow-up virtual lunch was scheduled with the team from each college. Participants were asked to provide verbal consent to participate in the virtual, group lunch and for permission for recording. When team members arrived late to the meeting, the meeting was paused and permission was gained. The

lunch was held via Zoom and was recorded, transcribed, and coded, along with field notes that were taken.

Another way in which a researcher established trustworthiness was through transferability or external validity (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Merriam, 2009). One cannot generalize findings based on the sample like when using statistical analysis common in quantitative research, therefore transferability is the substitute for this in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2014). The hallmark of good qualitative research is the assumption that if the findings are similar throughout the study, then the findings may transfer to another (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). One strategy employed to accomplish this was for the researcher to gain thick, rich descriptions from the participants (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An example of this strategy being accomplished is when readers are transported to the setting described by a participant or feel they are sharing in the experience (Creswell, 2014). With these thick, rich descriptions, others are more likely to be able to see the applicability of the findings to a wider variety of circumstances. Throughout the Findings and Discussion sections of this dissertation, quotes from the participants have been provided so that others may share in the experiences of those in this research.

The interviews with the presidents participating in this study were enhanced by creating open-ended questions that allowed for these types of answers. In one instance, when a president was asked to reflect on early moments with her senior leadership team, her eyes moved to another part of the room and she stated it was like she could see the individuals, most now no longer part of her team, sitting in the chairs having a conversation. She turned her webcam, so that I may see the chairs arranged in a circle in her office. As she reflected on their interactions, she remarked very candidly about how they treated one another. While each community college

president possessed a unique set of experiences and circumstances, considering the small number of female presidents found, even when viewing the number of female presidents that exist in community colleges at the national level, the findings of these five women have the potential to be in common with other current, or rising female presidents.

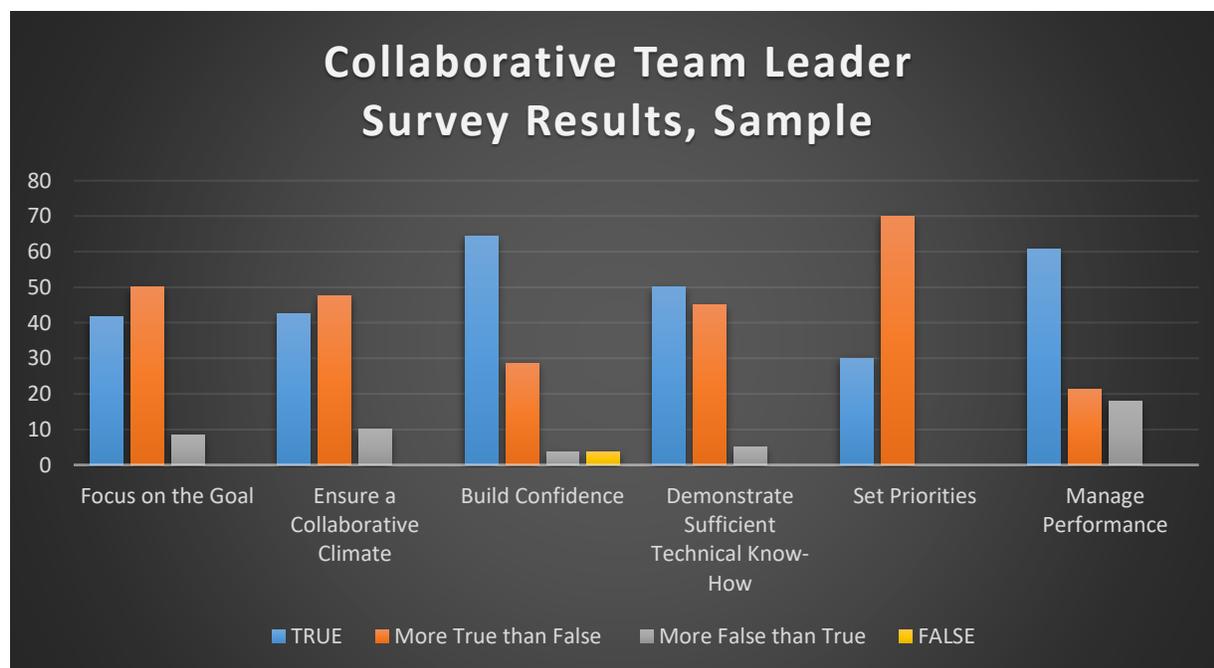
The consistency of the information in environments external to the study and from the data to the findings, also called dependability, is another important consideration of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the case of the ability to replicate findings to test consistency, it is difficult to replicate social science research because no two people or environments are exactly the same. The problem of the data being consistent with the findings is often more prevalent in social science research (Merriam, 2009). One guard against this is to have the researcher have the data and findings checked by a third party, called external auditing, this is controversial though, because the third party does not have the full benefit of being immersed in the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, I relied upon the fact that multiple perspectives were providing a rich, thick narrative as a measure of dependability.

The last measure of trustworthiness in qualitative research is confirmability. Narrative inquiry requires that the research co-create the data with the participants (Creswell, 2014). This type of deep relationship has the potential to draw a researcher into a biased position. To ward against this, Merriam (2009) stated that it is useful to create an “audit trail,” or a “detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points” in the event the research is challenged (p. 229). Furthermore, I disclosed a good deal about her personal and family history, as well as known positions, beliefs, perspectives, and known biases that may come into play during the data collection and analysis phases of the project. This, I believe, also helped to build rapport.

For the senior leadership teams, After the survey closed, I collected and tabulated the responses. The 42 questions from the LaFasto and Larson (2001) were aggregated into the categories of the “Six Dimensions of Collaborative Team Leadership” to view the results from a holistic perspective. The teams were shown a graph of the responses grouped into these six areas as is seen in an example chart in Figure 2. They then were asked clarifying questions like, “Why do you believe we would have gotten this response for the category ‘Focus on the Goal.’” This allowed a semi-structured approach to the virtual lunch and for a rich narrative to develop.

**Figure 2**

*Collaborative Team Leader Survey Sample PowerPoint Slide*



*Note.* A sample PowerPoint slide of one president’s survey results, as was provided to the senior leadership team to guide the discussion.

## Data Analysis

Using Seidman's (2013) approach, the first interview was used to gain insight into the participant's "focused life story" (p. 20). At this stage in the interview process, the interview protocol (see Appendix A) asked the presidents questions that sought to understand how they became a president at this institution and to construct their early experiences with the senior leadership team. To overlay the questions with the LaFasto and Larson (2001) theoretical framework, I inquired about specific roles that were given to the team and how goals were established, focusing more on "how" questions, more than "why" questions, again, as is suggested by Seidman (2013). The second interview in Seidman's series was intended to understand the details of the participants' experience "within the topic area of the study" (p. 22), which in this case focused more narrowly on the effective utilization of the senior leadership team using LaFasto and Larson's "Six Dimensions of Team Leadership" (2001) to guide the questions (See Appendix B). The third interview in Seidman's series asked that participants reflect on the meaning of their experiences. The final protocol questions (See Appendix C) follow Seidman's (2013) guidance for asking the participant to reflect on the past interviews, reconstruct and reframe their story, and to make meaning of it all.

In Saldana (2016) "Ezzy (2002, pp. 67–74) recommended several strategies for checking the progress of your analysis while still in the field. Though applicable for team researchers as well, the lone researcher can benefit most from these recommendations to assess the trustworthiness of his or her account: (1) initially code as you transcribe interview data; (2) maintain a reflective journal on the research project with copious analytic memos; and (3) check your interpretations developed thus far with the participants themselves" (p.38).

Using what Saldaña (2016) stated was “preliminary jottings” (p. 21), coding of the data began as the data was collected, even during the interview stage. Saldana called this a form of “analytic memoing” (p. 21). Birks et al. (2008) stated that while memoing is generally related to grounded theory, it has practical applications in all qualitative methods and can be used to effectively “extract meaning from the data” (p. 70) even from the onset of data collection. Memoing can allow a non-threatening means to make meaning out of ideas, perhaps this is why Saladna called them jottings, and formulated ideas for codes (Birks et al. 2008; Saldana, 2016). Although the Otter AI transcription software was used, what it provided was not a perfect rendering of the spoken word of the participants. To ensure accuracy, I listened to each Zoom recording again and corrected the transcriptions. During this process, analytic memos were written using the comments function of Microsoft word. This began immediately after each interview, because, in the event the recording failed, I was more likely to remember the information. What resulted was more than 500 pages of transcripts. When this had concluded, each transcript was read through once more and memoed. A researchers’ journal was kept from the first communications with the presidents and was also be used to contain jottings. The journal was included in each stage of coding, the same as the transcribed material.

In first cycle coding, I used what Saldana (2016) called an eclectic coding method, utilizing descriptive, in vivo, and magnitude methods. Descriptive coding was chosen because it is useful for a wide variety of types of data, like the interviews, field notes, jottings, the artifact, and the virtual lunch transcript. Descriptive coding was also useful to lay the groundwork for second cycle coding (Saldana, 2016). In vivo coding was selected because it allows the participants’ words to be used for the codes (Saldana, 2016). This was important to let the participants’ own words guide the study since a strong and detailed framework guided this study.

In vivo coding also aligned strongly with my chosen methodology of narrative inquiry, which relies on rich descriptions to transfer to a wider audience of those who could make the information useful in their own practice. In vivo coding can provide for “imagery, symbols, and metaphors for rich category, theme, and concept development,” (p. 109). Also, in vivo coding is useful to those who ascribe to the constructivist ontology (Saldana, 2016), as I do. Lastly, magnitude coding was used because it helps a researcher to understand the common experiences of each of the presidents. Magnitude coding gave deeper meaning to some codes, particularly those that were positive and negative (Saldana, 2016).

Second cycle coding relied heavily on the outcomes of the first cycle coding. Special attention was given to examine the in vivo and magnitude codes to understand which ideas were the most useful to the participants themselves, using their own words and strong feelings or beliefs. In the second round of coding, values coding was a useful addition to begin to see which common categories emerged. I was looking for the participants' own words and experiences to find how they are characterizing their own effective utilization of their senior leadership teams, what values united the participants, and to what degree. Keeting-Polson (2018) stated that the comparisons made through the descriptive coding across participants was very helpful in her study, which has a similar population of participants. To preserve trustworthiness, the coding, began to occur within two to three weeks of the final interview and within days of the member checking summaries being developed.

It is at this point that code mapping occurred, which allowed me to categorize the codes that were drawn out of the narratives (Saldana, 2016). While it would have been simple to approach the study question by question, especially because the questions asked are seeking “lumps” of data around the key characteristics of effectively utilizing senior leadership teams,

the data did not present itself in an organized manner. Oftentimes, a president would provide an answer that provided clarity to a question in an earlier protocol. Patton (2002) explained that the participants will provide data that requires flexibility. This was particularly true using Seidman's (2013) approach, because the open-ended questions provided important details in the last interview.

### **Delimitations**

To ensure that the goals of this research do not become overly broad, several delimitations were prescribed. The research focused on female presidents because their leadership styles are thought to be more aligned with team leadership and they are increasingly serving as community college presidents. The parameters were further narrowed to study participants in their first five years on the job, because they are more likely to remember the full breadth of their experiences with their leadership team than those who have been with their team for longer. Further, the presidents have been delimited by those who have obtained leadership development in an Aspen Presidents Fellowship program. This was done to increase the probability of effectiveness. The number of participants for the study has been narrowed to include just five presidents. This was done to allow time to have deep and meaningful interviews and conversations with the research participants and also so that I may conduct my own transcription to deeply understand the president's narrative. The primary delimitation of the research topic was the focus on the topic of effectiveness of the senior leadership team, rather than the full breadth of topics related to team leadership.

### **Limitations**

There were limitations of this study that bear discussion. Another limitation was that it relied on the presidents and senior leadership team being able to recall information and to

represent it correctly. They may have selectively or imperfectly recall events. Further, they may have attempted to bolster their own performance in recounting events, as was mentioned is common by Northouse (2016). To maintain the trustworthiness of this research, I utilized strategies like member-checking, peer evaluation, and triangulation.

The narrow criteria used to select also created a limitation. The scope of candidates was narrowed to females who were within five years of being a first-time president. When compounded with those who had a geographical location in close proximity to my location and those who had served in an Aspen Presidents Fellowship (to enhance the probability of effectiveness), it resulted in them all existing within similar governance structures and no representation of large or very large community colleges. This limitation will also be discussed in the recommendations for future research.

Another limitation of this study is that the small number of participants eligible for this study (due to the other selection criteria) created too great a confidentiality risk to delineate the type of Aspen Presidents Fellowship the presidents had participated in without compromising their identity. This would be an important distinction considering the New Presidents Fellowship provides specific training for presidents on how to utilize their senior leadership teams. Future research may want to either broaden the number of participants, reduce the other selection criteria, or both, in order to make the distinction between whether the president had participated in the New Presidents Fellowship or the Rising Presidents Fellowship. This will be discussed more in the recommendations section of the Discussion chapter.

## **Summary**

Given the vast turnover in community college presidencies in the last four years; the benefits served by utilizing the competencies of a senior leadership team; and the lack of

knowledge about how presidents create effective senior leadership teams; research on this topic has the capacity to provide promising practices to other new, presidents taking on the role. While the relationship of top executives and their senior leadership teams have been widely studied in business and healthcare, there has historically been a dearth of research on this topic in community college research. Spending several hours with each president and additional time with their senior leadership teams provided insights useful to the growing number of female presidents.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Considering that this study examined a narrowly defined population—that of first-time, female presidents in the first five years of their presidency who had also served in an Aspen Presidents Fellowship, the probability of re-identification is heightened. As a measure to protect their identity, this study will not provide profiles of these individuals, but rather, it will provide a composite aspirational state of the presidents in Chapter 5 entitled, *Aspirational State*.

For clarity throughout this discussion, the presidents who participated in this study will be referred to with pseudonyms of “Patricia, Consuela, Mary, Leigh, and Laura.” The purpose of gaining the perspectives of five, female, first-time presidents, who were within the first five years of coming to the role was to determine how they had effectively utilized their senior leadership teams. To enhance the probability of alignment with LaFasto and Larson’s theoretical framework, the participant selection criteria also included those who had received training in at least one Aspen Presidents Fellowship program. Although LaFasto and Larson’s framework is not connected to Aspen, it was believed the program’s extensive leadership training and mentorship (The Aspen Institute, 2020a) may enhance the probability of their leadership of teams, especially because this is a component of the New Presidents Fellowship program.

Information was gained through a narrative inquiry in three separate interviews, ranging from 45 minutes to one and a half hours. Seidman’s (2013) “Three Interview Series” was used (p. 20) to allow participants to provide broad information about how they came to the role; then to focus more narrowly on actions surrounding how they interact with their team; and lastly to allow participants to provide their broad perspectives about how they believed they were most effective. Additionally, the perspectives of each president’s associated senior leadership team members were gained through LaFasto and Larson’s (2001) *The Collaborative Team Leader*

(*Team Version*) (p. 153) 42-item survey, as well as a follow-up group interview during a virtual lunch meeting.

### **Key Themes**

The findings revealed eight key themes, which are presented chronologically. The themes start with the president's path, move to how they create effective senior leadership teams, and end with how they utilize their teams, which are represented as an alignment with the Six Dimensions of Team Leadership by LaFasto and Larson (2001). The themes are as follows:

#### **Path to Presidency**

1. Senior leadership teams benefit from a president's often long and winding ascension from faculty to president.

#### **Establishing the Right Team**

2. Female presidents acted to restructure their teams, generally within the first six months, and changed the way they worked to solve critical issues facing their institutions.

#### **How Teams Are Effectively Utilized: Alignment with the Six Dimensions**

3. Presidents developed goals with their teams collaboratively and conveyed the goals to stakeholders in clear, concise, and memorable ways.
4. Presidents built trusting and loyal environments and focus on strategic priorities by redirecting conversations and having team members to hold each other accountable to the collaborative structure.
5. Presidents built confidence and quelled apprehension and indecisiveness through relationship building, particularly through coaching and reassurance in one-on-one meetings.

6. Presidents utilize their close relationships with team members and model behaviors to demonstrate their technical know-how.
7. The presidents are astutely aware of priority creep and initiative fatigue, so they are careful that priorities are clearly focused on meeting the objectives the strategic plan.
8. Close relationships, clear expectations, and collective accountability are important components to presidents holding their senior leadership team members accountable.

This chapter will discuss each of these themes and begins with an overall description of how the presidents came to the role and influences to their leadership. Then, the findings examine early team structure and dynamics, as well as early changes that were made. Once presidents had their teams on board, we examine how they began to effectively utilize them primarily through an alignment with the LaFasto and Larson (2001) theoretical framework, which emerged strongly in their answers. These responses are examined against the survey answers provided by the senior leadership team members, the follow-up questions, and through the examination of a document provided by the presidents of a collaborative project. The findings are presented in chronological order, beginning with the president's preparation for the position.

### **Path to the Presidency**

**Senior leadership teams benefit from a president's often long and winding ascension from faculty to president.** None of the women in the study began in higher education with the intentions of becoming a president. Rather, they began as faculty members, some of them in part-time roles and with Bachelor's degrees. Each of them stated that they enjoyed the teaching

profession, but they were particularly struck with how much they loved the transformative influence community college has for the students they serve. This love for the profession of teaching kept them in roles near to students and appears to have contributed to their long and winding ascension. Their own words tell the story of their admiration for their work with students. When Consuela was asked about her transition from the field of business to education, she stated “I’m sold on the value of what we do and its ability to transform people’s lives by moving them from one class to another.” Mary cited the open door policy, the equitable access to education for typically marginalized groups, and simply the love of seeing the spark that lit in a student when they saw their path unfold as her reason for a lifelong career in community college.

This spirit of nurturing students and setting them on the path to a better future was evident throughout each of the interviews. Mary stated that her resistance to pursuing a presidency initially was because she didn’t perceive the role as one that worked closely enough with students. During her virtual campus visit, she pointed to a large decorative picture of students in a building and called each of them by name. Each of the female presidents in this study regularly engaged with students even after becoming president, whether it was by situating their office close to the locus of student activity; during their frequent walks around campus to get to know students by name; or by insisting that their leadership teams consider the student point of view. Each president mentioned incidences that kept students at the forefront of their minds. Laura, who is often called a “teacher at heart,” uniquely and remarkably, stated that throughout her decades of working in administrative roles, she has always kept a teaching load and is still trying to determine how she can work teaching a course into her schedule as a president.

The presidents in this study each have long tenures and have held a number of roles, throughout the institution and at progressive levels. Because they were not seeking a meteoric rise to president, the presidents gained a deep understanding of institutional divisions over their decades of experience. Collectively, these women have served more than 117 years in community colleges, this constitutes an average of 23.4 years each. Throughout this time, they worked in a variety of areas of the college. This is particularly important because when it comes to team leadership, they generally have a thorough understanding of the areas the senior leadership team members oversee. The presidents in this study have all held progressive levels of responsibility since holding their faculty role, including titles like department chair, dean, director, executive director, associate vice president, vice president, senior vice president, executive vice president, and others. Throughout their interviews, it was evident that they have depth and breadth of knowledge about community college operations. They have also gained direct knowledge of the roles their senior leadership teams directly supervise as well.

### **Leadership Influences**

Additionally, mentors, past presidents, and their Aspen Presidents Fellowship provided powerful influence in shaping career aspirations and these president's leadership style. Considering these female presidents did not initially have presidential aspirations, one may ask what caused the change of heart? Often this was due to a past president's and/or mentor's encouragement. While the mentoring relationship was positive in nature, the influence of past presidents demonstrated both positive and negative forces. Both relationships shaped the presidents to have positive outcomes though, because as Consuela put it, "I learned more from those types of experiences than from the more positive ones." The indelible impression left from

a bad experience led a few of these presidents to make a mental note of what they should never do.

All of the presidents except one stated that a mentoring relationship helped to set them on their path to being a president. Often very early on in their careers, the first of many mentoring relationships developed. Mentors were responsible for such activities as redirecting career paths; providing opportunities, additional responsibility, and encouragement; and recognition for their successes. The majority of the president's mentors were past presidents who discussed specific career goals with them and encouraged them to increase their education level. In Patricia's case, a past president and mentor found institutional funds to pay for her doctorate degree. She said,

I think he saw things in me that I didn't see in myself yet. I knew I was workhorse. I knew I was a great project manager. [I was] good with people [and] good on my feet. [I] had good communication skills. I knew my assets, but the confidence level, I think being a woman, being Hispanic, in a patriarchal family where men made the decisions...it kind of permeates your psyche. So I think there was that part in me, [in which I had] imposter syndrome.

Even when other life commitments made some presidents hesitant to take on higher leadership roles, past presidents who were also mentors provided information about what the individual could do to gain experience and education in the meantime, like taking business courses or working on a strategic plan to enhance institutional knowledge. The encouragement of past presidents and mentors often aided in presidents having broad portfolios that benefited them later in their career.

Mentors helped to build confidence too, leading to epiphanies that their talents were worthy of a role as president. The past presidents who also served as mentors encouraged

presidential aspirations and did not leave the idea open to interpretation nor did they mince words. They explicitly stated that they thought these women were well-suited to be presidents, when they had often not considered it previously. Leigh said she was told, “You have everything it takes. You’ve got experience. You’ve got passion. You’ve got the voice. You do well in front of people. You should be a president.” Likewise, Patricia stated a former president and mentor told her explicitly she should also be president. A colleague of Mary’s encouraged her for months to apply for a presidency before she truly saw herself in the role. Due to their positive mentoring experiences, this group of presidents frequently identify and mentor others who they believe are well-suited to be president as well. In many ways, this appears to be an outlet for their penchant for teaching others and considering they have a wealth of knowledge to share, the experience had the capacity to perpetuate more confidence.

While most of the mentoring and past president’s influence was positive, there were also profound instances in which the presidents stated that a past president’s negative actions propelled their career or their style of leadership. For those that had profound negative experiences, these left indelible impressions. Mary provided the example of a past president who came to her institution and sought to make sweeping reforms the moment they took office, causing resignations and low morale. This, in part, led her to pursue a doctorate degree to ensure a more secure future. Consuela stated that while working for a president that silenced the people around the leadership table, she “always thought it was a travesty to have 120 years of experience around the table and you don't tap into it.” It was in that moment she pledged to be a collaborative leader. Mentors and past presidents provided encouragement, guidance, valuable lessons, and sometimes financial support that prepared these women for their role as president.

## **The Aspen Experience**

Another influence on presidential aspirations and leadership for the presidents in this study was the Aspen fellowship. While they had presidential aspirations before the Aspen fellowship, the presidents were closely aligned in the ways in which the experience benefited them. Each of the presidents stated that the guiding questions and self-reflection conducted in their Aspen fellowship helped them to have clarity of purpose. The questions asked of them were undoubtedly ones that helped them to be deeply introspective and either helped them to better articulate already-held beliefs, or helped them to see how their well-articulated beliefs fit into a larger framework. One president, who said she had never heard of Aspen prior to applying for the fellowship, stated that she never connected her being awarded the fellowship with obtaining a presidency but that the experience was, “the most transformative in her career—hard stop.” This helped to confirm the decision that presidents who had received training in the fellowship would be more likely to effectively utilize their senior leadership teams. How they integrated the Aspen framework into their institutional operations will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Next, however, we will discuss the next theme that emerged. Once the president had completed their path to the presidency and entered the role, it was important to them to ensure their teams were able to carry out their mission and vision for the institution.

## **Establishing the Right Team**

**Female presidents acted to restructure their teams, generally within the first six months, and changed the way they worked to solve critical issues facing their institutions.**

For the most part, presidents entered institutions that had at least a majority of the team members who were, as one president put it, “bright and capable.” While some presidents came into stable, high-functioning institutions, some encountered difficulties that included budget shortfalls—one

of which was described as a looming “million-dollar cliff,” as well as another that was “bleeding enrollment,” and another that had personnel decisions to make which she described as “brutal.” These challenges would have been enough to alarm even the most seasoned of presidents, but would certainly seem to do so for first-time presidents. This group of female presidents did not simply carry on the business of the previous president, though. Rather, they changed the structure of their senior leadership teams and adapted the way the teams worked to be more collaborative.

These female presidents knew they possessed collaborative leadership style, so they intentionally sought to adapt team's work and structure. Leigh stated that she deeply admired her predecessor but knew she had a different style:

I have an approach that may be somewhat different than some other leaders, in that I truly believe in the power of collaboration, in the power of diversity of thought. Meaning that, I want to have a well-rounded team that can come to the executive leadership table and be able to bring their unique perspectives and to not to have everyone, you know, coming from the same kind of background, or the same ethnicity, and race, and gender, but to have a lot of diversity. I don't, unlike some of my colleagues, want to necessarily whittle that team down into a very small group.

This sometimes happened against the advice of greatly admired exiting presidents, like the advice to maintain an internally facing Executive Vice President, so they may focus more externally, as happened in more than one institution. While many remarked that they departed from this advice, Leigh explained why in detail,

I felt like, especially as a new president I needed to have more of an internal focus. I needed to be able to find that way to split my time between the external, and the internal. I also felt like I had enough strong leaders to be able to do that, you know, part of the secret in that is making sure that your team is equipped to and you can trust them to take things and run with it internally without you needing to hold their hand. So I chose not to replace the Executive Vice President and I instead had people reporting directly to me. Then I still was able to focus externally, but I also felt like I had my hands on the internal pulse of the college too. And as the new president, I think that's important.

These female presidents knew their leadership style was inherently different than their predecessors and often provided a stark reorganization from the structure of the original team.

All of the presidents made changes to the members of their senior leadership teams within the first six months, some were through natural attrition, like retirements, others were intentional dismissals by the presidents due to poor performance or a misalignment of goals.

Laura explained the structural changes she made,

One of the things that I wanted to ensure that I did was really work to help us have organizational structure that was based on positions and processes that work well together, that provide the best customer service, not [one that was] based on personalities or workloads.

More than half of the presidents stated that their senior leadership teams included a person who had been promoted beyond their abilities, or to a level of incompetence. In these cases, the presidents either found the person another position at the institution, not on the senior leadership team, or provided them with additional training, but eventually had to coach them out

of the institution. Mary went so far as to send a team member to an extensive leadership development program outside of the institution before deciding that the training was not going to be sufficient to prepare them for the role they held and she had to dismiss them.

A majority of the presidents found at least one senior leadership team member's role could not be afforded by the institution. Mary in particular said that her personnel costs were 98% of her overall budget when arriving at the institution, causing her to have to significantly reduce the size of her team. Patricia said that even after years of declining enrollment, which had hit the 40% decline mark by the time of her arrival, it had not stopped the institution from layoffs of staff using a "last in, first out" rule, while increasing the size of the senior leadership team. She cut her team in half and says she "wouldn't wish those decisions on anyone." She further reflected on what the expensive personnel costs meant for the institution when she said she realized the, "college can't afford this organizational structure because it's at the expense of the roles where students need us most." Consuela said that her institution had faced so many layoffs due to budget shortfalls that they had developed a "poverty mentality," which diminished their vision of what was possible. Her first task was to re-form the team by off-boarding two naysayers and empowering those who remained. Patricia reflected on her inherited team's focus on their own accomplishments, while their student performance metrics suffered. She set out to form a team who had students at the center of their mind, stating that students "put their dreams and aspirations in our hands and I think that is the most sacred thing." While the decisions of these presidents were not easy ones, they took action citing a responsibility to students, other campus stakeholders, and the community that required them to enact such measures.

The intentional changes made to the senior leadership teams most often began around the six-month mark, but most presidents articulated that they suspected from the onset which

members would be difficult to adapt to the new way of work. The presidents in the study were hesitant to make significant personnel changes before getting to really know and understand the institutions at which they had just been selected to lead. Most had heard about the rumored “obligatory year” to begin to make significant personnel changes, but said they made changes when it became apparent changes were needed, generally around the six-month mark. The consensus within the group about making changes sought to balance building trust with making significant changes. When it was evident personnel changes were going to need to be made, the remarkable compassion extended to those being dismissed was apparent. The presidents often helped them find other jobs outside their institutions, celebrated retirements in grand fashion, and remained immensely discreet, even when it meant that their own approval within the campus community was at stake. To one well-liked member who needed to be dismissed, one president said she conveyed,

‘If you announce a retirement, your name will never appear on a reorganization document. We’ll just announce your retirement and we will throw you every celebration that you want.’ I mean, I’m a human being right? Even though it wasn’t working out, I wanted her to be able to go in her own way. And so, she announced her retirement and there was a big party, and so forth, and she did not appear in any reorg document.

They often give inherited team members a chance to adapt, but if a senior leadership team member cannot perform as needed, they are not sheepish about making changes. One president stated that she asked a team member to help her to understand their position and conveyed that she wanted to help them. She said “Can you help me to understand where you could either be a fit here in this institution in a different seat, or is this not the place you want to be right now?”

She followed with saying it was best to give them time and that she generally gives three months for executive leaders to get on board with the mission. In the meantime, the individual should be in a place that does not impact the ability to move forward. Ensuring they had formed the “right team” was important to developing their teamwork.

### **Developing Collaborative Styles**

Once they had formed the teams they knew could operate effectively, they began to implement the skills of collaborative leadership, most often by using retreats and consultants. Whether it was through their experience at Aspen or through their years of work experience, a majority of the presidents utilized the services of outside consultants to identify, develop, and utilize the talents of the senior leadership team. This generally occurred early within the first year of assuming the role. Many had multi-day retreats with their senior leadership team members in which they each took assessments, like the *Clifton StrengthsFinder*, *Simplex Problem Solving*, or others similar in nature and determined how they could work collectively. Consuela stated,

I've been very intentional about having regular retreats with my team. We did strengths inventory, because I also believe in appreciative inquiry versus deficit thinking. We shared those results collectively. I brought in a consultant who helped lead us through a number of exercises, based on our strengths inventory.

And so we often refer to that.

They often also used this time to determine goals and discuss how they would reach them.

Patricia said a two-day retreat helped the team she had established after the first year to determine how they would work together:

My team, those who are here, understand the importance of that work and where we need to put our efforts...we did, after that year of change, a two-day retreat

with an outside facilitator...we went through two days of rules on how we were going to engage as a team. You know, what getting an email over the weekend means in terms of my expectation. it means I just had to get it out of my head, it doesn't mean I'm expecting a response.

Most importantly, these types of activities built deep relationships, trust, and often created a sense of loyalty among teams. Most presidents continued these activities, whether it was for a specific challenge the group was facing or simply to continue their regular development.

The senior leadership team members these presidents had inherited were often strongly adapted to the previous president's hierarchical leadership style, but they set the clear expectation for collaborative, strategic operations when they were together. Consuela coaxed her team:

I literally had to do round-robin every time I asked a question for the first year. I would like call on them. When I would ask a question for which I wanted their input, I would first of all, not say what I thought. I would merely put the question out there and say 'We need to talk about this.' When I realized no one was raising their hand, I said, 'Okay let's try it a different way. Alright so and so tell me what you think. You have the floor. I'd like to hear from you.' And then [I would go to] the next person.

The new presidents saw their team's hierarchical adaptations especially in the way meetings were conducted—often previously a “report out” session or one where papers were signed.

Patricia reflected on her expressing the expectation to her team as,

when you come and spend an hour of your precious time and my precious time on a regular basis, you are prepared to discuss issues that you need to discuss with

me or high level issues that you need to report. It's not a session for me to sign papers, which it was in the past. I mean that's what people did, right there at the time, with the president, with a file and all the papers he needed to sign, because he had to sign everything. I remember [thinking] those first few months, 'This is my one on one meeting with these folks? Send it through campus mail and my administrative assistant will carve out an hour of my time to sign papers.'

This group of female presidents made it explicitly clear at the onset of their tenure they possessed a collaborative leadership style and granted senior leadership team members the authority to make operational decisions in their respective departments. What they did not grant them the authority to do, however, was to make decisions that would affect other areas of the college and restrict the achievement of the strategic mission of the college. How presidents ensured a collaborative climate will be discussed later in this chapter in the examination of how participants exhibited the characteristics of the theoretical framework.

Some valuable lessons about how female leaders lay the foundation for the effective utilization of their senior leadership teams is that, while they often take control of institutions that are in a state of transition, they act swiftly even when their actions have a marked departure from their predecessors. They do not shy away from restructuring senior leadership teams or changing the "ways of working" for the teams. They adapt the team to a collaborative style of leadership. This is because they believe they have made changes to establish the "right team." They deeply value the voices at the leadership team table and believe that the group can come to better conclusions than they could on their own. While they have been mentored by individuals who often have a different leadership style, both male and female, they know what works best for them and their vision. Leigh said,

For the first two months especially, I learned a lot about the [team] and what I learned was that they were top down, in my opinion. It was very authoritarian, and that's not me. So I knew that I needed to change it, because I knew that the way that it had operated under [the former president's] leadership was just contradictory to who I am as a leader and to my beliefs on how we, as an institution, can really look and can look towards innovation and transformation. I needed more than just the [team] sitting in a room making decisions when we start talking about transformative ideas. You have to have engagement throughout the institution.

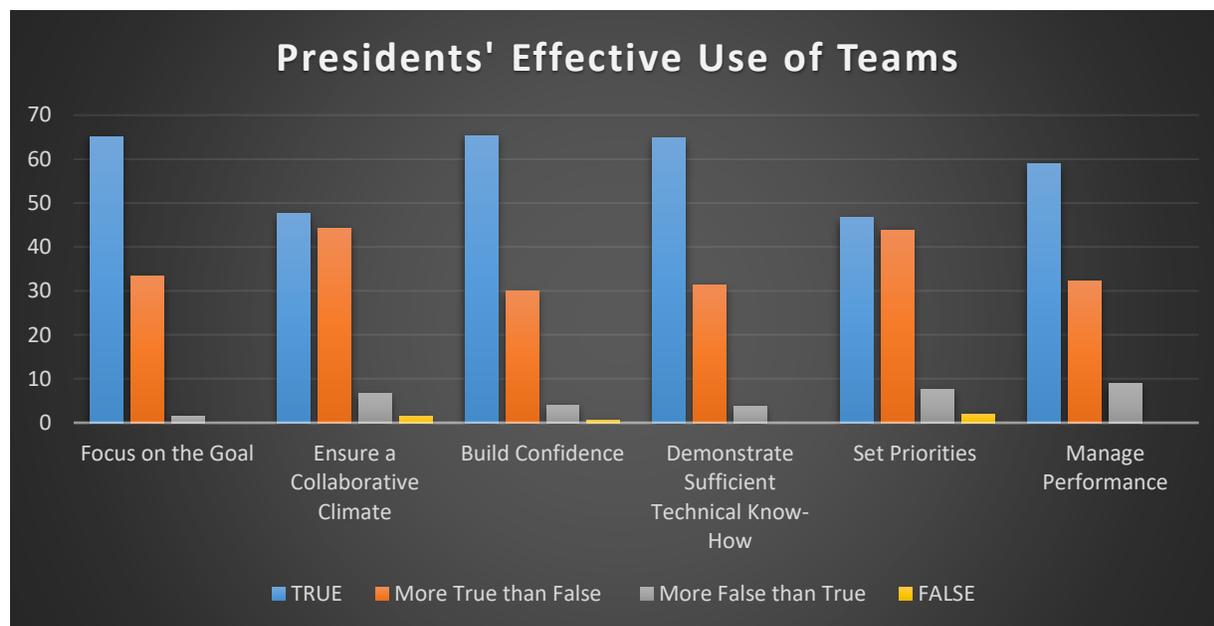
This group of president's self-awareness contributed to their establishing a team that had the capacity to be a high-functioning effective team.

### **How Teams Are Effectively Utilized: Alignment with the Six Dimensions**

Throughout the interviews, the presidents demonstrated that they brought out an array of talents of the senior leadership team. This study sought to find not only *whether* or not presidents effectively utilized their senior leadership teams, but rather, *how* they effectively did so. The research viewed the president's accounting of their leadership against the leadership literature as was outlined in the literature review section, to determine the degree of effectiveness. This literature was even more narrowly focused through the lens of the theoretical framework provided by Lafasto and Larson (2001), which provided the survey instrument that was provided to the senior leadership team members. So, while the previous sections provided the collective perspectives of the presidents in creating effective teams, the following sections include a focus on the perspectives of the senior leadership teams as well. This is done in an effort to provide a

peer-review of the data to ensure that the senior leadership team members' account matches that of the presidents.

The presidents' interview protocol questions aligned closely with LaFasto and Larson's "Six Dimensions of Effective Team Leadership" (2001), which are "focus on the goal, ensure a collaborative climate, build confidence, demonstrate sufficient technical know-how, set priorities, manage performance" (p.99). Their answers to these questions demonstrated that they do effectively lead their senior leadership teams and provided specific examples to support this assertion. The survey results of the senior leadership teams (see Figure 3) and their interview answers in the virtual lunch also demonstrate that they believe their presidents effectively utilize their teams as well. The teams overwhelmingly answered "True" or "More True Than False" in each of the assessed areas. This was true in the aggregate answers, as well as for each individual president's survey results. Therefore, the following six sections will discuss themes that emerged that closely align with the theoretical framework. Contained within are the six themes that closely align with LaFasto and Larson's (2001) "Six Dimensions of Effective Teams" (in bold text), explanations that contain narrative data, survey analysis and questions, and the narratives gained from the virtual lunch.

**Figure 3***Presidents' Effective Use of Teams*

*Note:* Aggregate responses from senior leadership teams about their presidents.

**Focus on the Goal**

**Presidents developed goals with their teams collaboratively and conveyed the goals to stakeholders in clear, concise, and memorable ways.** While the presidents believed they were hired to the position due to their strategic vision for the college, they sought to balance this with the rich and long-tenured experiences of their senior leadership teams. They listened to their senior leadership teams and welcomed a diversity of ideas. Most began the process of goal setting with listening to stakeholders for weeks, if not months, before settling on a final set of institutional objectives. Leigh stated that she went on a two-month campus and community listening tour at the start of her presidency to determine what was critical to her college's success. Each of the presidents made it clear that their senior leadership team members' ideas were not only welcomed, but expected. Patricia stated the expectation candidly to her group, "If I

have to solve it alone, then why are you here?" In similar fashion, Laura stated she conveyed to her team, "I want you to show me, John Q. Smith, how you, not your division or the team you lead, but how are you going to impact our strategic plan?"

They described the process by which these goals were created in a number of different ways. The presidents used techniques of questioning to help the group to refine ideas, not surprisingly this was also a tactic they stated was used in their Aspen training. Two created a framework of ideas and allowed their team to contribute their expertise during the strategic planning process. Two others held retreats to discuss critical needs at their colleges to determine their goals. In one of these retreats, Patricia stated that an external facilitator, "really helped us to get to the heart of who we want to be." When contributing ideas to the creation of these goals, they stated the group must see themselves in their attainment. Laura, for example, stated that she does not want her group to parrot the Aspen framework or to "write things out the way they've heard it." Rather, she wants her team members to recognize what they bring to the group's collective goals, stating she wants them to understand, "what they bring to the role." Their goals contained a compelling purpose that their teams could get behind.

The goals set at the institutions lead by this group of presidents clearly reflected their Aspen training. Every president used the Aspen framework in at least some portion of their strategic plan and mentioned it when referring to their institution's mission, vision, or strategic priorities. Each of them discussed the Aspen framework with their teams, which helped to demonstrate these objectives are not simply a hunch, but were promising practices in the field. They blended the Aspen knowledge with their own experiences as well, because each of them arrived at the presidency with a long list of accomplishments to use as a guide. This served as an example for the senior leadership team to also blend their experiences into the framework too.

Laura, for example, stated that through her decades of experience she had developed an understanding about how “critically important economic mobility is to the economic success” of her state. While this is directly in line with the Aspen framework, this was something she had arrived at through her own experience. Because Aspen situated this idea in a larger framework, she has been able to add to her mission though. Given their long tenure at the institutions for which they serve, this was also useful for the senior leadership teams to add solutions that fit their unique institutions. The senior leadership teams’ familiarity with the Aspen framework further helped to ground their goals in the culture of the institution.

Presidents wanted the goals articulated concisely and in a memorable way so the message can be conveyed easily across the campus community and to external stakeholders. Each president generally used their fingers to count off their goals when describing them. Mary said that her goals were narrowed to a small, memorable list when she stated, “I think that when we talk about setting priorities for the college, they become the priorities of the team... Those are our five focus areas and we should all be able to repeat those.” Leigh said her team, “spent the first four months developing a vision... something we can all remember say, talk about, and live, and then we use that to build out our strategic plan.” Likewise, Patricia stated they, “distilled one word for each, so we can remember.” Many presidents stated that they would be surprised if their teams did not articulate these goals in my subsequent meetings with them (and each of them did, nearly word-for-word). One president described the process of creating clearly articulated goals as happening at a retreat. She and her team were creating elaborate plans that they knew were needed to move student success efforts forward, but they were articulated in a way that were very complex. One senior leadership team member said that she remembered that the work “simplify” kept coming up, so the team made simplification a goal for the enrollment process

and they each agreed to communicate it as a goal in one word, “simplify.” Subsequently, the goal took on a life of its own, and she stated they used that word to simplify barriers that had nothing to do with enrollment. For example, they stated that their goal is to “simplify,” so it was extended to simplifying forms and processes. One should not confuse a concisely stated goal with a narrow one though.

The goals had broad implications and allowed each senior leadership team member to identify how they, as leaders of their own divisions, could have their group to contribute to it thoughtfully, even if it would have traditionally seemed to be foreign to their area’s mission. For example, one president stated that her senior leadership team did not traditionally know what their funding sources were. With the new president, information about funding streams and how they were allocated came to the table at senior leadership team meetings for a strategic discussion among all members. Each team member was charged with reflecting on the primary, long-range targets to determine if these were able to be met with the budget capacity allocated to it. If not, then the group collectively had to determine where the budget would best be allocated to meet the goals. Whereas in the past groups may have come to the senior leadership team table to compete for resources, with collaboratively created goals and collective accountability, they had to prioritize the resources accordingly.

After the goals were collectively created, the groups were also held collectively accountable for their attainment. Traditionally, for example, an institution may have held the Chief Academic Officer single-handedly accountable for student success metrics. This was not the case with this group of presidents and their teams. Senior leadership team members were expected to contribute ideas, solutions, and aid to their fellow team members. The presidents conveyed that failure rested on the group, not one individual. For example, even though Laura

spends a great deal of time speaking about her goals for the institution to campus and community stakeholders, she said this is also the “collective’s responsibility” and charged them with finding opportunities and events to engage with campus and community stakeholders. The presidents also stated that the collective creation of goals created a sense of ownership throughout the team, requiring no future “buy-in” campaign. Since they own the goals, the teams are also better able to articulate them to their direct reports. All activities and actions throughout the college had to direct back to these strategic goals. After the goal setting process, each of the president’s senior leadership teams emerged with a clear set of objectives that they identified as being meaningful goals for their institutions and for which they could understand their role.

Their senior leadership teams wholeheartedly echoed what the president’s believed to be true about themselves—they had a laser-like focus on their goals, their teams embraced these ideas, and they were well-known throughout the college. Patricia’s team mentioned their compelling purpose as being laser-like in the virtual lunch,

what (she) brought to our college was a laser-focused vision for the mission of the community college, why we were stood up in the first place, what our role is that our community, and for our students. And that was not the case before she came. And so that, that's why she was hired.

In the survey, collectively all community college’s senior leadership teams scored the presidents with either “True” or “More True Than False” in the questions related to “Focus on the Goal” (See Figure 4) at a rate of 98.41%, higher than any other of the dimensions in LaFasto and Larson’s (2001) framework. When each team was separately asked why they believed their team may have scored their president so high in this regard, the participants quickly jumped into the conversation and answered emphatically about the president’s focus on the goal.

**Figure 4***Focus on the Goal*

1	2	3	4	
True	More true than false	More false than true	False	
				1. Our team leader clearly defines our goal.
				2. Our team leader articulates our goal in a way as to inspire commitment.
				3. Our team leader avoids compromising the team's objective with political issues.
				4. Our team leader helps individual team members align their roles and with the team goal.
				5. Our team leader reinforces the goal in fresh and exciting ways.
				6. If it's necessary to adjust the team's goal, our team leader makes sure we understand why.

*Note:* Questions regarding “Focus on the Goal” from LaFasto and Larson’s (2001) Collaborative Leadership Survey as sent via Qualtrics.

Leigh’s senior leadership team members rated her highest in this area. Her team rated the questions about her being effective in focusing on the goal as “True” or “More True Than False” at a rate of 100%. They stated she articulated her vision and goals for student success as soon as she came to the college and as one team member said, “she came to the college with a student success priority and hasn’t let off the gas pedal on that.” Another said that Leigh’s vision “was contagious” and that “she expresses it so vividly and with so much passion that you don’t forget that the focus is on student success.” One long-term employee noted how she departed from earlier manners in which goals were set, stating “we spent a lot of time early in her tenure

developing goals and developing our vision. In my prior experience in higher education, that was a process you did and you put it away. She lives it every day.”

Patricia’s senior leadership team also rated her highest in this area too, with a positive response rate of “True” or “More True Than False” at 100% as well. In fact, they answered all questions which rated her effectiveness in this area as being wholly “True” at a high rate of 95.83%. The group stated that the goals being concisely stated, meaning using just one word for each goal, has helped the campus community to speak about them with confidence and to not get off on tangents. In an era of multiple and often competing initiatives, it was also a comfort to the senior leadership team member’s direct reports that they had a clear focus. One noted, “There are so many different things that are facing all of us, and our teams needed to know if it can't tie back to one of these things, then perhaps we need to re-evaluate if we need to be doing it.”

Laura’s group scored her effectiveness as “True” or “More True Than False” in four out of the six dimensions at a rate of 100%. Her ability to help her team to focus on the goal was one of these areas as well. In the virtual lunch, a senior team member said she made strategic planning a collective impact project which brought together more than 40 individuals. While they each had their wish lists, she helped them to distill the ideas into 6 focus areas with three objectives each. The individual recited them with ease and said,

Did I get everything I wanted? No. That’s okay, because I think that what we ended up with is something that we can all embrace. I’m so proud of it and so happy that we are moving forward in this direction. We have worked until we all came together and now they’re all our goals. I love that.

The president’s success in having their teams to understand the goal was enhanced due to their collaborative work in developing and achieving the goals.

## **Ensure a Collaborative Climate**

**Presidents built trusting and loyal environments and focus on strategic priorities by redirecting conversations and having team members to hold each other accountable to the collaborative structure.** The presidents focused on developing their teams from the moment they arrived by prioritizing having the right team and ensuring they worked collaboratively. Of all the dimensions in LaFasto and Larson's (2001) framework, this one demonstrated the most remarkable break from what they stated was the environment from their predecessors. They knew they couldn't deliver on promises to those in the institution and throughout the community without their senior leadership team working together to problem solve and to deliver the promised results. They all highly esteemed the teams they had created and genuinely valued their input. Not to mention, as first-time presidents, they knew those who had been at the institution could create solutions that would fit the needs of their unique institutions. Patricia explained why collaboration is important,

I do not have all the answers. Having the title of president does not bestow upon me mystical powers. The title does not confer abilities that I didn't have before. If I can speak with that level of human humility with my team, then it invites them to say, as appropriate, we need help here...With the team that I have in place, these are people who run their shops. They collaborate together without me in the room.

Collaborating with a team as a new leader is important and as Leigh stated, for the institution to be successful, "this top, strategic, visionary layer must all be together." A new leader has to create an environment which brings together the collective voices of team members.

These presidents knew they were collaborative leaders and so they coaxed members to change the type of interactions and frequency of their participation in team meetings. As has been stated earlier in this chapter, the teams were used to having a hierarchical leader and were used to the meetings being “report out” meetings or even one where the senior leadership team would have the president to sign papers. The methods employed to get the team to collaborate varied. Consuela utilized the tactic to asked questions in “round robin” fashion to ensure everyone’s voice was heard. Mary stated that her team was fairly new and so she provided a framework and asked them to provide feedback, to get the conversation started. Laura allowed the “report out” structure the team was adapted to initially, but would interject a question about the rest of the group’s thoughts on how the decision would help to lead to their collective goals. Eventually, her team began to interject questions as well. Patricia established clear ground rules for what she expected in team meetings, stating that operational issues were for one-on-one meetings. Leigh stated that after a two month listening session, she prepared an impassioned “I Have a Dream Speech” in which team members were asked to follow her bold new lead in collaborative leadership. She said this strategy was not effective because the team had no idea what she was asking of them. She found that developing meaningful relationships with her team first helped them to understand that she wanted them to collaborate on a bold, collective goal to vastly improve student success outcomes saying,

I’m always, you know, setting for them, ‘These are the expectations. We're going to challenge the status quo, when it needs to be challenged. We're going to lead boldly. We're going to take strategic risks. We're going to always consider the student first, [and focus on] student success. We're going to not be student interested, but truly student centered.

Overall, however, these strategies helped the team members to feel confident that their voice was heard.

Another important consideration for this new leadership style was that they had to protect the collaborative conversations by ensuring loyalty and trust. The presidents all agreed that the collaborative senior leadership team meetings did not always go smoothly. As Patricia declared, “Change is only sexy in its abstract form.” Each of these presidents not only worked in new ways, but were often ushering in significant reforms. Senior leadership team members were coming together to not only change the way they worked, but to also focus on new strategic priorities, which often led to difficult conversations. It was during times like this that the presidents had to assure their groups that the conversations that happened around the leadership table should never leave that room and that the group had to remain united when they took ideas to the college. They spoke about the seriousness of trust and loyalty in very candid terms. Patricia told her team, “Gossip, to me, is the kiss of death.” Consuela said, “Once we we've decided on a course of action, I expect people to get on board and not have sour grapes about it.” Laura sees the protection of her group’s work behind closed doors as required for membership to the team, stating to her team “If I learn that information is out and it comes from you, you are no longer a member of this team.” While this may seem like harsh wording to the teams, the presidents understand that they must serve as a united front for tough, strategic decisions and to stand by them in order to be successful.

Just as they did with establishing their goals, they demand conversations in team meetings be strategic, rather than operational in nature. If the senior leadership team is to function in a true collaborative fashion, they must use their time together wisely. Patricia said that the senior leadership team meetings are “the most expensive meetings on campus” and

calculated the dollar amount of one meeting costing the institution \$5,000. She said at the end of such an expensive meeting there should be something to show for it. She, like the other presidents, insist that conversations focus on the achievement of the strategic goals they all agreed upon. Fortunately for Patricia, she has one senior leadership team member, who is seasoned in working for a collaborative president, that will speak up in meetings and ask others if an issue is really something that should be discussed in the forum. The member is strict about it and while it may appear abrupt, it does keep the group on track. Leigh said she spends a lot of time empowering her team to serve two different roles for the college and explained it as wearing two hats. She said that for the senior leadership team role, particularly at team meetings, team members are, “responsible for vision and strategy and those big picture ideas of how to move the institution and take a transformational leap forward. They are setting the big picture direction and not controlling every minute aspect of how that is achieved.” and “when they are functioning as the vice president their functional unit, they are meeting with their teams and understanding how the processes are being done, for example, making sure they know they're equitable, making sure that they're not creating additional barriers.”

The presidents describe that they must balance doing their job and that of the senior leadership team members, even when it is difficult to refrain. When asked about how they balance utilizing their own technical know-how with talents of those on their teams, most cited an Aspen fellowship experience in which they were directed not be a “vice president on steroids.” They have each come to this role due to enormous success as vice presidents, so it is clear why Aspen would caution them to focus on their new, presidential role. They each recognize this caveat in their role and intentionally focus to lead the vice presidents, rather than to do their jobs for them. Leigh stated that team members worked hard to get to where they were

and that it “isn’t right or fair” to do their job for them. She said she does “reserve the right to make a directive if/when doing so is needed to keep us moving towards our vision” though.

While for each one of them it started with having capable members on their teams, from that point forward, they encouraged and allowed the senior leadership team members to perform their roles in different ways. Mary cautioned that even when she has the right members on her team, she likes to coach and develop team members to ensure they understand the political implications of their decisions. Several of them stated they used questioning to help presidents to see challenges and solutions more clearly. They often did this in one-on-one meetings with their team, especially because team members are at different stages in their development. In these moments, they are careful not to give advice. Laura said “the worst thing you can do as a leader is to say ‘Here is what you should do.’” Leigh echoed this sentiment and stated that it is hard, especially when you are excited about something, but that the better path is to provide them with literature, data, and to link them to your network. Consuela hired an executive coach that reminds her not to step in and provides her with questions to ask the team to help them to see that they know the answers. All of the presidents stated that the primary reason they should not do a vice president’s job for them is because the role of the president is already incredibly time-consuming and of extreme importance. They simply do not have time to do both and remain effective in either role. Allowing the vice presidents to become specialists in their role and to collaborate with other team members about strategic solutions to institutional problems helps to better understand the institution at large.

Presidents enhance their effectiveness by sharing responsibility and leadership, but take ultimate responsibility for the decisions made around the leadership table. One way in which they share their authority is to encourage the senior leadership team to come to decisions about

how to reach strategic goals collectively. This better ensures creative solutions, but also helps them to hold each other accountable, which will be discussed later in this chapter. In addition to the work they perform on and around campus though, each of these presidents spend a great deal of time in the community with government and industry stakeholders. Many presidents leave a particular person they leave in charge while they are away, and while that is fine for emergency decisions that must be made immediately, like declaring an inclement weather delay, most of the presidents state that the decisions generally fall to the person in charge of the area in question. If a decision that affects more than one area is in question, senior leadership teams who are adapted to work collaboratively come to decisions together. Most of the teams who participated in this study already met with other members, or participated on “sub-teams” without the oversight of a president, especially if it involved operational concerns. The presidents were not naïve though, they understood that they were held ultimately responsible for the actions of their senior leadership team member’s decisions. Leigh said, “I’m the person who has to sign in blood for the college, because somebody has to at the end of the day. The buck has to stop somewhere. That’s what the ‘leader in charge’ role is in an organization where you’re sharing and collaborating to lead.” *Onboarding the right team and taking ultimate responsibility* for the senior leadership teams decisions appear to be bookends to the presidents sharing their leadership authority. What lies in the middle is clearly *trust*.

The reason presidents are able to allow their senior leadership teams to function with such authority is because they have invested a lot of time getting to know them. Whether the topics are personal or professional, this group of presidents take a relational approach to leadership. Leigh vividly described that she reads for two hours every morning and shares current literature on topics in the field with her team via a digital platform. She also texts, video

calls, and chats in the car on nearly every trip she makes. She knows her team member's birthdays, buys Christmas gifts for their children, and takes time to know their personal and professional goals. Her self-profession of being a "relational leader" is most definitely understated. Patricia also developed the relationship with her team and provided space for her team to share proud moments in team meetings. She reflected on the "door frame conversations," frequent text messages, and phone calls as helping her team to know each other too. She was careful to allow the team members to balance their personal and professional lives, so she has communicated clear expectations about the difference between a text on the weekend, which requires an urgent response, and an email on the weekend, which can wait until Monday for a response. Consuela described the process of working closely with her team, "they have to have a big enough dose of my understanding of the vision that we're all working towards and what that means in their respective areas, so that when I'm not around or when I'm not directly involved in the work they're doing they hear my voice." The close relationships between presidents, with their teams, and between team members, fosters enhanced collaboration and builds trust, both with the president and one another.

Developing a collaborative leadership style took time and effort, but the presidents say that the result is that team members enjoy their work; the team's collective ideas are better than they could produce on their own; it has helped to develop leaders because some of their members have gone on to become presidents or Aspen fellows; and it helps them to share in the overall leadership of the institution.

The senior leadership team also demonstrated the benefits of working in a collective leadership environment. This is notable considering the short time frame that most of the senior leadership team members have worked in this environment, and remembering that all presidents

in this study have been in the role for less than five years. All senior leadership teams across the board collectively answered the questions regarding “Ensure a Collaborative Climate” (see Figure 5) with a positive rating, meaning “True” or “More True than False,” for all presidents at a rate of 91.91%.

**Figure 5***Ensure a Collaborative Climate*

1 True	2 More true than false	3 More false than true	4 False	
				7. Our team leader creates a safe climate for team members to openly and supportively discuss any issue related to the team's success.
				8. Our team leader communicates openly and honestly.
				9. There are no issues that our team leader is uncomfortable discussing with the team.
				10. There are no chronic problems within our team that we are unable to resolve.
				11. Our team leader does not tolerate a non-collaborative style by team members.
				12. Our team member acknowledges and rewards the behaviors that contribute to an open and supportive team climate.
				13. Our team leader creates a work environment that promotes productive problem solving.
				14. Our team leader does not allow organization structure, systems, and processes to interfere with the achievement of our team's goal.
				15. Our team leader manages his/her personal control needs.
				16. Our team leader does not allow his/her ego to get in the way.

*Note:* Questions regarding “Ensure a Collaborative Climate” from LaFasto and Larson’s (2001) Collaborative Leadership Survey as sent via Qualtrics.

Across the board, senior leadership team members shared positive sentiments about their president’s collaborative work. Many of the comments shared around the president’s style

regarded feeling heard like they'd never been heard before. A member of Patricia's team said before she came they were, "more fractured, less focused, less purposeful in our efforts."

Considering the vast amount of time and effort that the presidents contributed to coaching and developing collaborative leadership teams, it was notable that none of the teams scored this as the most positive of the six dimensions, even though it still ranked very high. During the virtual lunch, senior leadership teams spoke very highly of their president's collaborative leadership style and often discussed how it represented a marked departure from their previous president's leadership style.

While not asked about the shift to remote operations, many senior leadership team members stated that the move to remote operations had stifled both the ability to be strategic and the feelings of being in a collaborative environment, neither of which they blamed on their president. When the Covid-19 pandemic forced operations online, the senior leadership team conversations had to, understandably, quickly switch from strategic vision to emergency operations. This was noted by one team member who said that "Covid plays a part in this one because for the last year or so we have been meeting mostly virtually and not face-to-face. I think that is putting newer employees at a disadvantage." Those who had spent the months and years working collaboratively before Covid-era operations happened also mentioned feeling a loss of comradery. Another team member on another team lamented, "we used to be laughing around the boardroom table at our leadership meetings... now we're all on Zoom and sometimes we see each other and sometimes we don't." The presidents used their leadership skills to combat this feeling through various methods, including frequent text messages, video calls, phone calls, sharing of ideas via email, and other communication methods. While the president did work to keep the senior leadership team members collaborating, the strains of performing this work

remotely was stated (as mentioned above) to contribute to a feeling of loss of the strong collaborative environment for some team members.

As the pandemic seemed to draw to a close around the time of the interviews, the team members and presidents both reflected on how they had emerged more confident in their abilities. One president stated,

I think that we addressed the need to respond to the pandemic as well as I would have ever expected this institution to and I would say that that leadership team as whole, actually everybody in college, but particularly that leadership team should be recognized for that.

Another president stated, “I think on the other side of this we’ll be stronger, because we’ve developed more responsive muscles” As difficult as it was, those who worked together through the pandemic were tested in unimagined ways and emerged with remarkable resilience and proven agility to find collaborative solutions.

### **Build Confidence**

**Presidents built confidence and quelled apprehension and indecisiveness through relationship building, particularly through coaching and reassurance in one-on-one meetings.** As has been stated, the presidents believe they have high performing team members and they have made strong attempts to get to know them authentically. They have also often hired outside consultants who have performed assessments to show the team members what strengths they possess. Because they have spent enormous amounts of time communicating their collectively-created, concisely-stated goals, they believe in the capacity of their teams to move their mission, vision, and values forward. They also set clear expectations and informed their teams that they believed they could handle challenges that came their way. This surely laid the

groundwork for building the team's confidence. Considering the new strategic vision, the presidents have, confidence building is not a "one and done" scenario though.

The capacity to carry out a new agenda requires courageous action. When team members are hesitant or anxious, the presidents convey their belief and confidence in their team members' abilities through a number of actions. First, they give them the authority and convey the expectation that they will perform the job entrusted to them. As Patricia informed her team, "You have control over your own budget, your own personnel. You do not need 'you have my approval.'" Because they have a great deal of admiration and confidence in their team members, they often ask clarifying questions about what may be causing a lack of confidence or indecisiveness. Patricia says when they lack confidence, she asks them the "Captain Obvious questions" to show them they know what to do. Mary said she helps her team to feel confident by "going back and looking over all the efforts they've put their time into that have been successful over the past few years." Leigh stated that the feeling of apprehension or indecisiveness often arises from not having enough information to make a decision, or because they have what she terms as "anec-data," meaning anecdotal, unreliable data. She combats this feeling of anxiety or indecision by asking what information they need to move forward, providing them with literature that may help them to make a decision, by putting them into contact with someone who can help them to make the decision, and sometimes by giving them an impassioned speech to tell them their role requires bold action.

Most all of the president's offices reside in close proximity to at least some members of their senior leadership teams. Having a president who is within earshot also provides the ability to ask quick questions in an informal manner. This, paired with all with the other aforementioned ways they communicate with their team members, helps the team to know that they are acting in

line with what they know the president wants. This ability to have consistent communication can help to create a level of confidence that the team member is acting in a manner that the president will support. Consuela illustrated this in an example when one of her leadership team members was on a call with neighboring community colleges for which the president was not present. When one school indicated they had suffered a loss of online course content, one of her senior leadership team members leapt into action and requested the institution tell them the course content they needed and if they had it, they would send it along. Consuela said the team member was confident to take this action because she knew it is what she, herself would have done if she were on the call. She said,

She called me afterwards and said, 'I just wanted to let you know that's what I've done.' She said, 'I'm pretty sure that's consistent with what you would want.' And I said, 'It is spot-on consistent with what I would have asked you to do. So, thank you for conveying to them, our willingness to help.'

The access to the president created by the availability of technology has also enhanced the confidence of senior leadership teams. A quick text or video call helps the senior leadership team members to check in as needed. Presidents can share their point of view clearly and often. Leigh stated she buys her team books, provides literature via her digital platform, provides information from the field, and from the literature, to align the thoughts and the behaviors of the group with her vision and strategies to achieve it. This creates an environment in which presidents and their teams are growing in their knowledge and are aligning their ideas along the way.

Confident senior leadership team members are also happier in their work, especially when they see they believe they are contributing to the success of the college. This was reported

by the presidents with examples they gave about the sentiments of team members and by the team members themselves during the virtual lunch. Patricia gave an account of what one team member related to her,

she talked about how in all of her years of being at the college, she's never been happier, because she feels like she can fly and that she's like in this block with other team members. There's this synergy among the team... (she said) we are all on the same page. We're on we're not all on the same projects, but we're all on the same page.

By inviting the team's perspectives from the onset, the teams feel ownership of the objectives and their subsequent success. Leigh said that telling people they are doing a good job provides validation, "all of us want to want to be validated all of us want to know that what we're doing and the way we're moving forward is meeting the expectations of the leaders and our peers." This group of presidents was quick to attribute successful initiatives to their group as a whole, rather than taking personal credit.

The senior leadership teams demonstrate that they have been given the responsibility to perform their jobs and feel confident in their own abilities. Overall, the senior leadership teams collectively rated the area of "Build Confidence" (see Figure 6) with a positive rating, meaning "True" or "More True than False," for all presidents at a rate of 95.23%.

**Figure 6**

*Build Confidence*

				17. Our team leader ensures that our team achieves results.
				18. Our team leader helps strengthen the self-confidence of team members.
				19. Our team leader makes sure team members are clear about critical issues and important facts.
				20. Our team leader exhibits trust by giving us meaningful levels of responsibility.
				21. Our team leader is fair and impartial toward all team members.
				22. Our team leader is an optimistic person who focuses on opportunities.
				23. Our team leader looks for and acknowledges contributions by team members.

*Note:* Questions regarding “Build Confidence” from LaFasto and Larson’s (2001) Collaborative Leadership Survey as sent via Qualtrics.

While all president’s teams rated them highly in this area, “Build Confidence” was another of the areas that Laura’s team rated her at 100%. In the virtual lunch, it was apparent that this, at least in part, stems from their own self-confidence in their abilities and her recognition of that, as one member stated that when they have an issue that she conveys, “She has confidence that I can handle this and I will tell her when I have it done.” The individual continued, “I feel like if you look at our resumes, you would say, I think they can do it and that's how she feels so that's where I think the confidence for us comes from.”

This dimension was the area that Mary’s team rated her the most in the wholly “True” category. Her group said that she tells them how much she values them and that they are the best

senior leadership team out there. She does so in a myriad of ways, “email, texting, in group meetings, and one-on-one,” and not only to them, but also to external stakeholders, like the Board of Trustees. They said they wear many hats at the institution and appreciate that their work is valued. Building the team’s confidence in their own abilities rests, in large part, on their ability to deliver results. Another team member stated, “She encourages us and is very kind in her feedback, but she also has high expectations and expects us to do our jobs.” The senior leadership team members have to possess confidence in the leader to also have the ability to shepherd them through challenges they may face.

### **Demonstrate Sufficient Technical Know-How**

**Presidents utilize their close relationships with team members and model behaviors to demonstrate their technical know-how.** When the presidents were asked how they demonstrate their own technical know-how, even when given the questions in advance, some hesitated to provide an answer. Considering the long list of accomplishments of these female presidents, there was no shortage of talent within the group. They demonstrated their relational leadership style aids in building their teams’ confidence in their abilities. The primary manner that they all shared in demonstrating their technical know-how to their teams were through frequent dialogue and conversations. Each of these presidents has frequent group and one-on-one meetings in which they share their years of experience. As was stated previously in the “Collaborative Climate” section, they were careful not to perform the senior leadership team members’ jobs for them, but they do ask questions that often demonstrate they know a great deal about the subjects at hand.

The presidents also demonstrate their technical know-how through modeling behavior. It was clear throughout the interviews that the presidents set high expectations for their own work

and put in long hours. Two of the presidents, for example, said that in their first year they did not turn down any community engagements, one did so because she wanted to hear what the community needed and the other wanted to explain her enterprising workforce agenda. They have a strong sense of purpose and explain why to their teams. As Patricia said she “works hard, prepares in advance,” and is consistent in her “unwavering commitment” to students. Mary said that modeling who you genuinely are is also important. Some of the other ways presidents conveyed their breadth of knowledge and talents were through formal assessments and by connecting them to their professional networks, including their Aspen connections.

Overall, the senior leadership teams collectively rated the questions in the area of “Demonstrate Sufficient Technical Know-How” (see Figure 7) with a positive rating, meaning “True” or “More True than False,” for all presidents at a rate of 96.19%. For many of them, they cited their president carrying them through a time of crisis, like the onset of the pandemic and a quick switch to remote operations, as being a measure of how the president demonstrated their technical know-how.

**Figure 7***Demonstrate Technical Know-How*

				24. Our team leader understands the technical issues we must face in achieving our goal.
				25. Our team leader has had sufficient experience with the technical aspects of our team's goal.
				26. Our team leader is open to technical advice from team members who are more knowledgeable.
				27. Our team leader is capable of helping the team analyze complex issues related to our goal.
				28. Our team leader is seen as credible and knowledgeable by people outside our team.

*Note:* Questions regarding “Demonstrate Technical Know-How” from LaFasto and Larson’s (2001) Collaborative Leadership Survey as sent via Qualtrics.

As may be expected, senior leadership team members who worked in an area that a president had previously served in mentioned her expert abilities in that realm. For example, if a team member had served as a Vice President of Academic Affairs, a team member who served in that same role was better able to identify what strengths she possessed. Considering that this group of presidents have all worked in community college leadership roles for a long time, the teams recognized that enabled them to gain a strong base of knowledge. One of Laura’s team members said, “but there is no substitute in my mind for experience...she has done so many things in her career. We have confidence in her to run the college.”

Consuela’s team rated her highest in this area and said it was because that she carried her college through a crisis situation and they knew she was the person to lead them through this, even though she had only been at the college for a short time. When prompted for how she demonstrated her technical know-how to the team, one member drove the point home,

Anytime you ask her a question about anything, she either has had an experience with it or immediately goes and reads about it and then will tell you what she thinks about it. She has her finger on the pulse of every area. It seems like I always think she might be tripped up when something pops up, but she really studies, learns, and retains what she has experienced and has engaged in. I think just from that standpoint, the fact that she loves to look at data and that she loves to learn about all these different areas, that demonstrates her proficiency right there.

Some of the ways in which this group of presidents demonstrated their technical know-how are more attainable than others, like developing relationships, modeling behavior, hiring outside consultants to perform formal assessments. These actions took time, but were within the grasp of each new president. While the presidents have a wealth of experience and see a number of opportunities to enhance college operations, they must refine the list to manageable set of priorities for their teams.

### **Set Priorities**

**The presidents are astutely aware of priority creep and initiative fatigue, so they are careful that priorities are clearly focused on meeting the objectives the strategic plan.** The Aspen framework was not only the foundation for strategic planning, but served as the "North Star" for priorities as well. In every conversation with presidents about goals and priorities their strategic plan was mentioned. The data suggests that a clear focus on the goals makes conversations about the priorities streamlined. It also helps the senior leadership team to not go off on tangents, either in meeting conversations or in their activities. Consuela mentioned that her group is focusing on a goal to create a more positive environment on campus. Her team

determined characteristics they wanted all team members to embody and then created questions that could be used in hiring practices across the campus. The document they created together included guidelines for such characteristics as ethics and collegiality and demonstrate how she is leading her senior team to transform the culture. Setting this as a priority gave the senior leadership team a focus on priorities that help them to reach the goal.

The presidents also demonstrated a sense of urgency for prioritizing student success outcomes. The data showed they work with a sense of urgency, through long hours, and want their teams to prioritize urgent needs as well. Leigh said that her team asked her “what vitamins” she took because they were “having a hard time keeping up” with her. She used a quote from her grandmother to convey her sense of urgency for equitable student success outcomes as her being “hell bent for election to get where she is going.” Although she is sympathetic to them acclimating to her more rapid pace, she says the students cannot afford for them to slow improvement efforts. Each one conveyed this prioritization as having a student-centered focus. While one may link this to their Aspen training, most all attribute this drive and passion all the way back to their days in the classroom. They know what their initiatives mean to students and insist on urgency. Patricia told her team, “we need to adopt a little bit more speed and urgency” and explained to her team that “every semester that passes, if you don’t address these things we are failing a class of students.”

The presidents discussed how priority setting was important to their leadership, in spite of obstacles that often seemed to get in the way. While nothing existed in the interview protocol about the move to remote operations during the pandemic, it arose as an example of how presidents must remain focused on their most important priorities. The shift to remote work during the pandemic often required that urgent operational priorities took precedence over

strategic ones. In the fall of 2020, Patricia said she wanted the team to move forward on some pre-pandemic promises, so she sat down with several months' worth of notes to devise a plan to get the focus back to accomplishing some of their goals. She emerged from the weekend with a manageable set of priorities and took them back to the group for discussion. They set a one-year deadline to accomplish the objectives and were relieved that they could focus on moving forward. Patricia said "It doesn't mean we're not doing other things. But the other things cannot be prioritized over these things." She stated that none of them were new priorities, just things that had been put on a back-burner, so to speak, due to pandemic operations. She reported that her senior leadership team said, "Thank you. Thank you, thank you, because we're all in a place where we have 30 things on our lists, but when we shrink our universe just a little bit we can see that these are primary." Her team was comforted by the notion that they knew what to focus on again. The presidents demonstrated through their actions, like that explained by Patricia, that senior leadership teams need to know what needs to be prioritized, especially in times of crisis.

Budgets aid the achievement of priorities, but even with budget shortfalls presidents were able to focus on what mattered most to them. Consuela, for example, who arrived at her institution after multiple years of budget shortfalls and said that had resulted in a "poverty mentality," could have used the budget shortfall as an excuse for not being able to prioritize objectives. She stated one of her goals was to instill pride in the community about the campus and called upon others to make it their priority as well. She asked her maintenance crew to use any additional time they had to help renovate her executive conference room, paint exterior facing doors, and to remove broken benches. These things are being done on a shoestring budget, but she wants campus pride to be a priority and it is taking hold. They plan to move their graduation to their campus after holding it for many years at an off-site location. Patricia said her

budget helps to refine the top areas where they are going to prioritize resources, but does not dictate the priorities. She said the budget does clearly indicate where one's values are and said, "Show me your budget and I'll tell you where your values are."

While still deemed highly effective at 90.48% of respondents stated that they either believed the questions regarding effective priority setting (See Figure 8) were "True" or "More True Than False," collectively the presidents ranked lowest on this dimension of the framework than the others, according to their senior leadership team members. Nonetheless, the team members generally showered their presidents with praise about how they ensure that meetings are focused on a manageable set of strategic priorities and how they set clear guidelines for what is most important. Consuela's team was clear on her ability to set priorities and stick to them, "You know she means what she says. She's not going to forget it. She's not going to wander off and find another priority."

Individual results were similar, with the exception of Mary, whose senior leadership team scored her effectiveness in this area higher than all others. Her team answered questions about her effectiveness (See Figure 8), with answers of either wholly "True" or "More True Than False" at a rating of 100%. A member of Mary's senior leadership team provided some insight into the challenges of having too many priorities but also took responsibility and stated, "People get initiative fatigue and find it hard to see how it all fits together." They followed up with their shared responsibility, however, stating, "We all share in that as a senior leadership team." Considering that Mary works closely with her senior leadership team to collaborate on how the goals will be achieved, it's no wonder that they feel she is operating effectively in this dimension.

**Figure 8***Set Priorities*

				29. Our team leader keeps our team focused on a manageable set of priorities that will lead to the accomplishment of our goal.
				30. Our team leader and the members of our team agree on the top priorities for achieving our goal.
				31. Our team leader communicates and reinforces a focus on priorities.
				32. Our team leader does not dilute our team's effort with too many priorities.
				33. If it's necessary to change priorities our team leader helps us understand why.

*Note:* Questions regarding “Set Priorities” from LaFasto and Larson’s (2001) Collaborative Leadership Survey as sent via Qualtrics.

**Manage Performance**

**Close relationships, clear expectations, and collective accountability are important components to presidents holding their senior leadership team members accountable.** When asked how they hold their senior leadership team members personally and collectively accountable, the presidents frequently used the words “clearly,” “no surprises,” “one-on-one.” Laura used more than one of those words when speaking about individual accountability, especially when an individual is not aligning with the goals,

I have to be able to be direct, but also make sure that the individual knows I'm going to speak with [them] about it. This isn't an item or an incident. This is not about [them], in [their] role. Overall, it's a balancing act to make sure that at the end, we're very clear, this has to change. But that doesn't mean you should feel

threatened or on guard. When we're working together you should never be surprised.

Leigh stated that the key focus for her team is meeting the goals of the strategic plan, both in terms of their collective responsibility as vice presidents in senior leadership team, and in their functional areas while they are ensuring their operations support those goals. In their functional areas, they are also responsible for holding their direct reports accountable for aligning their goals and work. In the end, individual accountability has a large supporting framework throughout the college. She says personal accountability is “setting the expectations, providing the resources, supporting team members to achieve those expectations, and dealing with setbacks in a proactive way.” Much like what Leigh described, the other presidents explained that managing performance is not something that happens once a year in an annual appraisal. Mary stated that this is because people simply focus on the number. Others also posit that waiting until even a mid-year performance review was too late for a redirection. Rather, the president must have frequent check-in to manage and develop performance.

Presidents who are effective at holding their teams accountable set very clear expectations from the outset of their working relationships. Presidents must know what knowledge, skills, and abilities their team members possess and work to develop them. Consuela gave a sports analogy and said that it starts from day one with getting to know your team and what their strengths are, “You don’t show up on day one and say these are the plays we are going to run.” Instead, “You have got to see who has endurance. You have to see who is going to give up.” Every president used a term that denoted being clear when speaking about performance expectations and accountability. More than one president quoted Brene Brown (2018) and her

mantra “Clear is Kind, Unclear is Unkind,” when discussing feedback. Being kind but clear helps to develop team members, rather than to demoralize them.

When a senior team member has missed the mark on an objective or made an error, the presidents often started conversations with questions to gain clarity. Laura said she asks her team to join her so they can “think through this together” and to ask them what outcomes they wanted to happen from their actions. She said you need to “use some very specific concrete examples of something that has transpired that is not supportive of the outcome.” The team members are, after all, often accomplished team members. Each of the presidents said that meetings in which personal feedback was going to be delivered should be delivered in private. Consuela said that her predecessor was famed for “gotcha” moments and it had made the team shut down in team meetings. While kindness is important, it is also important for presidents to convey the consequences of the team member’s actions to them. This does not mean a threat that their job is on the line, but rather, Mary said it is important to let them know what the consequences of their actions have to college and community stakeholders. About one example, she stated,

It is a one-on-one conversation when it's something like that and it's really a teaching moment. It's almost like I come in to say, there are multiple aspects here, that in reality they probably didn't consider.

Some presidents said they had to be blunt at times and maintained that this was never an easy task. Laura said it sometimes gets “heavy” but that the president has to be willing to have the tough conversations. She said, “I've told folks, I've never gone into any conversation that I knew someone was going to be unhappy with the outcome that I thought, I can't wait to have this. But if I'm unwilling to do that...then I shouldn't be sitting in whatever leadership role I'm in.” Mary repeated this sentiment in her interview, “With some people you must be delicate, with

others you can be blunter, but you must talk about it." She says, it all about being able to communicate effectively and to know how receptive the person is going to receive it. The presidents also stated that while feedback should be delivered kindly and compassionately, senior leadership team members must be receptive to hearing feedback. Laura said "the key to managing feedback is to be self-confident enough not to let it shake you and to learn from the experience." This attitude also requires a degree of trust that comes with developing relationships both between the president and the team member and within the team.

When senior leadership team members are held collectively accountable to achieving their goals, they train and coach one another. Patricia said that when a new team member is onboarded, the other team members meet with them and provide information about her working style and what she expects. In most of the teams, the presidents stated there was at least one individual who held others accountable, not just for not wasting the group's time in senior leadership team meetings, but also for their collective success. Patricia has one senior leadership team member who she says has,

been able to come into [team] meetings [and say] immediately, 'Why are we bothering the president with this? We should be discussing something else.' So she has helped raise the bar for her fellow [team] members on what is a [team] level discussion, and what is an operationalizing work session that they need to be involved in.

Laura said she has never had a team that would not help one another out. Collective accountability has the capacity to aid the president in their role of meeting their goals and managing team members. For this go smoothly, presidents have to foster the team's interpersonal relationships and be keen to the team dynamics.

Overall, the senior leadership teams collectively rated the questions in the area of “Manage Performance” (see Figure 9) with a positive rating, meaning “True” or “More True than False,” for all presidents at a rate of 91.09%. This was not an area that brought up a lot of discussion in the virtual lunch. This was most likely due to the nature of the questions posed and because if there are performance issues, presidents stated that they dealt with them privately.

**Figure 9**

*Manage Performance*

1	2	3	4	
True	More true than false	More false than true	False	
				34. Our team leader makes performance expectations clear.
				35. Our team leader encourages the team to agree on a set of values that guides our performance.
				36. Our team leader ensures that rewards and incentives are aligned with achieving our team's goals.
				37. Our team leader assesses the collaborative skills of team members as well as the results they achieve.
				38. Our team leader gives us useful, developmental feedback to team members.
				39. Our team leader is willing to confront and resolve issues associated with inadequate performance by team members.
				40. Our team leader recognizes and rewards superior performance.

*Note:* Questions regarding “Manage Performance” from LaFasto and Larson’s (2001)

Collaborative Leadership Survey as sent via Qualtrics.

One senior leadership team member spoke with me privately after the virtual lunch and gave some clarification about why a president may have received a high score in this dimension.

They stated that it had to do with the collective accountability that the team engages in and explained,

I can see how there might be a member of the team that would put that, but I think it's not a matter of her (the president) directly but maybe how some of the other team members interact with that one vice president. Maybe that person doesn't feel that they're being supported at times, so I think it isn't necessarily a function of the president. It might be some of the others and the way that they interact with this one vice president.

In an assessment gauging the effectiveness of the president to hold others accountable, it appears that if one member believes the other group members are putting pressure on them, they will rate the president low on this measure.

### **Summary**

These first-time, female presidents entered the community colleges possessing a wealth of experience which had been gained through decades of experience, both in various areas of the colleges they serve and in progressive levels of experience. They followed often long-tenured, male presidents who possessed a hierarchical style of leadership. These women, however, knew their leadership style was collaborative and that they would have to adapt their teams to this style in order to be effective. They listened to their constituents to understand the campus culture, their inherited teams, and what needs existed at their new institutions. They laid out their vision, ensured they had teams who were aligned with their ideals, and collaborated with their teams to create goals, formulated in part with an eye on the president's Aspen training. They insisted on a collaborative climate, not because they lack experience or know-how, but because they admired their team's experience. They also knew they were better able to do the job of the president if

they had shared leadership of operational issues and collective thought processes contributing to a strategic vision. They required not only collaborative goals, but established both personal and collective accountability to reach them. The female presidents who participated in this study did align with LaFasto and Larson's (2001) framework that demonstrated how to lead effective teams. How the presidents effectively utilized their teams was reflected in their actions and was illuminated in their narratives. The survey answers provided by members of their senior leadership teams and the examples provided by their leadership teams also reinforced this finding.

While the presidents showed they were effective in this regard, they were not perfect and conveyed this throughout the interviews. For example, in the last questions, they provided answers to what they would have done differently and what advice they would have given to a new, incoming president about how they effectively utilized their senior leadership teams. As was demonstrated in the findings section, particularly in the survey responses by the senior leadership teams about their president, no one president scored one hundred percent on all measures of effectiveness.

As was stated at the onset of this chapter, because the sample is so narrowly defined, I have refrained from providing profiles so as to not risk the confidentiality of the participants. The goal of this research was to determine *how* a group of presidents effectively utilized their teams to benefit of other presidents coming to the role. The data provided throughout the findings is a robust account of how the presidents aligned with LaFasto and Larson's (2001) theoretical framework to accomplish this aim. The robustness of the answers has the capacity to lose the heart of the message, however. To deliver on the promise of providing useful information to new (and often busy) presidents, an additional chapter is being provided that summarizes what the

presidents themselves stated throughout their interviews as being the most important elements of their effectiveness. Those responses have been compiled and form the next chapter in which composites for an aspirational president are described.

Recognizing that no person is flawless, these principles are not a prescription for perfection, nor a set of linear steps to be completed. Rather, this chapter establishes a picture of the ideal according to the information provided by the presidents themselves, as was revealed in the data, throughout their interviews, and particularly in each of their final interviews. Because it is informed only by the data contained in their interviews, it is not intended to be a comprehensive recipe for success. The information contained here may have been frequently stated by one president and infrequently stated by another. It also does not contain alignment with literature that may support it, so citations are not provided. Rather, it is simply their stories brought together in one comprehensive *Aspirational State*.

## CHAPTER 5: ASPIRATIONAL STATE

The presidents who were the focus of this study represented high-functioning leaders who shaped and effectively utilized their senior leadership teams. Even still, throughout the course of the interviews, they reflected on what they could have done better. Additionally, each president was asked to reflect upon what they would have done differently and what advice they had for new, incoming presidents. Given the answers of the presidents in this study, this ideal state was gleaned as a concise guide of the most frequently or most robustly mentioned advice for new presidents. This section is provided primarily for new presidents, who want to read a concise account of what the presidents in this study stated was the key to their success, or what they wish they had done, to effectively lead their senior leadership teams.

### **Education and Experience**

A president who is equipped to lead and effectively utilizes their senior leadership team is one who has been steeped in many roles in various departments and divisions throughout the institution. They have been awarded terminal degrees in their fields. They are passionate about their experience in working with students and due to this are often given increasing levels of responsibility. Their experiences are not limited to the academic domain, however, they gain understanding by working around the college. The lessons learned become a toolkit of what to do, and what not to do in the future. They gain the respect of past presidents and mentors who encourage and guide. They pay their mentorship forward by mentoring others and feel a sense of pride from their accomplishments.

Being life-long learners they also keep learning, reading, researching, and studying. They ask others to read and reflect with them, so their perceptions are not one-sided. Being “in the

know” creates a level of confidence in their actions. They are not afraid of unconventional action.

### **Behavior**

A successful new president is emotionally intelligent, self-aware, and confident. Their emotional intelligence helps them to “read the room” and bring disparate groups together. They are fervent listeners, who deeply care about others, and repeat information back in the form of plans to move forward. When they are charged with oversight of campus communities that have different citizens in the community, they have the political savvy to utilize their most useful skills in genuine manner.

Presidents authentically value the ideas of others and do not tolerate egotistic behavior. They appreciate collaborative people and value their experience and ideas. Investing time in others is their greatest commitment. By building deep and meaningful relationships, they get to know people personally and professionally. They love to do fun things with those whom they work and celebrate each other’s families’ accomplishments. Going for walks together, chatting on the phone, and eating healthy meals together, demonstrates that they care for those with whom they work.

They don’t rely solely upon their own understanding and invite opposing viewpoints. By creating collaborative environments, they allow themselves and others to thrive. They seek out training opportunities, as well as assessments for their themselves and their teams to understand their talents. They hire outside consultants and spend time in retreats. Admitting when they are wrong is not a problem for them, because they are not egotistical. As one said, “You don’t have to be right. I don’t have to be right. But, we have to get it right.” Being of high moral regard

allows them to model what they expect of others as well. While they openly listen and appreciate the advice of others, they are astutely self-aware of how they wish to lead.

### **Values**

They value trust, loyalty, collaboration, and democracy. They admire the experience of their team members and build trusting relationships. Trust is the most important element of team membership to presidents who successfully utilize their teams. They also value the individual experiences and strengths others bring to the team. One person overshadowing the contributions of another is not tolerated, because they value the unique contributions their diverse team members offer.

Their purpose is to ensure equitable student success and all with whom they work must also value that ideal. Above all else, they want others to join them to ensure all their students to succeed and to deeply and genuinely care about the students they serve. A president would never stand for a team member who did not value equity in student success.

Aesthetics and community pride mean something to presidents who deeply value their institutions. They want each of their employees to be proud of their institution and believe the sentiment should be reflected in their surroundings. They create a family-like campus culture and create a consistent brand for their college, including mascots and logos. The identity creates excitement and is celebrated in ways that align with traditions. They beautify spaces like offices, meeting rooms, outdoor spaces, and want community members to also be proud of having the college in the community. Team members are encouraged to volunteer, listen to, and engage in the community so they may deeply and personally understand their college mission and how the college is woven into it.

## Work Style

The new generation of female presidents take pride in being teachers at heart and set high expectations for the next group of leaders. Continually training, sharing literature, connections to a broad network of support, and relying on data to make decisions, are all important actions in this process.

Due to their strong sense of urgency and excellence, they work at a rapid pace, for long hours, and rely upon data and best practices. Because they have a belief that others are relying upon them to accomplish their mission, they work long hours during evening hours and throughout weekends. It's important that they can be counted on. Their schedules are always open for those who rely upon their guidance because they want to offer assistance when senior leadership team members may need them. They develop relationships that foster the best in others. In return, they often enjoy team members who are loyal to the mission and ways of work.

When presented with team members who are not aligned with their expectations for a hardworking, loyal, and collegial spirit, they express clear expectations for change. Clear, candid, timely and relevant feedback are delivered frequently. If those in their circle do not change, however, they confidently remove them from their circle of influence. Personnel decisions could be described as compassionate but decisive. They give people a chance, but are not afraid of conflict and make personnel decisions early. Refusal by others not to accept the president's mission, vision, or style of work is not viewed as a personal affront by the president. Because they are self-assured in their abilities, they simply believe the team member needs to move on to their next, more appropriate opportunity.

Decisions are not made at the whim of the president. Instead, decisions are made with dependable data, collaboration of experts, and best practices from the field. Presidents who make

decisions in this manner feel confident to aspire to wide-sweeping change. They articulate their goals to stakeholders in concise and memorable ways so that others can easily repeat them and create momentum. Successful new presidents also do not accept in-progress decisions made before their arrival that they do not agree with. Instead, they act swiftly to ensure they understand the situation and cease the progress, or at least put it on hold until they have enough information to make a decision. They are aware that no matter who started a process, if they bring it to conclusion it will be viewed as their project.

Effective presidents are good project managers and allow team members the right balance of collaboration for strategic priorities and autonomy in their divisional operations. They are not micromanagers. They entertain a lot of discussions both in team meetings and one-on-one though, to ensure teams are held accountable to the goals and to one another. Team members are trusted to do their work, even if they work far from the view of the president. Technology solutions for collaboration, like text-messaging, video calls, emails, and phone calls are all part of an effective president's daily operation.

### **Summary**

Most of all, they believe their people are their greatest asset and the time spent developing them will help them to accomplish their collective goals. They are humble in spirit and allow the team to take not only collective responsibility for conducting the work, but also collective reward for accomplishing their goals.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Considering that community colleges fill a vital role in the communities for which they serve (Crawford & Jervis, 2011; The White House, 2010) and the rapid pace of presidential turnover (Phillipe, 2016; Smith, 2016, May 20), the effective utilization of the senior leadership team is vital to institutional operations (Boggs, 2020; Kezar, 2019). This is because the utilization of senior leadership teams leverages the competencies of a greater number of people to problem solve the challenges that face community college operations (Boggs, 2020; Kezar, 2019; Northouse, 2016).

### **Research Question**

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to determine how new, first-time, female, community college presidents who are within the first five years in the role, who have also served in an Aspen Presidents Fellowship, effectively utilized their senior leadership teams.

### **Sub-Questions**

This chapter discusses the findings of this primary research question and also discusses the sub-questions to gain a better understanding of this relationship:

- How much time do presidents take to learn about the individuals, the team, and/or the institution before making changes to the senior leadership team?
- How do presidents first define, or relate, goals for your senior leadership team?
- In what ways do presidents foster their senior leadership teams to work collaboratively?
- Do members of senior leadership teams have shared responsibility in leading the institution?
- What do presidents do to quell apprehension and indecisiveness within their teams?

- What are some of the ways they build confidence within their teams?
- How do presidents balance utilize their own technical know-how with talents of those on their teams?
- How do presidents set the priorities for their teams?
- How do presidents hold team members accountable collectively and individually?

The chapter begins by revisiting the context of the study, namely the critical role of community colleges. Then, the chapter will demonstrate how presidents set the stage for effective utilization of teams in their own development pathway and how they demonstrated their effectiveness, which aligned with the six dimensions in the LaFasto and Larson (2001) theoretical framework. The chapter will close with recommendations and a conclusion.

### **Study Context: Critical Role of Community Colleges**

While examining the rapid pace at which community college presidential turnover is happening and the increasing number of women who are coming to the role would be an important topic at any time, it's important to revisit the context of this study before delving into the discussion of the findings. Throughout the introduction, and as was supported in the literature review in Chapter Two, it was stated that community colleges serve a vital role to students as well their region's economic and workforce development. Further, it was stated how they had remarkably ushered their colleges into remote operations during the onset of the pandemic. During the course of the interviews with these presidents, news of the longer-term consequences brought on by the pandemic began to be reported. The pandemic dealt community colleges a terrible blow in terms of a 4.5 percent reduced enrollment (Gardner, 2021) and states slashed funding by \$457 million (Whitford, 2021), forcing them to face a long and difficult recovery (Gardner, 2021). At the same time, they were facing what amounted to a war on two-fronts, in

that while they were in a state of recovery at their own institutions, they were also being eyed to support the economic recovery of their regions and the nation (Higher Ed Works, 2021). What's more, the pandemic disproportionately affected students of color and first generation college students, groups who also disproportionately rely upon community college as a pathway to economic mobility (Crawford & Jervis, 2011, Pruett & Absher, 2015). Even in the face of this, this group of presidents stated their laser-like focus on strategic goals to ensure equitable student success and economic mobility for their students.

The critical role of community colleges and the challenges facing community college presidents is without question. These presidents who were in the role a relatively short time were assuming unbelievable challenges throughout the onset of the pandemic, but did not indicate a sign of trepidation in their interviews. Instead, they reflected on how they spent a lot of time listening, writing down what needs are on their campuses and in their communities and then how they saw with clarity the critical priorities they should center their efforts upon. Because they value relationships, they were able to quell fears and produce plans. Consuela said, "my brain finally allowed me to identify what were the key themes. And that became the seven elements of how do we move our organization forward." Likewise, as was stated previously, Patricia coded several months' worth of notes to devise a plan for recovery as the pandemic was drawing down. They demonstrated a pattern of action. Just as these presidents were not shy about changing the senior leadership teams, both in personnel and collaborative work-style, this self-awareness and boldness appears to have served them well in utilizing their senior leadership teams a time of crisis.

## **The Importance Effective Team Utilization**

As the findings discussed, the presidents expressed ways in which they effectively utilized their senior leadership teams to carry out the operations of their institutions and aligned closely with LaFasto and Larson's (2001) framework. While Weisman and Vaughan (2007) noted that from 2001-2007 a president's focus was shifting away from internal operations, this group of presidents did not live by that model. They rejected the notion that they could not balance internal and external operations. Key examples of this were that two did not fill the internally-facing Executive Vice President role as was recommended by their predecessor. Two others spent most of their first year in meetings throughout the community, one who stated she did not turn down a single invitation in the community that first year. Their actions more closely align with Wyner (2021) in an article *The Role of Senior Leaders in Student Success* which was released in the midst of data collection for this project. It diverts from the earlier statement of Weisman and Vaughan (2007),

The role of the president in building culture inside the college is crucial, but it is often given short shrift in favor of external-facing activities. To be sure, excellent presidents are highly effective at building relationships with outside partners, including employers, K-12 schools, four-year universities, and political players.

But students suffer when presidents focus most of their efforts externally.

During the course of the interviews, Leigh, who reads literature related to the field for two hours each morning, forwarded Wyner's (2021) publication to me as an illustration of the way she leads her team. Although Wyner's (2021) article is focused more narrowly on achieving student success, rather than senior leadership team effectiveness at large, his charge for

presidents utilizing their senior leadership teams aligns closely with the findings of this study. He specifically states,

Without strong senior leadership, reforms cannot add up to what every student needs, because community colleges are traditionally decentralized in too many ways—curriculum, hiring, budgeting, and professional development are frequently driven at the department level, and thus may not easily cohere and serve a change agenda. In the end, reform strategies require visionary senior leadership (Wyner, 2021, p.4).

Considering that the goals of these presidents is largely focused on equitable student success, which closely aligns with Wyner’s (2021) guidance, in addition to the theoretical framework around which the interview protocols were structured, as well as the body of literature which was examined in Chapter Two.

## **Findings**

To answer the research question about how the presidents effectively utilized their senior leadership teams, this qualitative narrative inquiry revealed the following, eight primary findings:

### **Path to the Presidency**

1. Senior leadership teams benefit from a president’s often long and winding ascension from faculty to president.

### **Establishing the Right Team**

2. Female presidents acted to restructure their teams, generally within the first six months, and changed the way they worked to solve critical issues facing their institutions.

### How Teams Are Effectively Utilized: Alignment with the Six Dimensions

3. Presidents developed goals with their teams collaboratively and conveyed the goals to stakeholders in clear, concise, and memorable ways.
4. Presidents built trusting and loyal environments and focus on strategic priorities by redirecting conversations and having team members to hold each other accountable to the collaborative structure.
5. Presidents built confidence and quelled apprehension and indecisiveness through relationship building, particularly through coaching and reassurance in one-on-one meetings.
6. Presidents utilize their close relationships with team members and model behaviors to demonstrate their technical know-how.
7. The presidents are astutely aware of priority creep and initiative fatigue, so they are careful that priorities are clearly focused on meeting the objectives the strategic plan.
8. Close relationships, clear expectations, and collective accountability are important components to presidents holding their senior leadership team members accountable.

### **Path to the Presidency**

**Senior leadership teams benefit from a president's often long and winding ascension from faculty to president.**

The presidents each began as faculty members, which deeply influenced their vision and mission for college operations. The literature (Eddy, 2019; Heelan & Mellow, 2017; Wyner, 2014) demonstrates that a focus on student success is the core mission of successful community

college operations. The goals of the Aspen College Excellence Program and the Aspen College Excellence Award (The Aspen Institute, 2020a) center strongly on student success efforts.

Wyner's *The Role of Senior Leaders in Student Success* (2021) article puts the responsibility to build the culture in which student success is possible squarely on the shoulders of the president saying that, "presidents are the key to building highly effective student-oriented cultures" (p.3). Presidents who begin in the faculty role have experience in seeing the student perspective close-up and can lead their senior leadership team members, some of which who may have never served as faculty members, in student success reform efforts.

The faculty/student success linkage confirms one difference between the research concerning senior leadership teams in higher education and other sectors and demonstrates why as Adrianna Kezar stated "higher education research rarely borrows from the many concepts in the broader field of SLT (senior leadership team) research" (p. 105). This is clearly evidence of the difference between a need that exists between community college presidents and chief executives in business or healthcare, for which much of the previous literature (Hackman, 2002, Wageman et al., 2008) was written, in the competencies needed to effectively utilize senior leadership teams.

The many years of experience these women gained prior to the presidency provided them with a depth and breadth of institutional knowledge which also contributed to their effective leadership. The five presidents contained in this analysis collectively had 117 years of experience. This aligns with Stout-Stewart's (2005) quantitative review of the effective leadership patterns and behaviors of community college presidents. Her examination of 126 female community college presidents who had been in their role for less than five years found that, overall, they possessed on average 21 to 30 years of experience (Stout-Stewart, 2005).

When compared to the many years of experience these presidents had before assuming the role, it appears that in the last one and a half decades, little has changed in the length of time these female presidents took to assume the role of president.

Throughout this time the presidents appear to have worked in many roles that helped them to gain competencies that enhanced their effectiveness. This was also noted by one of Laura's team members who stated about her, "there is no substitute in my mind for experience." Each of these five, new female community college presidents demonstrated that their experience aided in their collaborative style and effective utilization of teams. They also attributed mentoring relationships and their Aspen training as contributors to their success in obtaining the presidency and in shaping how they led their teams.

### **Leadership Influences**

Another benefit of a taking time to become president, is that there was time for mentors, past presidents, and Aspen, provided powerful influences in career aspirations and leadership. Many of the presidents remarked about how they had not entered the field of community college leadership with the intentions of being a president, but were encouraged to do so by another person. Early mentors and presidents encouraged individuals to assume increasing levels of responsibility and to recognize themselves as future presidents. As was stated by Patricia, who had the college pay for her doctorate degree, and others. This is what initially gave them the clarity and confidence that they belonged in the role and, in some cases, helped to overcome imposter syndrome.

In a quantitative study of how community college presidents prepare for the role, Rabey (2011) found that 42% of female presidents had mentors and those that did had 20% greater participation in leadership training programs outside of their graduate degree program. Those

who participate in an Aspen Presidents Fellowship receive training that aligns with the enhanced utilization of senior leadership teams (Wyner, 2021) and Aspen fellows have a greater probability of becoming president, (The Aspen Institute, 2020, February 5). Considering this, mentors can be an important extension in ushering more women into presidencies and ensuring that they effectively utilize their senior leadership teams. Even with the strong degree of leadership influences and experiences, the presidents do not believe they personally possess all the answers though. They believe that the work of the senior leadership team is vital to the success of the college and, ultimately, to the communities that depend upon them, so they thoughtfully created them.

### **Establishing the Right Team**

**Female presidents acted to restructure their teams, generally within the first six months, and changed the way they worked to solve critical issues facing their institutions.**

Most of the presidents in this study had heard of the rumored “obligatory year” they should wait before making widespread personnel changes. Most of them had also heard that if they witnessed a problem, they should act more quickly. They did not mention familiarity with Wageman’s (2008) guidance that states that most successful chief executive officers gave problematic team members no longer than six months to stop their “balking” and to get to work (p.97), but they did follow this model. They stated they spent time early on getting to know their teams in one-on-one meetings, team meetings, in retreats, and some utilized formal assessment processes. After this period, it was generally clear what changes needed to be made and, for the most part, they began making changes around the six-month mark. They each shifted the teams’ actions from working more independently to a collaborative style.

In restructuring their teams, they modeled many characteristics in the literature that are conducive to effective team leadership, particularly in terms of their collaborative work style. For example, they ensured the team members were willing and able to work collaboratively and were on board with the strategic vision the president had set forth. This aligns with Hackman's (2012) *Enabling Conditions of Group Effectiveness*, that outlines effective group work as including the "right people" working in a "real team." Hackman believes that the right people must not only possess the appropriate technical skills, but that they also need the interpersonal skills to be able to communicate effectively. When asked how they ensure their teams work collaboratively, many stated that it starts with having the right team. Consuela stated she had to dismiss an early team member, in part, due to their inability to communicate with others collegially. Others gave clear expectations to their team members that collaborative work was not only important to gaining the most useful solutions, but that it was required. Leigh stated that she is "preaching, if you will, to them all the time, 'Don't work in a vacuum. We have spent a huge amount of time talking about the need to chop down the silos.'"

Wageman et. al, (2008), who investigated senior leadership teams in the business sector, identified teams as those working groups who participate in functions that are informational, consultative, coordinated, or decision making, but state that these working roles may change over time (p.36). He theorized that titles are less important than influence and posited that an individual may exist in the upper echelons of an organization for which they possess little responsibility or influence. Two of the presidents in this study, however, placed their Executive Assistants on their teams and gave them decision-making authority. While neither have their own direct reports, they have an equal voice in decisions made at the senior leadership team meetings

and one has developed and launched a college-wide initiative that affects more than half of the campus community.

These presidents also changed the way the teams worked together, changing senior leadership team meetings from a “report out” to an opportunity to strategize on achieving their key strategic objectives together. The president’s laser-like focus on the strategic plan and the credibility it gains from the Aspen framework, demonstrated alignment with Hackman’s (2012) need for teams to have a compelling purpose. Patricia’s team mentioned their compelling purpose as being laser-like in the virtual lunch,

what (she) brought to our college was a laser-focused vision for the mission of the community college, why we were stood up in the first place, what our role is that our community, and for our students. And that was not the case before she came. And so that, that's why she was hired.

Leigh was especially indicative of focusing all activities with her team around her vision, which was articulated in her college’s strategic plan, stating,

I think a vision statement is a must. Where are we trying to go? What is our why? Tell me the why. That's the vision. We spent the first four months developing a vision...something we can all remember say, talk about, and live, and then we use that to build out our strategic plan, update our mission, create an equity statement, because equity is so important to what we're doing, build out our values, update our values and build out our strategic goals and outcomes. The way that I relate my goals to my team is based on the strategic plan. You know how as a senior leader over this functional area— ‘What are you doing that ties back to where we're trying to get by 2025 in our strategic plan? What is your goal, you know, for

your five-year goal? Your four year? Three? What are you going to do? How are we incrementally going to get there?’

Because she was discussing their interdependent work toward a collaborative goal, this also aligned with Woodfield and Kennie’s (2008) guidance for groups to function as real teams. Remembering Boggs’ (2020) bold proclamation that community colleges’ work to enhance student success outcomes “can *only* be accomplished through effective leadership teams” (p. 206), it was important to ensure not only that effective team leadership was occurring within these groups, but *how* it was occurring. To examine this, interview protocols which aligned with the LaFasto and Larson (2001) “Six Dimensions of Effective Team Leadership” guided the narrative inquiry interview protocols (See Appendices A-C).

### **How Teams Are Effectively Utilized: Alignment with the Six Dimensions**

In their effective leadership of their teams, these presidents demonstrated alignment with the theoretical framework that guided this study by LaFasto and Larson (2001), through their own narratives, via the survey answers by their teams, and in the follow-up reflections of their team members in the virtual lunch. What follows are the six related themes, related to the “Six Dimensions of Team Leadership” (LaFasto and Larson, 2001), which resulted from the narrative inquiry to demonstrate *how* they effectively utilized their teams.

#### **Focus on the Goal**

**Presidents developed goals with their teams collaboratively and conveyed the goals to stakeholders in clear, concise, and memorable ways.** Every president in this study had strong similarities regarding how they developed and worked to achieve their goals—a collaborative leadership style and they utilized this to strongly focus on achieving their goals, which were influenced by the Aspen framework. The senior leadership teams collaborated on the

development of the institution's strategic priorities. Because they conveyed them in clear, concise, and memorable ways, they could be more easily articulated to their respective, operational divisions. LaFasto and Larson (1989) when goals are not clear and memorable, they are often replaced by those in a power struggle or seeking to accomplish their own agenda. Mary said that her goals were narrowed to a small, memorable list when she stated,

I think that when we talk about setting priorities for the college, they become the priorities of the team...Those are our five focus areas and we should all be able to repeat those. And so what becomes a priority in any area is 'How are you most achieving one or more of those goals?'

To also reiterate Leigh's words, she said her team, "spent the first four months developing a vision...something we can all remember say, talk about, and live, and then we use that to build out our strategic plan." These practices align with the guidance of both Boggs (2020) and Kezar (2019) which stated that team members can help presidents to make their message clear to constituents, which can "make the difference between success and failure for the leader, and the difference between excellence and mediocrity for the institution" (Boggs, 2020, p. 16).

Because they were influenced by the Aspen framework, many senior leadership team members were familiar with the rationale of the goals. Leigh's team demonstrated their knowledge when one member in the virtual lunch said, "Our strategic plan is the Aspen pillars. That's what the framework was, so whenever we started our strategic planning sessions we framed each of those and had discussions on how we can enhance those." This aligned with the guidance by Woodfield and Kennie (2008) which argued that effective team work required a "focus on the right mix of strategic and more operational matters and to leave other issues to more appropriate bodies within the institution" (p.406). Leigh aligned with this and said that her

senior team members must wear two hats, one within the senior leadership team where they create and develop the strategic vision, and the other hat in their respective divisions where they do the operational work to achieve the vision.

### **Ensure a Collaborative Climate**

**Presidents built trusting and loyal environments and focus on strategic priorities by redirecting conversations and having team members to hold each other accountable to the collaborative structure.** The work of the senior leadership team was laser-focused on their vision and accomplishing it collaboratively required trust and loyalty within the group. Gaval (2009) said that trust ranked at the top of all competencies desired of senior leadership teams. Presidents knew that the effectiveness of a collaborative work environment depended on the senior leadership team members being able to work through challenges in a safe environment and that what was said around the leadership table stayed around the leadership table, so to speak. Mary described it as, “a sense of loyalty when we are interacting as a team and we have disagreements within that team, but when we develop the message that is going to out to the rest of the college, that we're supportive of that message. You can you can have very open communication when we're together in our space.”

This environment allowed them to function in the manner that Bensimon and Newmann described as working as a real team “functionally and cognitively complex” (p. 151) and not as those who were not authentically acting as teams who were “functionally and cognitively simple” (p.151). A good example of how they transitioned from the functionally and cognitively simple is that they moved from the “report out” structure in team meetings to collaborating on how to achieve the goals and priorities of the strategic plan, which could certainly be described as functionally and cognitively complex.

In LaFasto and Larson's (2001) own definition of "Ensuring a Collaborative Climate" (p.108). They defined collaboration as occurring between the president and the members of the senior leadership team individually, and as a collaboration between the individual members of the team. The participants in this study demonstrated both types of collaborative interactions. The presidents in this research focused their initial efforts on the collaboration of team members to share leadership with the goal of sharing decision-making with the group in their respective areas. This was especially apparent with Leigh who told her group "You don't have authority to just go off and decide to make that strategic decision. We're going to do it together. And then we're going to hold each other accountable."

The pinnacle of collaborative leadership between presidents and their team members is when it leads to shared leadership. Once presidents have built trust with the members of their senior leadership team, they generally believe they are competent to act on their behalf in their absence. Some have even handed over off campus engagements to some of the members of their team, like Laura who allowed a senior leadership team member to hire for another senior-level position. She did not meet the candidates until the committee had interviewed and narrowed the field to two members. Senior leadership team members who shared in decision-making and helped to lead the college are those who had been effectively coached to do so, which helped to build their confidence.

### **Building Confidence**

**Presidents built confidence and quelled apprehension and indecisiveness through relationship building, particularly through coaching and reassurance in one-on-one meetings.** After building teams that presidents trusted to carry out their mission, presidents ensured that the members of the teams were confident to take action by specifically authorizing

them to do the operational work, meeting with them one-on-one, by speaking praising them in public, and providing the tools (like reliable data) to do their jobs effectively. By taking these actions, the presidents not only align with LaFasto and Larson's (2001) dimension of "Building Confidence" but also connect with other team leadership theorist. As mentioned previously, one strategy used by Patricia was to simply tell her team that she entrusted the job to them and authorized them to do it, which provides for the "supportive organizational structure" (Northouse, 2016, p. 369) from Hackman's (2012) model. Consuela reaped rich rewards for effectively coaching her team into confidence, when a senior leadership team member offered assistance to a neighboring college, because she knew that was what the president would have done. This is a clear realization of the literature (Hackman, 2012; LaFasto & Larson, 2001; Larson & LaFasto, 1989; Northouse, 2016; Wageman et al., 2008) that mentions how collaborative leadership and confidence building can lead to shared leadership, which can relieve a bit of the workload from presidents as well. The presidents must build confidence in their team members, but as Leigh stated, she knows the buck ends with her. Therefore, presidents must also show their teams they have the capacity to lead.

### **Demonstrate Sufficient Technical Know-How**

**Presidents utilize their close relationships with team members and model behaviors to demonstrate their technical know-how.** For first-time presidents, especially those new to their institutions, it could be difficult for long-term senior leadership team members to release control of their areas and collaborate or to have faith that a president can lead their institution. These presidents however, exhibited LaFasto and Larson's (2001) fourth dimension and "Demonstrate Technical Know-How" (p.130), who described this as being both focused technical competence and broad experience. Both types of know-how are important to presidents

as was demonstrated in this research. They had gained many years of experience and had performed a variety of roles they supervised. They also continued their learning with the Aspen fellowship, staying up on the literature from the field, and in hiring outside consultants for continued training. They frequently shared this information, as Leigh did with her team via a digital platform, to show that their gaining knowledge must be an ongoing endeavor. This helped to demonstrate their competencies in their challenging environment.

The presidents represented in this study were, even in the face of a pandemic, seeking to model their leadership skills to show that their teams should still be working with a sense of urgency to meet community needs. As the pandemic began to soften near the end of the data collection for this research, it was apparent that the president-participants in this project did not resign their efforts throughout this time. In the senior leadership team virtual lunch, Laura's team said she worked 24/7 and they did not know how she did it. Instead, the presidents modeled their expectations of working with a sense of urgency. They forged ahead by refining their priorities and by working long hours, including weekends. As was stated, Leigh's team asked what vitamins she took, especially because she gets up early each day and reads literature from the field for two hours each morning to share with her team. Consuela dismissed a person who she stated had come to her institution "to retire," and did not put in the hours required to perform their job effectively. The presidents appeared to model that the work of the administration cannot rest when the community was depending on them. The presidents also had to build trust that all their efforts were the right efforts to be working on at the time.

Staying up to date also helps to build trust in one's leadership. As many researchers (Gaval, 2009; Wageman, 2008; Woodfield & Kennie, 2008) described in the literature, team trust scores at or near the top on the list as a needed competency for effective leadership. Each

group of the senior leadership team members made comments related to how they trust the capabilities of their president. For example, Leigh's group stated, "She thinks outside of the box. She's got 20-plus years of community college experience, so she is relied upon across the state for her expertise and her advice. She's extremely knowledgeable in all things 'community college' from finance to, you know, student success." The presidents had the ability to accomplish a vast number of objectives, but knowing which ones are important was key to achieving effective utilization of the senior leadership team.

### **Set Priorities**

**The presidents are astutely aware of priority creep and initiative fatigue, so they are careful that priorities are clearly focused on meeting the objectives the strategic plan.** It was clear that the presidents closely linked their goals with their priorities and this helped to reduce instances of initiative fatigue. Having the strategic plan and the Aspen framework to act as a "North Star" to guide all activity enabled the group to hold each other accountable for whether or not an idea should be entertained. Larson, R. and Larson, E. (2009) are two project management researchers who call having too many competing priorities "Scope Creep" (n.p.) and state that it occurs with the project sponsor and the project team have a different view of the project. To combat this, they state that, among other things, leaders must devise clear charters, communicate them clearly, describe deliverables, and to create short deadlines. Patricia noted this in her institution's work during the pandemic when she sat down one weekend and listed their top five priorities that she wanted them to accomplish over the next year. She allowed the team to ring in on the priorities as well. In the midst of the competing priorities that the pandemic had brought on, they were happy to have a focus on key activities to move forward. The competing priorities brought on by the pandemic had caused some presidents to have to refocus on priorities. While

many would think the pandemic also relaxed the focus on managing performance issues, the presidents still managed to keep their teams functioning effectively.

### **Manage Accountability**

**Close relationships, clear expectations, and collective accountability are important components to presidents holding their senior leadership team members accountable.** The word “clear” was a frequent code in the narrative analysis. The presidents developed relationships with their team members, which allowed them to speak candidly about what they expected from each other, both as individuals and as a group. This is a realization of effective team leadership to “be conscious of the language we use to communicate team expectations” mentioned by Eddy et al., (2020, p.37). Leigh went so far as to convey expectations to her team in a formal presentation complete with an associated PowerPoint. It included clear guidelines for how some senior cabinets work and how they were expected to work differently, stating that they should act as an authentic team with a strategic, collaborative focus. She reflected on setting expectations with the team,

I set the expectation very clearly. You don't get to just make decisions that impact the college in your narrow world. So, for example, if you're going to change a policy in HR, first of all, you're going to bring that forward...to the senior leadership cabinet and say, ‘We want to vet this with you. What's going to get us in trouble when we try to roll this out? What haven't we thought of? Give us feedback.

Further, she stated that they will be more effective as a team when they debate and problem-solve collaboratively.

Unfortunately, team members do not always live up to the expectations provided to them. Wageman et al. (2008) also stated that it is important to get rid of problematic team members early, calling them “dangerous derailers.” Consuela said a member of her team was an “energy vortex” so much so, she had to end a meeting early due to it preventing a meeting from moving forward. She dismissed this person not long after the incident, which is very much in line with Wageman’s theory to remove derailers early so the team can move forward on critical goals. In Gaval’s (2009) interviews, she found that some of the most successful efforts in senior leadership team development involved presidents who made decisions about team members early. When asked if they could go back to the early days and do something differently, several presidents in this study stated they would have made personnel decisions earlier.

### **Summary**

The presidents in this study demonstrated taking action to structure collaborative teams and setting them forth with a clear goal and clear guidelines contributes to the effective utilization of the senior leadership teams. By building relationships with team members, coaching them along the way, trusting them to share responsibility and holding them accountable presidents are more free to balance both internal and external matters. Further, the democratic, collaborative style led to an enjoyable work environment which was a fulfillment of the literature by Bensimon and Newmann (1993), which stated that collaborative work styles create a satisfying environment. Team leadership is ideal for community colleges today. With it, community colleges can meet the needs of students and the community by creating smooth operations during transitions, utilize the competencies of a greater number of stakeholders, and make it a more enjoyable place for senior leaders to work.

## **Unexpected Finding**

Wageman et al.'s (2008) theory that many existing teams are too large and diverse, which leads to silos within the team and having too many members, was not realized in this study. The senior leadership teams and roles within the team varied widely. The diversity within the team also varied widely, but there appeared to be racial diversity on most teams. Two teams had little or no gender diversity, having little to no females. Others had strong representation of males and females. The differences in the interviews, surveys, and virtual lunch comments did not reflect silos or stifled work in the larger teams or the teams with greater diversity. Larger and more diverse teams tended to speak more in the virtual lunch, which would lead one to believe that senior leadership team meetings would also have more conversations and more perspectives offered. The presidents did mention that they do not allow the senior leadership team to function as a committee though. Most of the presidents loathe the word "committee" due to what a couple termed "death by committee," meaning that committees do not accomplish swift, decisive action. Instead, most of the presidents in this group favored cross-functional taskforces to accomplish shorter term action plans. They were often given a narrow objective to deliver in a prescribed amount of time. This also helped to relieve the senior leadership team from having to shepherd these types of projects and freed up their time for more global, strategic matters. The presidents recommended that their teams also use this collaborative, but swift approach in their divisional operations. This was one finding and recommendation from the presidents that departed from the literature. There are a number of instances where the presidents aligned with each other and the literature that can provide guidance for the practice of new presidents.

## **Recommendations for Practice**

This narrative inquiry led to four recommendations for practices based upon the data. One of these recommendations is for sitting presidents, past presidents, and educational institutions to aid in the development of rising presidents by fostering mentoring opportunities. The other three recommendations are for new presidents as they enter the role for the first time and are: to create collaborative work environments, to build strong, personal relationships with their team members, and to ensure that strategic priorities are the focus of each individual's workload.

## **Mentoring Support**

This research revealed that the female presidents in this study strongly benefitted from having a mentor. It not only helped them to be set on a pathway to the presidency, but for some it combated impostor syndrome. Women hold only about 30% of presidencies (Rabey, 2011). Most of those in this study did not see themselves as becoming a president, like Patricia who said that when her mentor suggested she be a president it elicited a realization that she could in fact take on the role-- "I paused and actually looked back at the body of my work as a professional in this field and was like, yeah? me? Yeah me!" Patricia also stated, "So I think there was that part in me-- imposter syndrome," which her mentor helped to break down. Nearly two decades ago, Moore-Brown's (2005) study on Mentoring and the Female College President aligned with the idea that mentoring has the capacity to increase the number of female presidents, "Mentorship and multiple mentoring relationships are invaluable in advancing women through the ranks of higher education administration and for increasing the number of female college presidents" (p. 659). She said this is often because women have a belief that they cannot balance work, family, and sanity, but knowing another successful woman in the field has the capacity to change that

Moore-Brown, 2005). Fostering mentoring relationships may not only help to increase the numbers of female presidents, because they may more readily see themselves in the role, but can help them to realize their full potential once in the role.

The data revealed that mentoring relationships helped to make this groups of presidents more effective as well. For example, Leigh stated that her mentor, and others in the Aspen fellowship, told her,

‘You have to remember when you become a president, you know how to do it, you know how to do things, right? If you're coming from an academic background, you know how to deal with that. If you're coming from a finance background, you know finance. If you're coming from student services, you know student services. You have to remember that now you're in a different role and you are not in that role to be the vice president on steroids, right? You are in that role to be the president.’

She mentioned that that performing a senior leadership team member’s job for them was tough to resist, but not doing so kept her focused on her own presidency. Having an experienced mentor to stress the importance of this advice is just one example of how mentors improved the effectiveness of presidents in this study and could improve the effectiveness of others.

My recommendation to sitting presidents, retired presidents, and higher education research organizations, would be to find ways to foster mentoring opportunities for emerging and mid-level leaders. While this study focused on females who were mentored and subsequently were hired as community college presidents, mentors have been found to be valued by other groups who are typically underrepresented in community college presidencies (Jernigan et. al, 2020). An empirical analysis (Jernigan et. al, 2020) utilizing the social network theory as a

conceptual framework found that, “Network connections that lead to sponsorship and recommendations for senior leadership roles, positively impacts leadership attainment for Black and African-American men and women in higher education.” Those in the study had increased positive beliefs about their own abilities to perform as leaders and mentoring also helped them to overcome feelings of not belonging in the profession. Lindsay (1999) stated that the proximity to which Black women were to others in leadership positions in an organization was important to ending discrimination and unfair treatment of them in hiring and promotion practices for their attainment of chief executive roles (Jernigan, 2020). This illustrates how mentoring opportunities can greatly prove to be advantageous to emerging leaders.

In summary, investing in both formal and informal mentoring arrangements can benefit individuals in seeing themselves as president. It can enhance the effectiveness of new presidents due to reduced imposter syndrome and because they benefit from hearing from a voice of experience. It can also provide underrepresented groups with network connections that may help them to obtain a presidency and overcome discrimination and unfair treatment.

### **Create Collaborative Work Environments**

The next recommendation revealed by the data is for one new presidents. The data and the literature (LaFasto and Larson, 2001) align to demonstrate that new presidents should intentionally create collaborative work environments from the onset of taking the role. The presidents in this study began by establishing collaborative team meeting styles as soon as they took the role. They did so in a variety of ways, including holding “round robin” style meetings, as Consuela did, or “creating a framework” and having them to contribute ideas like Mary did. Another strategy was having them to collaborate on the strategic vision, as Leigh charged her group with doing, saying they are “responsible for vision and strategy and those big picture ideas

of how to move the institution and take a transformational leap forward.” It is important, as it was to these presidents, to set the expectation early on so that one may see which team members are willing to work in this new style. Creating a collaborative climate allows a new president to leverage a greater number of talents.

The literature (Boggs, 2020; Kezar, 2019; Northouse, 2016) discussed the capacity for senior leadership teams to bring about transformative change in their institutions, primarily due to the varied perspectives they can integrate with the overall mission and vision. For new presidents to experience the transformative power of senior leadership teams, they cannot simply have people on staff and entitle them a senior leadership team. For the team to function effectively, they have to operate interdependently (Hackman, 2012; Woodfield & Kennie, 2008). The presidents in this study set the expectation that teamwork was required from the onset. Leigh stated that she told her team “Don't work in a vacuum. We have spent a huge amount of time talking about the need to chop down the silos.” When new presidents have their teams to collaborate, the work of presidents can grow to be a shared experience, relieving some of the responsibilities generally left to presidents. For example, Laura allowed her Executive Vice President to lead the hiring and interview process for another senior leadership team member. Consuela, said that one of her team members attended a statewide meeting and heard another college experienced disruption to their online operations. She leapt into action and Consuela said.

She called me afterwards and said, ‘I just wanted to let you know that's what I've done.’ She said, ‘I'm pretty sure that's consistent with what you would want.’ And I said, ‘It is spot-on consistent with what I would have asked you to do. So, thank you for conveying to them our willingness to help.’

The benefit of this collaborative environment is what Aristotle (and more than one of these presidents) said results in ‘the sum of the total being greater than its parts.’ For this to work effectively, however, a president must know their team.

### **Build Strong Relationships**

The third recommendation is for new presidents to build strong relationships with team members in order to fully understand and utilize their skills. The data strongly represented this recommendation especially as Leigh stated,

The biggest, single best advice I could ever give someone who is ever in any executive leadership role, or any leadership role for that matter, is the team that you build is the most important thing that you will ever do. People, in general, are your strongest assets. You should spend the most time as a leader with people, with process, and not with non-people kinds of things, [or] non-human capital. Human capital is the most important thing that you will ever do as a leader, developing those people.

Josh Wyner explained why developing people is so crucial to the efforts of community colleges,

If community college student outcomes are to improve more rapidly—as they must—each of these actors will need to ramp up efforts to develop presidents, senior teams, and trustees. More importantly, presidents, senior teams, and boards themselves must invest time to develop skills needed for transformational leadership. Developing, communicating, and executing college-wide reform strategies is hard work, and the tools needed to succeed are increasingly well-understood (Wyner, 2021, p. 30).

As was stated in Chapter 1, community colleges must be agile institutions to serve diverse student populations (Boggs, 2020; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). When new presidents understand the strengths of their senior leadership team members, like Consuela did with the *Clifton Strengths Indicator*, it can allow them to know who is best suited for the variety of objectives needing to be accomplished. As another example, Mary held a nationwide search for a senior leadership team member position and after getting to know a dean's strengths better, she elevated them to the role and, because the individual was so successful, she then expanded their role. The person is now helping to lead a reform effort aimed at improving student success.

When thinking about the benefits of building relationships with those on their teams, new presidents should bear in mind that each of these presidents were recognized by an individual in their institution as having the capacity for leadership.

The narrative data also showed that relationships must be authentic, not transactional, in order to build trust. Mary said,

You know there are people that have charisma and that's important, but it has to be genuine. It has to be genuinely who you are. You can't fake that you know who you are so that the two of you get along. I mean sure there's some of that; that's what's called politics. But when it comes down to really being able to understand a situation, you have people to develop skills and in a lot of different ways, [like] you develop them in your family.

The recommendation for authentic relationship building was shown in the data as every president referred, at least once, to their senior team members using the word "family." Many said that they did not want to diminish the professional relationship, but that they did feel as their

team was like a family. Consuela mentioned that she coached her team in the same way she did her children,

That's the same concept of raising children right so you spend an excessive amount of time with your children, you know between those formative ages so that they will literally understand what you expected them as they get older, and as you're around them less.

Laura described the relationship with a former senior leadership team member she had gotten to know and mentored, who went on to be a president at another college. She said “You know he'll always be my work son. That's what we talked about. I will always be his work mom.” For new presidents, the rewards of developing relationships with team members can be long-lasting.

New presidents can follow the lead of the presidents in this study to develop relationships by using their actions as a guide. There are a few examples of note. Leigh got to know her team members' birthdays and about their children. Consuela took walks around campus with her team members. Mary (as well as many other of the presidents) situated her office within earshot of other team members. Patricia texted her group and shared photos of meals she cooked. Laura plays sports with those in her college and community. These actions all helped these presidents get to know their people better and to build trust in one another.

The senior leadership team members who participated in this study expressed the trusting relationship and its benefits. One in Laura's team said,

We have confidence in her to run the college. Likewise, she knows how long that I've worked here. She's seen me in action. She knows I can do it. So I think

[others] would agree with me, you know we have a solid relationship with her because she knows our abilities, and she relies on us to do it because she's got one-hundred other things to do.

When you know your team and what they value, you are better able to use those skills and their passion to your institution's favor.

### **Focus Work on Strategic Priorities**

Lastly, the data revealed a recommendation that presidents must ensure that strategic priorities are the focus of each individual's workload. One team member remarked that previous to their president, the strategic plan was something which was put on a shelf, but that was not the case here, as they stated,

She reminds everyone of the goals that we have spent a lot of time on early in her tenure...and in my prior experience for higher education, that was a process that you did and you put it away. You never really talked about it. [Our president] she kind of lives it every day she lives. [It is] the goal, the pursuit, every day.

The literature on leading effective teams (Northouse, 2016; LaFasto and Larson, 2001) states that a focus on the goal is especially important to the group's work functioning in concert with one another. In the case of these presidents, it demonstrated an alignment of all their activities.

Leigh's team discussed the nature of alignment, "We revised our mission statement. At the same time, our mission statement aligns directly with the strategic plan. Our mission is, you know, for those four areas. Okay, again [there is] just alignment in everything." This focus also makes the work more enjoyable, because people better understand where their actions are taking them. As was stated previously, Patricia's team said, "Thank you. Thank you, thank you, because we're all in a place where we have 30 things on our lists, but when we shrink our universe just a little bit

we can see that these are primary.” Therefore, presidents who provide clear guidance for their teams to focus on a goal with aligned strategic priorities will not only be better able to accomplish their mission, because it fully leverages institutional capacity, but will provide much needed direction for senior leadership teams.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

While this study focused on female presidents and how they effectively utilized their senior leadership teams, the strategies they employed could be useful to individuals who possess a wide variety of characteristics or experience levels. An attempt has been made to include rich descriptions in the narrative that Patton (2015) stated were so important in narrative inquiry findings. A number of additional studies would provide the means by which others may more readily see themselves in the data as well. Therefore, it is important to consider some other directions for future research.

First, the literature (Book, 2000; Helgesen, 1990; Stout-Stewart, 2005) stated that women are collaborative and democratic leaders and while this study confirmed that, the study only examined women. This was a limitation mentioned in the methods section. Males may also possess these leadership characteristics. Replicating this study with men would provide insights into whether or not gender is the primary variable, or if some other variable, like the type of leadership training or years of experience, is the variable that is associated with leaders possessing the characteristic of a collaborative leadership style. Conducting a comparative analysis with this study with male participants would give us a more in-depth understanding of the differences between men and women’s leadership styles.

To understand the effective leadership of teams by female presidents who were new to the role, I recruited participants using narrow selection criteria, females who were presidents for

the first time, who were within the first five years of their presidency, and who had served in some form of Aspen Presidents Fellowship (in order to enhance the probability that effective utilization had occurred). Because of the narrow selection criteria and due to the small number of Aspen New Presidents Fellows (due to the newness of the program), I was limited in revealing which Aspen Presidents Fellowship the individual had participated in without risking confidentiality. The type of Aspen Presidents Fellowship is an important distinction, because the Aspen New Presidents Fellowship contains an element of training specifically designed for the leadership of senior teams. Future research that broadens the selection criteria and includes a greater number of participants would allow for a comparative analysis between fellowship programs to compare to those who have not participated training specific to leading senior leadership teams.

Due to the available pool of participants who met the inclusion criteria for this study (including geographical proximity), the type of institution that the presidents led did not vary widely in terms of governance structure or size of the institution. All institutions in this study were either small or medium size institutions. Examining community colleges that have governance structures that vary more widely and that vary in size would provide an additional perspective, particularly on the size and function of senior leadership teams.

Relatedly, future research should be conducted on the size and structure of leadership teams, especially in terms of size of the institution. This was not realized in this study especially because many of these presidents were still attempting to determine their group size and functions. The literature by Kezar (2019) also illustrated the need for research on the size and function of senior leadership team members. She cited Woodfield and Kenne's (2007) work that said that teams that report to the president may need to be explored as to whether "tradition is the

best way to assemble a team” (p. 107) and that “In business they typically consist of 8–10 persons whereas in higher education they can consist of dozens of persons” (p. 107). My experience throughout this research with this group of presidents was that the larger teams enabled individuals to be specialist and contribute their expertise. In contrast to Woodfield and Kennie’s (2007) suppositions, they appeared no less collaborative. More research in this area may also contribute to how team size affects collaboration.

### **Conclusion**

Community college presidents today lead multifaceted institutions that require many experienced and diverse senior leadership team members to collaborate and carry out effective operations (Boggs, 2020; Eddy et al., 2015; Kezar, 2019; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). As the turnover of community college presidencies continues to be widespread and ongoing (Gagliardi et al., 2017; Phillipe, 2016), attention toward who is best prepared to lead and how they can best leverage the capacity of their senior leadership teams much be given. National organizations, like the Aspen Institute’s College Excellence Program have attempted to aid this problem by focusing their efforts on training new presidents (The Aspen Institute, 2019b). Senior leadership teams can provide the capacity to create agile institutions during this transition (Boggs, 2020; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017) and can help to bring about a greater range of talents to assist with challenges (Boggs, 2020; Kezar, 2019; Northouse, 2016). Women have been found to have more democratic (Northouse, 2016); inclusive and collaborative (Eddy, et al., 2020); and transformational (Eagly et al., 2003) leadership styles than men, which are all favorable competencies in the leadership of teams.

Throughout this narrative inquiry, it was evident that the first-time, female presidents who were within five years of taking the role, who had also served as Aspen fellows, do

effectively utilize their senior leadership teams, although the magnitude with which they do so in each area varied. They do possess many commonalities though. With a love for students and passion for their work, they steep in knowledge and mentorship to prepare for their role. Because they understand their own leadership style, they quickly and thoughtfully create supportive environments and collaborative teams. Their teams are loyal, trusting, and confident in their own abilities, especially because they value one another and know they are led by a capable leader. They focus on a unified goal and aligned priorities. When a team member becomes misaligned, the other team members work to draw them back in. The president shepherds the group and knows they are ultimately responsible. Effective presidents develop relationships with their senior leadership team members and come to understand their aspirations and help them to achieve them. They allow the ebb and flow of collaboration to lead to shared leadership, and eventually others to take the reins on occasion. In such a crucial environment as community colleges, where presidents are likely to stay such a short while, this relational, collaborative, shared style of leadership is one that creates continuity and strength.

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**APPENDICES**

## **Appendix A: Participant Interview Questions (First Interview)**

### Interview Protocol: Questions for Participants

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Permissions: Gain permission for recording prior to the start of each interview. Begin recording on Zoom and Otter AI (have participant state name, date, time).

Introductions: Introduce yourself. Ask the participant to introduce themselves.

Purpose: Provide a brief reminder about the purpose of study.

Expectations: Provide a brief reminder about the length of the interview, the number of interviews that will occur, and that they will have the ability to see the report before it is published.

\*Notes in parenthesis denote alignment with the theoretical framework and will be removed when questions are provided to participants in advance of the interview.

### Introductory Questions

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself, how you came to the role and how you came to be an Aspen fellow?

(Focus on the Goal)

2. Can you tell me a little about your senior leadership team? Who they are and what roles they fill at your college?
3. How did you come to know your senior leadership team?
4. What were your initial interactions with your senior leadership team like in your first year?
5. How have the members of your senior leadership team, or the structure of the team, changed over the time you've been president?

6. Will you describe the time you took to learn about the individuals, the team, and/or the institution before making changes to the senior leadership team?
7. How did you first define, or relate, goals for your senior leadership team?
8. Can you think of a time that you helped team members to see their relevance to the goal?

## Appendix B: Participant Interview Questions (Second Interview)

Interview Protocol: Questions for Participants

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Permissions: Gain permission for recording prior to the start of each interview. Begin recording on Zoom and OtterAI.

Welcome: Thank the participant and welcome them back to second interview

Reflection: Provide a brief reflection about the first interview.

Expectations: Provide a brief reminder about the length of the interview, the number of interviews remaining, and that they will have the ability to see the report before it is published.

\*Notes in parenthesis denote alignment with the theoretical framework and will be removed when questions are provided to participants in advance of the interview.

(Ensure a collaborative climate)

1. Can you provide examples about the ways in which your senior leadership team works collaboratively?
2. Do the members of the senior leadership team have shared responsibility in leading the institution?

(Build confidence)

3. What do you do to quell apprehension and indecisiveness within your team?
4. What are some of the ways you build confidence within your team?

(Demonstrate sufficient technical know-how)

5. How do you communicate what talents you possess to your team?
6. How do you balance utilizing your own technical know-how with talents of those on your team?

(Set priorities)

7. How do you set the priorities for your team?
8. Can you think of some examples of priorities you set for your team?

(Manage performance)

9. How do you hold your team members accountable collectively?
10. How do you hold your team members accountable individually?

## **Appendix C: Participant Interview Questions (Third Interview)**

### Interview Protocol: Questions for Participants

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

- *Permissions: Gain permission for recording prior to the start of each interview. Begin recording on Zoom and OtterAI.*
- *Welcome: Thank the participant for your time together*
- *Reflection: Provide a brief reflection about the first two interviews.*
- *Expectations: Provide a brief reminder about the length of the interview, have the participant walk you around campus (if they agree to do so), tell them when they will receive the written report and how they can provide feedback.*

1. What stands out to you about the early days of working with your senior leadership team?
2. If you could go back and do anything differently, would you? What would you change?
3. Given what you have reconstructed throughout our interviews, what stands out to you as important moments in how you've effectively utilized your senior leadership team?
4. What advice would you give to an incoming, first-time president in utilizing their senior leadership team?
5. Is there anything you would like to say as we conclude our interviews on the topic of the effective utilization of senior leadership teams that I haven't asked?

### **Campus Conversation Questions**

6. Where is your office situated?
7. Where is the leadership team in relation to you?
8. Who do you pass regularly on campus?

9. What spaces are where brainstorming or official decisions are made?
10. What spaces would you say are where unofficial brainstorming or decisions are made?
11. If you were to take me on an actual virtual campus tour, where would you take me?
12. What are some important "landmarks" on your campus?

## Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

### North Carolina State University

#### Informed Consent Form for Participating in Research: College President

**Title of Study:** Female Community College Presidents and Effective Utilization of Senior Leadership Teams

Principal Investigator: Rebecca Berry

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Audrey Jaeger

#### **What are some general things you should know about research studies?**

You are invited to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate, and to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of how female community college presidents make effective use of their senior leadership teams. We will do this through participating in three 60 minute, virtual interviews, with the last occurring as a campus visit. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed.

You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in this study. Research studies also may pose risks to those who participate. You may want to participate in this research because you would like to help inform the next generation of female college leaders. You may not want to participate in this research because it may be uncomfortable to discuss your performance or the performance of others.

Specific details about the research in which you are invited to participate are contained below. If you do not understand something in this form, please ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If, at any time, you have questions about your participation in this research, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above or the NC State IRB office. The IRB office's contact information is listed in the *What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?* section of this form.

#### **What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of how female community college presidents make effective use of their senior leadership teams.

#### **Am I eligible to be a participant in this study?**

There will be approximately five participants in this study.

In order to be a participant in this study, you must agree to be in the study and be a female community college president who is within five years of taking the position; oversee a senior leadership team; and have served as an Aspen Presidential Fellow.

You cannot participate in this study if you do not want to be in the study or if you no longer act as a community college president or no longer oversee a senior leadership team.

### **What will happen if you take part in the study?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do all of the following:

6. Participate in the interviews and virtual campus visit.
7. Provide feedback on the prepared narrative findings from the interviews.
8. Provide access to the senior leadership team you oversee.
9. Allow for the findings to be published in a doctoral dissertation.

The total amount of time that you will be participating in this study is approximately five hours, including the three hours of interviews and time for review of narratives.

### **Recording and images**

As a part of this research, I would like your consent to audio and video record you. Please initial next to the sentence(s) that you agree to.

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to being photographed.

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to being audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to being video recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not consent to being photographed.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not consent to being audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not consent to being video recorded.

### **Risks and benefits**

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. The risks to you as a result of this research include disruption of the typical workday, the potential for compromised anonymity, stress related to discussing institutional effectiveness and job performance. The researcher will attempt to mitigate all risks.

There are no direct benefits to your participation in the research. The indirect benefits are aiding a new generation of female presidents in understanding experiences related to senior leadership teams and reflecting on and understanding your own experiences better.

### **Other options**

Instead of participating in this research, there are alternative procedures and courses of treatment available to you. These include not participating in this research project and, instead, learning about the experiences of others by reading the finished report conducted without your participation.

### **Right to withdraw your participation**

You can stop participating in this study at any time for any reason. In order to stop your participation, please contact Rebecca Berry at [rlberry@ncsu.edu](mailto:rlberry@ncsu.edu) or by phone at (919) 522-6243; or the faculty advisor, Audrey Jaeger at [ajjaeger@ncsu.edu](mailto:ajjaeger@ncsu.edu) or by phone at 919-515-6240. If you choose to withdraw your consent and to stop participating in this research, you can expect that the researcher(s) will redact your data from their data set, securely destroy your data, and prevent future uses of your data for research purposes wherever possible. This is possible in some, but not all, cases.

### **Confidentiality, personal privacy, and data management**

Trust is the foundation of the participant/researcher relationship. Much of that principle of trust is tied to keeping your information private and in the manner that I have described to you in this form. The information that you share with me will be held in confidence to the fullest extent allowed by law.

Protecting your privacy as related to this research is of utmost importance to me. There are very rare circumstances related to confidentiality where I may have to share information about you. Your information collected in this research study could be reviewed by representatives of the University, research sponsors, or government agencies (for example, the FDA) for purposes such as quality control or safety. In other cases, I must report instances in which imminent harm could come to you or others.

How I manage, protect, and share your data are the principal ways that I protect your personal privacy. Data that will be shared with others about you will be re-identifiable.

**Re-identifiable.** Re-identifiable data is information that I can identify you indirectly because of my access to information, role, skills, combination of information, and/or use of technology. This may also mean that in published reports others could identify you from what is reported, for example, if a story you tell us is very specific. If your data is

re-identifiable I will report it in such a way that you are not directly identified in reports. Based on how we need to share the data, I cannot remove details from the report that would protect your identity from ever being figured out. This means that others may be able to re-identify from the information reported from this research.

### **Future use of your research data**

Your information, even with identifiers removed, will not be stored or distributed for future research studies.

### **Compensation**

For your participation in this study, there is no compensation for participation.

### **Emergency medical treatment**

If you are hurt or injured during the study session(s), the researcher will call 911 for necessary care. There is no provision for compensation or free medical care for you if you are injured as a result of this study.

### **What if you are an NCSU student?**

Your participation in this study is not a course requirement and your participation, or lack thereof, will not affect your class standing or grades at NC State.

### **What if you are an NCSU employee?**

Your participation in this study is not a requirement of your employment at NCSU, and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your job.

### **What if you have questions about this study?**

If you have questions at any time about the study itself or the procedures implemented in this study, you may contact the researcher, Rebecca Berry at [rlberry@ncsu.edu](mailto:rlberry@ncsu.edu) or by phone at (919) 522-6243; or the faculty advisor, Audrey Jaeger at [ajjaeger@ncsu.edu](mailto:ajjaeger@ncsu.edu) or by phone at 919-515-6240.

### **What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the NC State IRB (Institutional Review Board) Office. An IRB office helps participants if they have any issues regarding research activities. You can contact the NC State IRB Office via email at [irb-director@ncsu.edu](mailto:irb-director@ncsu.edu) or via phone at (919) 515-8754.

**Consent To Participate**

By signing this consent form, I am affirming that I have read and understand the above information. All of the questions that I had about this research have been answered. I have chosen to participate in this study with the understanding that I may stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I am aware that I may revoke my consent at any time.

**Yes, I consent to participating in this research study**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Today's Date \_\_\_\_\_

**No, I do not consent to participating in this research study.**

**Thank you for your consideration.**

## Appendix E: Informed Consent Form

### North Carolina State University

#### Informed Consent Form for Participating in Research: Senior Leadership Team

**Title of Study:** Female Community College Presidents and Effective Utilization of Senior Leadership Teams

Principal Investigator: Rebecca Berry

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Audrey Jaeger

#### **What are some general things you should know about research studies?**

You are invited to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate, and to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of how female community college presidents make effective use of their senior leadership teams. We will do this through answering a survey and by participating in a virtual lunch. The virtual lunch will be recorded and transcribed.

You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in this study. Research studies also may pose risks to those who participate. You may want to participate in this research because you would like to help inform the next generation of female college leaders. You may not want to participate in this research because it may be uncomfortable to discuss your performance or the performance of others.

Specific details about the research in which you are invited to participate are contained below. If you do not understand something in this form, please ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If, at any time, you have questions about your participation in this research, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above or the NC State IRB office. The IRB office's contact information is listed in the *What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?* section of this form.

#### **What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of how female community college presidents make effective use of their senior leadership teams.

#### **Am I eligible to be a participant in this study?**

There will be approximately five leadership teams in this study, each team will be surveyed and interviewed separately. The number of participants will vary by institution.

In order to be a participant in this study, you must agree to be in the study and be a member of a senior leadership team of a participating president.

You cannot participate in this study if you do not want to be in the study or if you no longer act as a senior leadership team member of a participating president.

**What will happen if you take part in the study?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do all of the following:

1. Participate in the survey and the virtual lunch.
2. Allow for the findings to be published in a doctoral dissertation.

The total amount of time that you will be participating in this study is approximately 2-3 hours.

**Recording and images**

As a part of this research, I would like your consent to audio and video record you. Please initial next to the sentence(s) that you agree to.

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to being photographed.

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to being audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to being video recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not consent to being photographed.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not consent to being audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not consent to being video recorded.

**Risks and benefits**

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. The risks to you as a result of this research include disruption of the typical workday, the potential for compromised anonymity, stress related to discussing institutional effectiveness and job performance. The researcher will attempt to mitigate all risks.

There are no direct benefits to your participation in the research. The indirect benefits are aiding a new generation of female presidents in understanding experiences related to senior leadership teams and reflecting on and understanding your own experiences better.

### **Other options**

Instead of participating in this research, there are alternative procedures and courses of treatment available to you. These include not participating in this research project and, instead, learning about the experiences of others by reading the finished report conducted without your participation.

### **Right to withdraw your participation**

You can stop participating in this study at any time for any reason. In order to stop your participation, please contact Rebecca Berry at [rlberry@ncsu.edu](mailto:rlberry@ncsu.edu) or by phone at (919) 522-6243; or the faculty advisor, Audrey Jaeger at [ajjaeger@ncsu.edu](mailto:ajjaeger@ncsu.edu) or by phone at 919-515-6240. If you choose to withdraw your consent and to stop participating in this research, you can expect that the researcher(s) will redact your data from their data set, securely destroy your data, and prevent future uses of your data for research purposes wherever possible. This is possible in some, but not all, cases.

### **Confidentiality, personal privacy, and data management**

Trust is the foundation of the participant/researcher relationship. Much of that principle of trust is tied to keeping your information private and in the manner that I have described to you in this form. The information that you share with me will be held in confidence to the fullest extent allowed by law.

Protecting your privacy as related to this research is of utmost importance to me. There are very rare circumstances related to confidentiality where I may have to share information about you. Your information collected in this research study could be reviewed by representatives of the University, research sponsors, or government agencies (for example, the FDA) for purposes such as quality control or safety. In other cases, I must report instances in which imminent harm could come to you or others.

How I manage, protect, and share your data are the principal ways that I protect your personal privacy. Data that will be shared with others about you will be re-identifiable.

**Re-identifiable.** Re-identifiable data is information that I can identify you indirectly because of my access to information, role, skills, combination of information, and/or use of technology. This may also mean that in published reports others could identify you from what is reported, for example, if a story you tell us is very specific. If your data is re-identifiable I will report it in such a way that you are not directly identified in reports. Based on how we need to share the data, I cannot remove details from the report that

would protect your identity from ever being figured out. This means that others may be able to re-identify from the information reported from this research.

### **Future use of your research data**

Your information, even with identifiers removed, will not be stored or distributed for future research studies.

### **Compensation**

For your participation in this study, there is no compensation for participation.

### **Emergency medical treatment**

If you are hurt or injured during the study session(s), the researcher will call 911 for necessary care. There is no provision for compensation or free medical care for you if you are injured as a result of this study.

### **What if you are an NCSU student?**

Your participation in this study is not a course requirement and your participation, or lack thereof, will not affect your class standing or grades at NC State.

### **What if you are an NCSU employee?**

Your participation in this study is not a requirement of your employment at NCSU, and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your job.

### **What if you have questions about this study?**

If you have questions at any time about the study itself or the procedures implemented in this study, you may contact the researcher, Rebecca Berry at [rlberry@ncsu.edu](mailto:rlberry@ncsu.edu) or by phone at (919) 522-6243; or the faculty advisor, Audrey Jaeger at [ajjaeger@ncsu.edu](mailto:ajjaeger@ncsu.edu) or by phone at 919-515-6240.

### **What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the NC State IRB (Institutional Review Board) Office. An IRB office helps participants if they have any issues regarding research activities. You can contact the NC State IRB Office via email at [irb-director@ncsu.edu](mailto:irb-director@ncsu.edu) or via phone at (919) 515-8754.

### **Consent To Participate**

By signing this consent form, I am affirming that I have read and understand the above information. All of the questions that I had about this research have been answered. I have chosen to participate in this study with the understanding that I may stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I am aware that I may revoke my consent at any time.

**Yes, I consent to participating in this research study**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Today's Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**No, I do not consent to participating in this research study.**

**Thank you for your consideration.**

## **Appendix F: Information Sheet Presidents**

### **Request for Participation in Doctoral Research**

America's community colleges are experiencing rapid turnover and the presidencies that lead them are changing. New presidents are arriving at community colleges in near-unprecedented numbers. Just in 2015 alone, 269 community presidents assumed their roles, meaning that, nationally, one in four colleges had a transition. As presidents enter these institutions, strategic plans are being developed, new partnerships with industry are being arranged, and often dozens of initiatives are in full swing. Oftentimes, presidents are not just new to the institution, but as was illustrated in survey data from American Association for Community Colleges in 2016, 56% were in new to their positions at a community college.

Community college presidents are also staying in their positions for a shorter period of time than in recent decades, averaging about 5-6 years. Additionally, more women are serving as community college presidents than ever before. From 2011 to 2016, nationally, the number of women presidents in higher education rose by four percentage points overall. More specifically, women hold the presidency in 38% of associate degree-level institutions. Within this time, schools are experiencing rapid changes with the use of technology, tightening budgets, and the change of operations due to a pandemic. Considering these challenges, some presidents are leveraging the competencies of their senior leadership teams, or SLTs, to carry out operations and to create strategies for improvement.

Adrianna Kezar (2019) recently wrote about the dearth of research on how presidents create and utilize senior leadership teams. She states that considering the lack of research, it "likely means that the operation of such teams is based upon idiosyncratic norms and traditions." Current presidencies are being filled with individuals unlike their predecessors. Therefore, accepting Kezar's urgent charge to scholars to "contribute research-based findings and principles to inform how SLTs are formed, function and develop," I would like to execute a study of four to six Aspen Fellow, female, first-time presidents in creating their senior leadership teams to meet the needs of their institutions within the first five years of holding the presidency. Better understanding their practices will require conducting three interviews, ranging from 45 minutes to one and a half hour, with the last occurring as a campus visit. An opportunity to provide a written reflection to my research will be included in this process. Considering the time-sensitive nature of this project, I would propose the following timeline, pending an initial agreement:

- Initial meeting, virtual—end of Jan. to near beginning of Feb. 2021--1 hour
- Second meeting, virtual—before end of Feb. 2021-- 45 minutes
- Last meeting w/campus tour, optional in-person meeting— March --1.5 hours
- Researcher reflections provided for review—April 2021
- Analysis of the data complete—May 2021

I recognize the quick turnaround of this plan, but hope those supportive of the project will understand that this study may provide valuable insights to new presidents to utilize their SLTs in an era of great change.

I am a doctoral candidate in the Community College Leadership, Ed.D. program at North Carolina State University and have served as a Professor of History at Wake Tech Community College for more than 12 years. Currently, however, I work cross-functionally between Curriculum Education and Institutional Effectiveness and Innovation to author a portion of the strategic plan and to aid in enhancing online operations in the Covid-19 environment.

## **Appendix G: Information Sheet Senior Leadership Teams**

### **Request for Participation in Doctoral Research**

America's community colleges are experiencing rapid turnover and the presidencies that lead them are changing. New presidents are arriving at community colleges in near-unprecedented numbers. Just in 2015 alone, 269 community presidents assumed their roles, meaning that, nationally, one in four colleges had a transition. As presidents enter these institutions, strategic plans are being developed, new partnerships with industry are being arranged, and often dozens of initiatives are in full swing. Oftentimes, presidents are not just new to the institution, but as was illustrated in survey data from American Association for Community Colleges in 2016, 56% were in new to their positions at a community college.

Community college presidents are also staying in their positions for a shorter period of time than in recent decades, averaging about 5-6 years. Additionally, more women are serving as community college presidents than ever before. From 2011 to 2016, nationally, the number of women presidents in higher education rose by four percentage points overall. More specifically, women hold the presidency in 38% of associate degree-level institutions. Within this time, schools are experiencing rapid changes with the use of technology, tightening budgets, and the change of operations due to a pandemic. Considering these challenges, some presidents are leveraging the competencies of their senior leadership teams, or SLTs, to carry out operations and to create strategies for improvement.

Adrianna Kezar (2019) recently wrote about the dearth of research on how presidents create and utilize senior leadership teams. She states that considering the lack of research, it "likely means that the operation of such teams is based upon idiosyncratic norms and traditions." Current presidencies are being filled with individuals unlike their predecessors. Therefore, accepting Kezar's urgent charge to scholars to "contribute research-based findings and principles to inform how SLTs are formed, function and develop," I would like to execute a study of four to five Aspen fellow, female, first-time presidents in creating their senior leadership teams to meet the needs of their institutions within the first five years of holding the presidency.

Better understanding their practices the practices of how Presidents effectively utilize their Senior Leadership Teams includes not only interviewing community college Presidents, but also in surveying and communicating with members of these teams.

Considering the time-sensitive nature of this project, I would propose the following timeline, pending an initial agreement:

- Survey sent to members of the Senior Leadership Team—mid- to late Feb. 2021
- Virtual lunch with Senior Leadership Team members—early to mid- March 2021

I recognize the quick turnaround of this plan, but hope those supportive of the project will understand that this study may provide valuable insights to new presidents to utilize their SLTs in an era of great change.

I am a doctoral candidate in the Community College Leadership, Ed.D. program at North Carolina State University and have served as a Professor of History at Wake Tech Community College for more than 12 years. Currently, however, I am charged with working in the office of Institutional Effectiveness and Innovation to aid in enhancing online operations and success in Math and English courses in the Covid-19 environment.

### Appendix H: Senior Leadership Team Survey

Please answer the following questions on a rating of one to four by checking the box under the appropriate number, with:

- One representing “True”
- Two representing “More true than false”
- Three representing “More false than true”
- Four representing “False”

1	2	3	4	
True	More true than false	More false than true	False	
				1. Our team leader clearly defines our goal.
				2. Our team leader articulates our goal in a way as to inspire commitment.
				3. Our team leader avoids compromising the team's objective with political issues.
				4. Our team leader helps individual team members align their roles and with the team goal.
				5. Our team leader reinforces the goal in fresh and exciting ways.
				6. If it's necessary to adjust the team's goal, our team leader makes sure we understand why.
				7. Our team leader creates a safe climate for team members to openly and supportively discuss any issue related to the team's success.
				8. Our team leader communicates openly and honestly.
				9. There are no issues that our team leader is uncomfortable discussing with the team.

				10. There are no chronic problems within our team that we are unable to resolve.
				11. Our team leader does not tolerate a non-collaborative style by team members.
				12. Our team member acknowledges and rewards the behaviors that contribute to an open and supportive team climate.
				13. Our team leader creates a work environment that promotes productive problem solving.
				14. Our team leader does not allow organization structure, systems, and processes to interfere with the achievement of our team's goal.
				15. Our team leader manages his/her personal control needs.
				16. Our team leader does not allow his/her ego to get in the way.
				17. Our team leader ensures that our team achieves results.
				18. Our team leader helps strengthen the self-confidence of team members.
				19. Our team leader makes sure team members are clear about critical issues and important facts.
				20. Our team leader exhibits trust by giving us meaningful levels of responsibility.
				21. Our team leader is fair and impartial toward all team members.
				22. Our team leader is an optimistic person who focuses on opportunities.
				23. Our team leader looks for and acknowledges contributions by team members.

				24. Our team leader understands the technical issues we must face in achieving our goal.
				25. Our team leader has had sufficient experience with the technical aspects of our team's goal.
				26. Our team leader is open to technical advice from team members who are more knowledgeable.
				27. Our team leader is capable of helping the team analyze complex issues related to our goal.
				28. Our team leader is seen as credible and knowledgeable by people outside our team.
				29. Our team leader keeps our team focused on a manageable set of priorities that will lead to the accomplishment of our goal.
				30. Our team leader and the members of our team agree on the top priorities for achieving our goal.
				31. Our team leader communicates and reinforces a focus on priorities.
				32. Our team leader does not dilute our team's effort with too many priorities.
				33. If it's necessary to change priorities our team leader helps us understand why.
				34. Our team leader makes performance expectations clear.
				35. Our team leader encourages the team to agree on a set of values that guides our performance.
				36. Our team leader ensures that rewards and incentives are aligned with achieving our team's goals.
				37. Our team leader assesses the collaborative skills of team members as well as the results they achieve.
				38. Our team leader gives us useful, developmental feedback to team members.

				39. Our team leader is willing to confront and resolve issues associated with inadequate performance by team members.
				40. Our team leader recognizes and rewards superior performance.

Please answer the two following questions with a free response:

41. What are the strengths of the team leader?
42. What one or two changes are most likely to improve the effectiveness of the team leader?